

The Last of the Flatboats

*A Story of the Mississippi and its
interesting family of rivers*

By

GEORGE CARY EGGLESTON

Author of "The Big Brother," "Captain Sam,"
"The Signal Boys," "The Wreck of
the Red Bird," etc., etc.

Illustrated by Charlotte Harding

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TO MY LAST-BORN BOY

CARY EGGLESTON

*A brave, manly fellow
Who knows how to swim
How to catch fish
How to handle his boat
How to shoot straight with a rifle
And how to tell the truth every time*

I Dedicate

This Story about some other Boys of his kind

GEORGE CARY EGGLESTON

Culross-on-Lake-George

Preface

VEVAY, from which "The Last of the Flatboats" starts on its voyage down the Mississippi, is a beautiful little Indiana town on the Ohio River, about midway between Cincinnati and Louisville. The town and Switzerland County, of which it is the capital, were settled by a company of energetic and thrifty Swiss immigrants, about the year 1805. Their family names are still dominant in the town. I recall the following as familiar to me there in my boyhood: Grisard, Thiebaud, Le Clerc, Moreraud, Detraz, Tardy, Malin, Golay, Courvoisseur, Danglade, Bettens, Minnit, Violet, Dufour, Dumont, Duprez, Medary, Schenck, and others of Swiss origin.

The name Thiebaud, used in this story, was always pronounced "Kaybo" in Vevay. The name Moreraud was called "Murrow."

The map which accompanies this volume was specially prepared for it by Lieut.-Col. Alexander McKenzie of the Corps of Engineers of the United States Army. To his skill, learning, and courtesy I and my readers are indebted for the careful marking of the practically navigable parts of the great river system, and for the calculation of mileage in every case.

G. C. E.

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The Last of the Flatboats

CHAPTER I

THE RESCUE OF THE PIGS

"GIVE it up, boys; you're tired, and you've been in the water too long already. And, besides, I've decided that this job's done."

It was Ed Lowry who spoke. He was lying on the sand under a big sycamore tree that had slid, roots and all, off the river bank above, and now stood leaning like a drunken man trying to stand upright.

Ed was a tall, slender, and not at all robust boy, with a big head, and a tremendous shock of half-curly hair to make it look bigger.

The four boys whom he addressed had been diving in the river and struggling with something under the water, but without success. Three of them accepted Ed's suggestion, as all of them were accustomed to

do, not because he had any particular right to make suggestions to them, but because he was so far the moral and intellectual superior of every boy in town, and was always so wise and kindly and just in his decisions, that they had come to regard his word as a sort of law without themselves quite knowing why.

Three of the boys left the river, therefore, shook the water off their sunburned bodies, —for they had no towels,—and slipped into the loose shirt and cottonade trousers that constituted their sole costume.

The other boy — Ed's younger brother, Philip — was not so ready to accept suggestions. In response to Ed's call, he cried out in a sort of mock heroics : —

"Never say die! In the words of the immortal Lawrence, or some other immortal who died a long time ago, 'Don't give up the ship!' *I'm* going to get that pig if it takes all summer."

The boys all laughed as they threw themselves down upon the sand by Ed.

"Might as well let him alone," said Will Moreraud; "he never will quit."

Meantime Phil had dived three or four times more, each time going down head first,

wrestling with the object as long as he could hold his breath, and each time manifestly moving one end or the other of it nearer the shore, and into shallower water, before coming to the surface again.

When he had caught his breath after the third or fourth struggle, he called out : —

“ I say, boys, it isn’t a pig at all, but a good average-sized elephant. ‘ Sink or swim, live or die, survive or perish,’ *I’m* going to get that animal ashore.”

“ He’ll do it, too,” said Constant Thiebaud.

“ Of course he will,” drawled Irving Strong. “ It’s a way he has. He never gives up anything. Don’t you remember how he stuck to that sum in the arithmetic about that cistern whose idiotic builder had put three different sized pipes to run water into it, and two others of still different sizes to run water out? He worked three weeks over that thing after all the rest of us gave it up and got Mrs. Dupont to show us — and he got it, too.”

“ Yes, and he can do it now backwards or forwards or standing on his head,” said Constant Thiebaud ; “ while there isn’t another boy here that can do it at all.”

"Except Ed Lowry," said Irving Strong. "But then, he's different, and knows a whole lot about the higher mathematics, while we're only in algebra. How is it, Ed? You've been sick so much that I don't believe you ever did go to school more than a month at a time, and yet you're ahead of all of us."

Just then Phil came up after a long tussle under the water, and this time stood only a little way from shore where the water was not more than breast high. He cried:—

"Now I've 'met the enemy and it's ours,' or words to that effect. I've got the elephant into three feet of water, but I can't 'personally conduct' it ashore. Come here, all of you, and help."

The boys quickly dropped out of their clothes, and went to their comrade's assistance.

"What is the thing, anyhow?" asked Irving Strong.

"I don't know," said Phil. "All I know is that it's got elbows and wrists and all sorts of burs on it, on which I've been skinning my shins for the last half hour; and that it is heavier than one of your compositions, Irv."

The thing was in water so shallow that all the boys at once could get at it merely by bending forward and plunging their heads and shoulders under the surface. But it was so unwieldy that it took all five of them — for Ed too had joined, as he always did when there was need of him — fully ten minutes to bring it out upon shore.

“I say, boys,” said Ed, “this is a big find. It’s that ferry-boat shaft the iron man told us about, and you remember we are to have fifty dollars for it.”

“Then hurrah for Phil Lowry’s obstinate pertinacity!” said Irving Strong. “That’s what Mrs. Dupont called it when she bracketed his name and mine together on the bulletin-board as ‘Irreclaimable whisperers.’ Phil, you may be irreclaimable, but you’ve proved that this shaft isn’t.”

It was just below the little old town of Vevay on the Ohio River, where Swiss names and some few Swiss customs still survived long after the Swiss settlers of 1805 were buried. To be exact, it was at “The Point,” where all Vevay boys went for their swimming because it lay a little beyond the town limits, and so Joe Peelman, the marshal, could not arrest

them for swimming there in daylight without their clothes.

During the high water of the preceding winter a barge loaded with pig-iron had broken in two there and sunk. The strong current quickly carried away what was left of the wrecked barge, — which had been scarcely more than a great oblong box, — leaving the iron to be undermined by the water and to sink into the sand and gravel of the bottom.

The agent who came to look after matters quickly decided that at such a place very little of the cargo could ever be recovered — not enough to justify him in sending a wrecking force there. He thought, too, that by the time of summer low water — for the Ohio runs very low indeed in July and August — the iron would have settled and scattered too much to be worth searching for.

But Phil Lowry not only never liked to give up, he never liked to see anybody else give up. So what he looked upon as the iron man's weak surrender gave him an idea. He said to the agent:—

“That iron's where we boys go swimming in summer-time. If we get any of it

out during the low water, can we have it? Is it 'finder's keeper'?"

"Well, no," said the man, hesitating. "But I'll tell you what I'll do. If you boys get out any considerable quantity, — say fifty tons or more, — enough to justify me in sending a steamboat after it, I'll pay you three dollars a ton salvage for it."

So the boys formed a salvage copartnership. Long-headed Ed Lowry, in order to avoid misunderstandings, drew up an agreement, and the iron man signed it. It gave the boys entire charge of the wreck, and bound the owner to pay for recovered iron as he had proposed. Just before signing the paper the agent remembered the ferry-boat wheel shaft, which had been a part of the cargo; and as it was a valuable piece of property, which he particularly wanted to recover, he added a clause to the contract agreeing to pay an additional fifty dollars for it, if by any remote chance it should be saved.

During the summer the boys had been specially favored by circumstances. The river had gone down much earlier that year than usual, and it went at last much lower than it had done for many years past. As a consequence they had prospered well in

their enterprise. Their pile of iron "pigs" on the shore when the shaft was found amounted to three hundred tons, and the agent was to arrive by the packet that night to pay for it and take possession. This was, therefore, their last day's work, and thanks to Philip Lowry's "obstinate pertinacity" it was the most profitable day's work of them all.

CHAPTER II

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

WHEN the wheel shaft was tugged ashore, the boys slipped on their clothes again and retired to the shade of the big sycamore tree, where Ed Lowry had left the book he had been reading. Ed Lowry always had a book within reach.

Philip threw himself down to rest. He was not only tired, he was physically "used up" with his labors under water in tugging first one and then the other end of the heavy shaft toward the shore.

It would have been very hard work even in the open air. Under water, and without breath, it had completely exhausted the boy. Just now he was bent upon sleep. So in spite of the sun glare, and in spite of the chatter around him, and still more, in spite of a sense of triumph which was strong enough in him to have kept anybody else awake, he fell into a profound slumber.

"Well, we've finished the job," said Constant Thiebaud after a while. "What's the result, Ed?"

Ed Lowry pulled a memorandum out of his pocket and studied it for a while.

"We have saved a trifle over three hundred tons of pig-iron," he replied, "and for that, at \$3.00 a ton, will get a little over \$900. We're to get \$50 more for the shaft, which makes \$950. It'll be a trifle more than that, but not enough more to count. My calculation is that we shall have about \$190 apiece when the agent settles with us to-night—possibly \$195."

"And a mighty good summer's work it is," said Will Moreraud.

"Especially as it's been all fun," said Irv Strong, "to a parcel of amphibious Ohio River boys who would have stayed in the water most of the time anyhow. It's better fun diving after pig-iron than after mussel-shells, isn't it?"

Irving was the only boy in the party whose people were comparatively well-to-do, and who could therefore afford to think of the fun they had had without much concern for the profits. But Irv Strong had no trace of arrogance in his make-up. He

could have dressed, if he had chosen, in much better fashion than any other boy in town. But he chose instead to wear blue cottonade trousers and a tow linen shirt, and to go barefoot just as his comrades did. So in speaking of the pleasure they had had, he put the matter in a way that all could sympathize with. For truly they had had more "fun" as he called it, than ever before in their lives. Ed Lowry could have told them why. He could have explained to them how much a real purpose, an object worth struggling for, adds to the enjoyment people get out of sport; but Ed usually kept his philosophy to himself except when there was a need for it. Just now there was no need. The boys were as happy as possible in the completion of their task, just as they had been as happy as possible in performing it. Satisfaction is better than an explanation at any time, and Ed Lowry knew it.

There was silence for a considerable time. Perhaps all the boys were tired after their hard day's work. Presently Constant Thiebaud spoke.

"A hundred and ninety dollars apiece! That's more money than any of us ever saw

before. I say, boys, what are we going to do with it?"

There was a pause.

"Let him speak first who can speak best," said Irv Strong. "So, Ed Lowry, what are you going to do with *your* share of the money?"

"I'm going shopping with it — shopping for some 'bargain counter' health," replied the tall boy.

"How do you mean?" asked two boys at once, and eagerly.

"Well, my phthisic was very bad last winter, you know. It isn't phthisic at all, I think. Phthisic is consumption, and I haven't that — yet."

He spoke hopefully, rather than confidently. He hoped his malady might not be a fatal one, but sometimes he had doubts.

Let me say here that his hope was better founded than his fear. For at this latter end of the century, Ed Lowry — under his own proper name and not under that which I am hiding him behind in this story — is not only living, but famous. His bodily strength has always been small, but the work he has done in the world with that big brain of his has been very great, and his

name—the real one I mean—is familiar to everybody who reads books or cares for American history.

“But whatever it is,” Ed continued, “the doctor wants me to go South for this winter, and now that I’ve got money enough, I’m going to do it.”

“But you haven’t got money enough,” said Irv Strong. “A hundred and ninety dollars won’t much more than pay your steamboat fare to New Orleans and back. What are you going to live on down there—especially if you get sick?”

The irrepressible Phil selected this as the time to wake up. “Well,” he said, sitting up in the sand and locking his muscular arms around his knees, “*I’m* in this game a little bit myself. I’ve got one whole hundred and ninety dollars’ worth of stake in that big pile of iron; and from Mrs. Dupont down to the last one-suspended chap in the lot of you, you are all always talking about my ‘obstinate pertinacity.’ Well, my ‘pertinacity’ just now ‘obstinately’ declares that Ed shall take my share in the stake and spend it for his health. He shakes his head, but if he won’t, then I ‘solemnly swear or affirm’ that I’ll take

every dollar of it out to the channel there and throw it in. I'll — ”

But Phil had broken down. His affection for his half-invalid brother was the one thing that nothing could ever overcome. He didn't weep. That is to say, none of the boys saw him shed tears, but instead of finishing the sentence he was uttering, he suddenly became interested in the pebbles along the river shore, fifty yards lower down the stream.

Ed, too, found it difficult just then to say anything. Ed had always been disposed to worry himself about Phil — to regulate him, and when he couldn't do that, to suffer in his own mind and conscience for his brother's misdeeds — which, after all, were usually nothing worse than manifestations of excessive boyish enthusiasm, the undue use of slang, and an excessive devotion to purposes which Ed's calmer temper could not quite approve. Just now Ed had made a new discovery. He had found out something of the rattling, restless, reckless boy's character which he had never fully known before. For he did not know, as the other boys did, how Phil, a year ago, had waited for half an hour behind the schoolhouse,

and armed with stones had wreaked a fearful vengeance upon the big bully twice his size, who had used his strength cruelly to torment Ed's weakness. That story had been kept from Ed, because it was well understood that he did not approve of fighting; and the boys, who fully sympathized with the little fellow's animosity against the big bully, didn't want him censured for his battle and victory.

So there was silence after Phil's declaration of his purpose, which every boy there knew that he would fulfil to the letter. At last Ed said:—

"On my own share of the money I could go by taking deck passage."

"Yes," cried Phil, suddenly reappearing in a sort of wrath that was very unusual with him—"yes, and live on equal terms with a lot of dirty, low-lived wretches—ugh! Now see here, Ed! I've told you you are to take my share of the money. If you don't, I'll do exactly what I said,—I'll get it changed into coin, and I'll drop it into the river at a point where no diving will ever get it. I've said my say. I'll do my do."

"Look here," drawled Irv Strong, after a moment. "Let's *all* go to New Orleans,

and don't let's pay any steamboat fare at all except to get back !”

“ But how ? ” asked three boys, in a breath.

— “ Let's run a flatboat ! In my father's day, pretty nearly all the hay, grain, bacon, apples, onions, and the like, grown in this part of the country, were sent to New Orleans in flatboats. I don't see why it wouldn't pay for us to take a flatboat down the river now. We've more than enough money to build and run her, and we can get a cargo, I'll bet a brass button.”

The boys were all eagerness. They knew, of course, what a flatboat was, but they had seen very few craft of that sort, as the old floating flatboats had almost entirely given place on the Ohio to barges, towed, or rather pushed, by big, stern-wheel steamboats. For the benefit of readers who never saw anything of the kind, let me explain.

A flatboat was simply a big, overgrown, square-bowed and square-sterned scow, with a box-like house built on top. She could carry a very heavy cargo without sinking below her gunwales, and the house on top, with its roof of slightly curved boards, was to hold the cargo. There was a little open space at the bow to let freight in and out,

while a part of the deck-house at the stern was made into a little box-like cabin for the crew. The scow part, or boat proper, was strongly built, with great timber gunwales, and a bottom of two-inch plank tightly caulked. The freight-house built on it was so put together that only a few of the planks were required to have nails in them, so that when the boat reached New Orleans she could be sold as lumber for more than she had originally cost.

She was simply floated down the river by the current. There were two big oars, or "sweeps," as they were called, with which the men by rowing could give the craft steerage way — that is to say, speed enough to let the big steering oar throw her stern around as a rudder does, and guide her course. All this was necessary in making sharp turns in the channel to keep off bars; but as the flatboats usually went down the river only at high stages of water, the chief use of the oars was to make landings.

Ed could have told his comrades some interesting facts concerning the enormous part that the flatboats once played in that commerce which built up the great Western country; but, as Irv Strong said, there was

“already a question before the house. That question is, ‘Why can’t we five fellows build a flatboat, load her, and take her down the river?’ We’ll be the ‘hands’ ourselves, and won’t charge ourselves any wages, so we can certainly carry freight cheaper than any steamboat can. We’ll earn some more money, perhaps, and if we don’t, we’ll have lots of fun, and best of all, we’ll ‘bust that broncho,’ or bronchitis of Ed’s — for that’s what it is. They call it phthisic only because that’s the very hardest word in the book to spell.”

The sun was getting low, but the boys were deeply interested. They would have determined upon the project then and there but for Ed’s caution. As it was, they made him a sort of committee of one to inquire into details, to find out what it would cost to build a flatboat, what living expenses would be necessary for her boy crew, what it would cost them for passage back from New Orleans, and on what terms they could get a cargo.

This is how it all began.

CHAPTER III

CAPTAIN PHIL

ED's report was in all respects favorable to the enterprise. Perry Raymond, who in the old days had built many scores of flatboats, was now too old to undertake an active enterprise. But he told Ed, to the very last board, how much lumber would be required, and the price of every stick in it. He volunteered, as a mere matter of favor and without any charge whatever, to superintend and direct the work of the boys in building a boat for themselves. The result was that they could build a boat for a very small fraction of their money, and Perry promised to show them how to caulk it for themselves.

Ed had seen the principal merchants of the place, also. It was their practice to exchange goods for country produce—any sort that might come to them, whether hay, or onions, or garlic, or butter, or eggs, or

wheat, or wool, or corn, or apples, or what not.

It was their business to know pretty accurately how much of each kind of produce they were likely to get during any given season in return for their goods, and how best to market it. They knew to a nicety how much butter and how many eggs or how many bushels of onions or how many pounds of hay they could get for a parasol or a bit of lace or a calico dress or a sack of coffee. Their chief problem was how to sell all these things to the best advantage afterward. Usually they found their best market down the river.

So when Ed Lowry presented the case to them they were quick to see advantage in it. His proposal was that the boys should provide the flatboat and take her to New Orleans at their own expense; that the merchants should furnish a cargo to be sold on commission either at New Orleans or on "the coast," as the river country for a few hundred miles above that city is called, the boys to have a certain part of the money as freight and a certain other part as "commission."

Every merchant in town was ready to

furnish a part of the cargo, and it seemed altogether probable that the boys would easily secure more freight than they could carry, though their flatboat was to be one of the biggest that ever floated down the river. As she was likely also to be one of the last, coming as she did long after that system of river transportation had been generally abandoned, Irv Strong, in a burst of eloquence, proposed that she should be called *The Last of the Flatboats*, in order, he said, "that she may take rank with those noble literary productions, 'The Last of the Barons,' 'The Last of the Mohicans,' 'The Last of the Mamelukes,' 'The Last Days of Pompeii,' and 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel.'"

Ed Lowry laughed, and the other boys voted for the name proposed.

As the boat was nearing completion, a few weeks later, and indeed had already received a part of her cargo, the question arose, who should be her captain.

The first impulse of everybody concerned was to say "Ed Lowry," but Ed vetoed that.

"I'm an invalid," he said, "or half an invalid at the best, and this thing isn't play.

There are very serious duties for the captain of a flatboat to do. He must be able to expose himself in all weathers, which I can't do. He must be ready in resource and very quick to decide. In an emergency, it is far more important to have a quick decision than a wise one, and especially to have the one who decides a resolute person who will carry his decision into effect."

"I see," said Irving Strong. "What we need in a captain is 'obstinate pertinacity.' I move that Phil Lowry, as the possessor of a large and varied stock of that commodity, be made captain of *The Last of the Flatboats*."

As Phil was the very youngest of the group, and as he had always been regarded rather as a ready than a discreet thinker, there was a moment's hesitation. But a little thought convinced every one of the boys that Phil was by all odds the one among them best fit to undertake the difficult task of command — the one most likely to bring the enterprise to a successful termination, especially if any serious difficulties should arise, as was pretty certain to happen.

"It's an awful responsibility for Phil to assume," said Ed that night to their widowed mother, a woman of unusual wisdom.

"Yes," she replied; "but, after all, he is the one best fit, and that ought to be the only ground on which men or boys are selected for places of responsibility. Besides, it will educate Philip in much that he needs to learn. No matter what happens on the voyage, he will come back the better for it. He ought to have the discipline that responsibility gives. The one lesson he most needs to learn is that he is not merely an individual, but a part of a whole: that his conduct in any case affects others as well as himself, and that he is, therefore, responsible to others and for others. It is well that you boys have made him your captain. Now remember to hold up his hands and obey him loyally in every case of doubt. That will be hard for you, Edward, because of your superior knowledge —"

"No, it won't, mother, pardon me," responded Ed: "first, because I know too much about some things not to know that other people know more than I do about others; and secondly, because I thoroughly understand what Napoleon meant when he said that 'one bad general in command of an army is better than two good ones.' The most unwise order promptly executed

usually results better than the wisest order left open to debate. Phil will never leave things open to debate when the time comes for quick action, and besides, mother, I have a much better opinion of Phil's capacity for command than you think. His readiness and resourcefulness are remarkable. He may or he may not get us safely to New Orleans. But if he doesn't, I shall be perfectly certain that nobody else in the party could."

So it was that Phil Lowry, the youngest of the party, and the most harum-scarum boy in all Vevay, was chosen captain of *The Last of the Flatboats* by those who were to voyage with him, simply because they all believed him to be the one best fit for the place.

CHAPTER IV

A HURRY CALL

WITHOUT theorizing about it, and, indeed, without knowing the fact, Phil began at once to rise to his responsibility. The success of the enterprise, he felt, depended in a large degree upon him, and he must think of everything necessary in advance.

One night, late in September, he asked his comrades to meet him "on business" in Will Moreraud's room over a store. When they were all gathered around the little pine table with a smoky lamp on it, Phil drew out a carefully prepared memorandum and laid it before him. Then he began : —

"As you've made me responsible in this business, I've been studying up a little. The river's going to rise earlier than usual this year, and in two weeks at most there'll be water enough to get the boat over the falls at Louisville."

"How do you know that?" broke in Constant Thiebaud, incredulously.

"Because there has already been a smart rise all along, as you know, and heavy rains are falling in the West Virginia and Pennsylvania mountains. The Allegheny River is bank full; the Monongahela is over its banks; and the Muskingum and the Big Kanawha and the Little Kanawha are all rising fast. There'll be lots of water here almost before we know it."

"Whew!" cried Irving Strong, rising, — for he could never sit still when anything interesting was under discussion, — "but how in the name of all the 'ologies do you know what's going on in the Virginia mountains, and the rivers, and all that?"

"I've been reading the Cincinnati papers every day since you made me 'It'; that's all. Mr. Schenck lends them to me."

"Well, Gee Whillicks!" exclaimed Constant, "who'd 'a' thought of that!"

"No matter," said Phil, a little abashed by the approbation of his foresight which he saw in all the boys' eyes and heard in all their voices. "No matter about that; but I've more to say. The sooner we can get away with the flatboat, the better."

"Why? What difference does it make?"

"Well, for most of the things we are taking as freight the prices are apt to be much higher in the fall than later, after the steamboats load up the market. That's what Mr. Shaw says, and he knows. So we must get the boat loaded just as quickly as we can, and go out as soon as there is water enough to get her over the falls."

"But we can't do that," said Ed, "because most of the produce we are to take hasn't been brought to town yet. The hay is here, of course, but apples have hardly begun to come in —"

"That's just what I'm coming to," interrupted Phil. "I've been studying all that. We could get enough freight for two cargoes by waiting for it, but the best figuring I can do shows only about three-quarters of a load now actually in town. I propose that we go to work to-morrow and get the other quarter. That's what I called you together for."

"Where are we to get it?"

"Along the river, below town—in the neighborhood of Craig's Landing."

"But how?" asked Ed.

"By hustling. I've made out a list of everybody that produces anything for ten

miles down the river and five miles back into the hills, — Mr. Larcom, Captain John Wright, Johnny Lampson, Mr. Albritton, Gersham McCallum and his brother Neil, Algy Wright, Mr. Minnit, Dr. Caine, Mr. Violet — and so on. Craig's Landing is the nearest there is to all of them, and they can all get their produce there quickly. I propose that every boy in the crew take his foot in his hand early to-morrow morning, and that we visit every farmer in the list and persuade him to send his stuff to the landing at once. I've already seen Captain Wright, — saw him in town to-day, — and he promises me thirty barrels of apples and seventy bushels of onions with some other things. I'll go myself to Johnny Lampson. He has at least a hundred barrels of apples, and I'll get them. They aren't picked yet, but I'll offer him our services to pick them immediately for low wages, and so — ”

“I say, boys!” broke in Irv Strong, “I move three cheers for ‘obstinate pertinacity.’ It's the thing that ‘goes’ in this sort of business.”

“And in most others,” quietly rejoined Ed Lowry. “I'm afraid I've never properly appreciated it till now.”

Phil had some other details to suggest, for he had been trying very earnestly to think of everything needful.

They would need some skiffs, and he reported that Perry Raymond had six new ones, of his own building, which he proposed to let them have as a part of the cargo. They were to use any of them as needed on the voyage, and their use was to offset freight charges. They were to sell the skiffs at New Orleans or above, and to have a part of the proceeds as commission.

"I move we accept the offer," said Will Moreraud. "It's a good one."

"It is already accepted," replied the young captain a trifle sharply. "*I* closed the bargain at once."

His tone was not arrogant, but it was authoritative. It was a new one for him to take, and it rather surprised the boys, but on the whole it did not displease them. It meant that their young captain intended to be something more effective than the chairman of a debating club; that having been asked to assume authority, he purposed to exercise it; that being in command, he meant to command in fact as well as in name.

Some of them talked the matter over later that evening, and though they felt a trifle resentful at first, they finally concluded that the boy's new attitude promised well for the enterprise, and, better still, that it was right.

"You see he isn't 'cocky' about it at all," said Will Moreraud; "it just means that in this game he's 'It,' and he's going to give the word."

"It means a good deal more than that," said shrewd Irv Strong, who had been born the son of an officer in a regular army post. "It means we've picked out the right fellow to be our 'It,' and I, for one, stand ready to support him with my eyes shut, every time!"

"So do I," cried out all the lads in chorus. "Only you see," said Constant, "we didn't quite expect it from Phil. Well—maybe if we had, we'd have voted still louder for him for captain; that is, if we've got any real sense."

"It means," said Ed, gravely, "that if we fail to get *The Last of the Flatboats* safely to New Orleans, it will be our own fault, not his."

"That's so," said Irving Strong. "But

who'd ever have expected that rattlepate to think out everything as he has done?"

"And to be so desperately in earnest about it, too!" said another.

"Well, I don't know," responded Irving. "You remember how he stuck to that cistern sum. It's his way, only he's never before had so serious a matter as this to deal with, and I imagine we have never quite known what stuff he's made of."

"Anyhow," said Will, "we're 'his to command,' and we'll see him through."

With a shout of applause for this sentiment the boys separated for sleep.

CHAPTER V

ON THE BANKS OF THE WONDERFUL RIVER

IT was a busy fortnight that followed. The boys visited every farmer within six miles of the landing to secure whatever freight he might be willing to furnish. They picked and barrelled all of Lampson's apples, dug and bagged and barrelled all the potatoes in that neighborhood, and got together many small lots of onions, garlic, dried beans, and the like, including about ten barrels of eggs. These last they collected in baskets, a few dozen from each farm, and packed them at the landing. Of course every shipper's freight had to be separately marked and receipted for, so that the proper returns might be made.

During all this time the boys had lived in a camp of their own making at the landing, partly to guard the freight against thieves, partly to get used to cooking, etc., for themselves, partly to learn to "rough it," generally, and more than all because, being

healthy-minded boys, they liked camping for its own sake.

Their little shelter was on the shore, just under the bank. They occupied it only during rains. At other times they lived night and day in the open air. They worked all day, of course, leaving one of their number on guard, but when night came, they had what Homer calls a "great bearded fire," built against a fallen sycamore tree of gigantic size, and after supper they sat by it chatting till it was time to sleep.

They were usually tired, but they were excited also, and that often kept them awake pretty late. The vision of the voyage had taken hold upon their imaginations. They pictured to themselves the calm joy of floating fifteen hundred miles and more down the great river, of seeing strange, sub-tropical regions that had hitherto been but names to them, seeming as remote as the Nile country itself until now.

And as they thought, they talked, but mainly their talk consisted of questions fired at Ed Lowry, who was very justly suspected of knowing about ten times as much about most things as anybody else in the company.

Finally, one night Irv Strong got to "supposing" things and asking Ed about them.

"Suppose we run on a sawyer," he said. Ed had been telling them about that particularly dangerous sort of snag.

"Well," said Ed, "we'll try to avoid that, by keeping as nearly as we can in the channel."

"But suppose we find that a particularly malignant sawyer has squatted down in the middle of the channel, and is laying for us there?"

"I doubt if sawyers often do that," said Ed, meditatively.

"Well, but suppose one cantankerous old sawyer should do so," insisted Irv. "You can 'suppose a case' and make a sawyer anywhere you please, can't you?"

Everybody laughed. Then Ed said: "Now listen to me, boys. I've been getting together all the books I can borrow that tell anything about the country we're going through, and I'll have them all on board. My plan is to lie on my back in the shade somewhere and read them while you fellows pull at the oars, cook the meals, and do the work generally. Then, when you happen to have a little leisure, as you will now and

then, I'll tell you what I've learned by my reading."

"Oh, that's your plan, is it?" asked Phil.

"Yes, I've thought it all out carefully," laughed Ed.

"Well, you'll find out before we get far down the river what the duties of a flatboat hand are, and you'll *do* 'em, too, 'accordin' to the measure of your strength,' as old Mr. Moon always says in experience meeting."

"But reading and telling us about it is what Ed can do best," said Will Moreraud, "and that's what we're taking him along for."

"Not a bit of it," quickly responded Phil. "We're taking him along to make him well and strong like the rest of us, and I'm going to keep him off his back and on his feet as much as possible, and besides —"

"But, Phil, old fellow," Ed broke in, "didn't you understand that I was only joking?"

Ed asked the question with a tender solicitude to which Phil responded promptly.

"Of course I did," he replied. "You always do your share in everything, and sometimes more. But I don't think you

understand. You know we started this thing for you. I don't know — maybe you'll never get well if we don't do our best to make you —" but Phil had choked up by this time, and he broke away from the group and went down by the river. A little later Ed joined him there and, grasping his hand, said : —

" I understand, old fellow."

" No, you don't; at least not quite," replied the boy, who had now recovered control of his voice. " You see it's this way. You and I are *twins*. You're some years older than I am, of course, but we've always been twins just the same."

" Yes, I understand all that, and feel it."

" No, not all," persisted the younger boy. " You see I've got all the health there is between us, and it isn't fair. If you should — well, if anything should happen to you, I'd never forgive myself for not finding out some way of dividing health with you —"

" But, my dear brother —" broke in Ed.

" Don't interrupt me, now," said Phil, almost hysterically, " because I must tell you this so that you will understand. When we made up this scheme and you fellows chose me captain, I got to thinking how much

depended on me. There was the cargo, representing other people's money, and I was responsible for that. There was the safety of the boat and crew, and that depended upon me, too. But these weren't the heavy things to me. There was your health! That depended on me in a fearful way. I felt that I must find out what was best for you to do and then *make* you do it." He laughed a little. "That sounds funny, doesn't it? The idea of my 'making' you do things! — Never mind that. I went to Dr. Gale —"

"What for?" asked Ed, in astonishment at this new revelation of the change in Phil's happy-go-lucky ways.

"To find out just what it would be best for you to do and not to do, in order to make you well and strong like me." He choked a little, but presently recovered himself and continued. "I found out, and I mean to *make* you do the things that will save you, even if you hate me for my —"

He could say no more. There was no need. Ed, with his ready mind and big, generous heart, understood, though he wondered. He grasped his brother's hand again and said, between something like sobs: —

"And I'll obey you, Phil! Thank you, and God bless you! Be sure I could never hate you or do anything but love you, and you must always know that I understand."

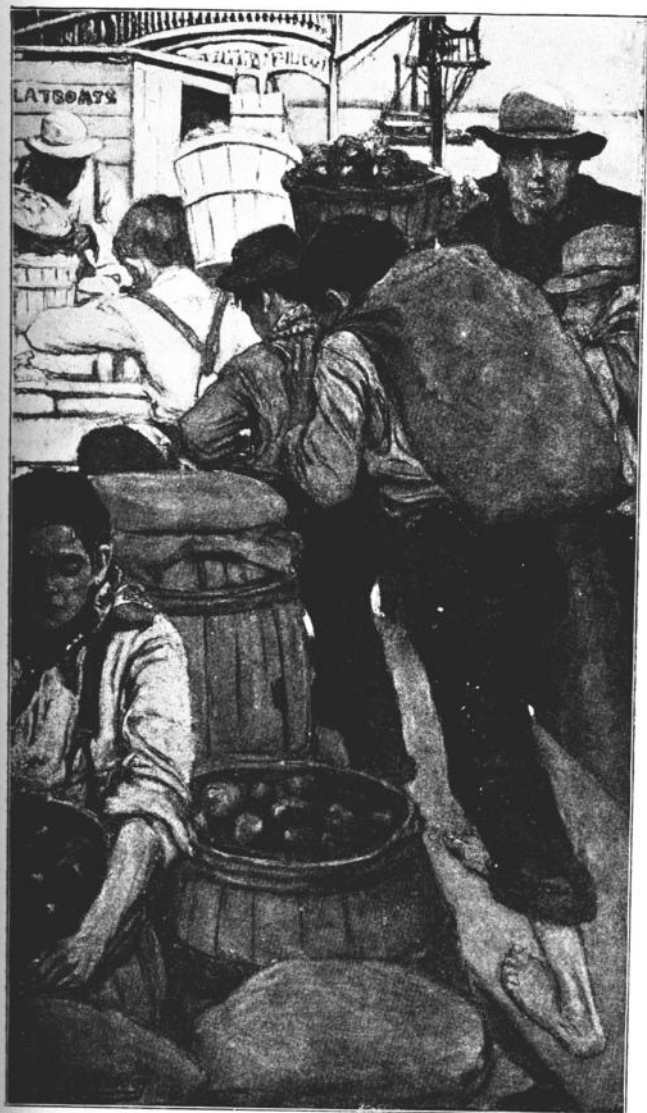
Then the two turned away from each other.

On their return to Vevay a few evenings later, Ed said to his mother: —

"You were right, mother; responsibility has already worked a miracle in Phil's character."

"No, you are wrong," said the wise mother. "It is only that you have never quite understood your brother until now. Nothing really changes character — at least nothing changes it suddenly. Circumstances do not alter the character of men or women or boys. They only call out what is already there. Responsibility and his great affection for you have not changed your brother in the least. They have only served to make you acquainted with him as you never were before."

"Be very sure I shall never misunderstand him again!" said the boy, with an earnestness not to be mistaken.



CHAPTER VI

THE PILOT

THE boys went hurriedly back to Vevay. They had cargo enough and to spare. Indeed, they feared they might have difficulty in bestowing it all on their boat. And the rise in the river was coming even earlier and faster than Phil had calculated. They must get the Vevay part of their load on board and drop down to Craig's Landing before the water should reach their freight there, which lay near the river. So they hired a farm hand to watch the goods at the landing and hastened to town.

There they worked like beavers, getting cargo aboard, for it was no part of their plan to waste money hiring anybody to do for them anything that they could do for themselves. They loaded the boat under Perry Raymond's supervision, for even the tightest and stiffest boat can be made to leak like a sieve if badly loaded.

Finally, everything was ready. The town part of the cargo was well bestowed. Ed Lowry had deposited his books on top of tiers of hay bales, in between barrels, and in every other available space, for there was no room for them in the little cabin at the stern, where the boys must cook, eat, sleep, and live. The cabin wasn't over twelve feet by ten in dimensions, and a large part of its space was taken up by the six sleeping-bunks. For besides themselves there was a pilot to be provided for.

His name was Jim Hughes. Beyond that nobody knew anything about him. He had come to Vevay, from nowhere in particular, only a few days before the flatboat's departure, and asked to be taken as pilot. He was willing to go in that capacity without wages. He wanted "to get down the river," he said, and professed to know the channels fairly well.

"If he does," said Ed Lowry, "he knows a good deal more than most of the old-time flatboat pilots did. With the maps I've secured I think we can float the boat down the river without much need of a pilot anyhow. But as Hughes offers to go for his passage, we might as well take him along.

We may get into a situation where his knowledge of the river, if he has any, will be of use to us."

So Jim Hughes was shipped as pilot of *The Last of the Flatboats*.

When all was ready that gallant craft was cast loose at the Ferry street landing, and as she drifted into the strong current, there was a cheer from the boys on shore who had assembled to see their schoolmates off.

"She floats upon the bosom of the waters," cried Irv Strong, "with all the grace of a cow learning to dance the horn-pipe."

Irv was in exuberant spirits, as he always was in fact. He was like soda water with all its fizz in it, no matter what the circumstances might be, and just now the circumstances were altogether favorable.

"I say, boys," he cried, "let's have a little dance on deck! Tune up your fiddle, Constant."

Constant dived into the cabin and quickly returned with his violin, playing a jig even as he emerged from the little trap-door at the top of the steps.

Phil did not join in the dance, for he had discovered a cause of anxiety. Their pilot

was making a great show of activity where none whatever was needed. From the Ferry street landing to "The Point" the current ran swiftly in a straight line, and if let alone, the boat would have gone in precisely the right direction. But Hughes was not letting her alone. With long sweeps of his great steering-oar he was driving her out dangerously near the head of the bar, now under water but still a shoal.

Phil, who was observing closely, called out:—

"I say, Jim, you must run further inshore, or you'll hit the head of the bar."

"Lem me alone," said Jim. "I know the river."

Just then the boat scraped bottom on the bar. Phil called out quickly:—

"All hands to the larboard oars! Give it to her hard!" and himself seizing the steering oar, he managed by a hair's breadth to swing the great box—for that is all that a flatboat is—into the deep and rapid channel near the Indiana shore.

As she drifted into safe water, Phil said:—

"That's incident number one in the voyage."

"Yes, and it came pretty near being chapter first and last in the log-book of *The Last of the Flatboats*," replied Irv Strong.

For several miles now there was nothing to do but float. But Phil was closely watching Jim Hughes and observed that that worthy made three visits to the hold,—as the cargo part of the boat is called,—going down each time by the forward ladder and not by the stairs leading to the cabin.

When the boat reached the big eddy about half a mile above Craig's Landing, it was necessary for all hands to go to the oars again in order to make the landing.

Presently Phil observed that Hughes was steering wildly. His efforts with the steering oar were throwing the boat far out into the river, away from the shore on which they were to land, and directly toward the head of a strong channel which at this stage of water ran like a mill-race along the Kentucky shore on the farther side of Craig's bar. Should the boat be sucked into that channel, she would be carried many miles down the stream before she could ever be landed even on the wrong side of the river, and she could never come back to Craig's Landing unless towed back by a steamboat.

Phil, seeing the danger, asked: "Why don't you keep her inshore?"

"None o' yer business. I'm steerin'," answered the pilot.

One quick, searching glance showed Phil the extent of the man's drunkenness,—or his pretence of drunkenness,—for Phil had doubts of it. There were certain indications lacking. Yet if the fellow was shamming, he was doing it exceedingly well. His tongue seemed thick, his eyes glazed, and his walk across the deck appeared to be a mere stagger, supported by the great oar that he was wielding to such mischievous effect.

There was not a moment to be lost if the landing was to be made at all. Phil called all the boys to the larboard sweep and went to take possession of the steering-oar. Jim Hughes resisted violently. Phil, with a quietude that nobody had ever before seen him display under strong excitement, picked up a bit of board from the deck, and instantly knocked the big hulking fellow down by a blow on the head.

The man did not get up again or indeed manifest consciousness in any way. If this troubled the boy, as of course it must, he at

least did not let it interfere with his duty. He had a difficult task to do and he must do it quickly. He gave his whole mind to that. The boys obeyed with a will his shouted orders to "pull hard!" then for two of them to go to the starboard oar and "back like killing snakes." In a little while the boat swung round, and Phil called to Will Moreraud to "take a line ashore in the skiff and make it fast." The youth did so, just in time to prevent the boat from grounding in the shoal water below the landing.

When everything was secure and the strenuous work done, the boy sank down upon the deck and called to his brother.

"See if I've killed him, won't you, Ed? *I can't.*"

A very slight examination showed that, while the blow from the bit of plank had brought some blood from the pilot's head, it had done no serious damage. His stupor, it was Ed's opinion, was due to whiskey, not to his chastisement.

Nevertheless it was a very bad beginning to the voyage, and Phil was strongly disposed to discharge the fellow then and there, and trust, as he put it, to "a good map, open eyes, and ordinary common sense, as

better pilots than a drunken lout who probably doesn't know the river even when he is sober."

But the other boys dissuaded him. They thought that Jim's intoxication was the result of his joy at getting off; that they could find his jug in its hiding-place and throw it overboard, — which presently they did, — and that after he should get sober, Jim's experience in flat-boating might be of great advantage to them.

"You see," said Ed Lowry, "we've taken a big responsibility. All this freight, worth thousands of dollars, belongs to other people, and I suppose half of it isn't even insured because the rates on flatboats are so high. Think if we should lose it for lack of a pilot!"

"Yes, think of that!" said two or three in a breath.

"Very well," said Phil. "I yield to your judgment. But my own opinion is that such a pilot is worse than none. I'll keep him for the present. But I'll watch him, and if he gets any more whiskey or plays us any more tricks, I'll set him ashore once for all if it's in the middle of an Arkansas swamp."

The river was rising now, more and more rapidly every hour. There was three days' work to do getting the rest of the cargo aboard and making room for it in the crowded hold. But at Ed Lowry's suggestion the boys avoided overtaxing themselves. The energetic Swiss blood in the veins of Constant Thiebaud and Will Moreraud prompted them to favor long hours for work on the plea that they could make it up by rest while floating down the river.

But under Ed's advice Phil overruled them, and it was decided to breakfast at six o'clock, work from seven to twelve, dine, rest for an hour, and work again till five.

CHAPTER VII

TALKING

THE pleasantest part of the day, under this arrangement, was that between five o'clock and bedtime.

The boys talked then, and talking is about the very best thing that anybody ever does. It is by talk that we come to know those about us and make ourselves known to them. It is by talk that we learn to like our fellows, by learning what there is in them worth liking. And it is by talk mainly that we find out what we think and correct our thinking.

Ed Lowry was reading a book one day, when suddenly he looked up and said:—

"I say, fellows, this is good. Lord Macaulay said he never knew what he thought about any subject until he had talked about it. Of course that's so with all of us, when you come to think of it."

"Well, I don't know," said Phil. "I often talk about things and don't know what

I think about 'em even after I've talked. Here's this big bond robbery, for example. I've read all about it in the Cincinnati newspapers and I've talked you fellows deaf, dumb, and blind concerning it. Yet, I don't know even now what I think about it."

"I know what I think," said Will More-
raud. "I think the detectives are 'all off.'"

"How?" asked all the boys in chorus.

"Well, they're trying to find the man who is supposed to be carrying the plunder. It seems to me they'd better look for the other fellows first; for if they were caught, they'd soon enough tell where the man that carries it is. They wouldn't go to jail and leave him with the stuff."

"The worst of it is they're publishing descriptions of the fellow and even of what they've noticed concerning his clothes and beard, as if a thief that was up to a game like that wouldn't change his clothes and part his hair differently and wear a different sort of beard, especially after he's been told what they're looking for."

"Yes, that's so," said Irving Strong, reading from one of Phil's Cincinnati newspapers:

"'Red hair' — a man might dye that —
'parted on the left side and brushed for-

ward' — he might part it in the middle and brush it back, or have it all cut off with one of those mowing machines the barbers use, just as Jim Hughes does with his —"

"Now I come to think of it," continued Irv, after a moment's thought, "Jim answers the description in several ways, — limps a little with his left leg, has red hair when he permits himself to have any hair at all, has lost a front tooth, and speaks with a slight lisp."

"Oh, Jim Hughes isn't a bank burglar," exclaimed Will Moreraud. "He hasn't sense enough for anything of that sort."

"Of course not," said Irv. "I didn't mean to suggest anything of the kind. I merely cited his peculiarities to show how easily a detective's description might lead men into mistakes. Why, Jim might even be arrested on that description."

"But all that isn't what Macaulay meant," said Ed. "He meant that a man never really knows what he thinks about any subject till he has put his thought into words and then turned it over and looked at it and found out exactly what it is."

"I guess that's so," drawled Irv. "I notice that whenever I try to think seriously —"

The boys all laughed. The idea of Irv Strong's thinking seriously seemed peculiarly humorous to them.

"Well, I do try sometimes," said Irv, "and whenever I do, I put the whole thing into the exactest words I can find. Very often, when I get it into exact words, I find that my opinions won't hang together and I've got to reconstruct them."

"Exactly!" said Ed Lowry. "And that is the great difficulty animals have in trying to think. They haven't any words even in their minds. They can't put their thoughts into form so as to examine them. It seems to me that language is necessary to any real thinking, and that it is the possession of language more than anything or everything else that makes man really the lord of creation."

"Yes," said Phil. "Even Bre'r Rabbit and Bre'r Fox and all the rest of them are represented as putting their thoughts into words."

"Perhaps," said Irv, "that's the reason why educated people think more soundly than uneducated ones. They have a nicer sense of the meaning of words."

"Of course," said Ed. "I suppose that

is what President Eliot of Harvard meant when he said that 'the object of education is to teach a man to express his thought clearly in his own language.' "

"Very well," said Phil. "My own thought, clearly expressed in my own language, is that it's time for supper. Come, stir your stumps, ye philosophical pundits! Bring me the skillet and the frying-pan, the salt pork to fry, and prepare the apples and potatoes and eggs to cook in the fat thereof. In the classic language of our own time, get a move on you, and don't forget the coffee-pot; nor yet the coffee that is to be steeped therein!"

The boys were ready enough to respond. Their appetites, sharpened by hard work in the open air, were clamorously keen. The supper promised—fried pork, fried apples, fried eggs, and coffee with a short-cake—seemed to them quite all that could be desired in the way of luxury. They could eat it with relish, and sleep in entire comfort afterward. Probably not one of my readers in a hundred could digest such a supper at all. That is because not one reader in a hundred gives himself a chance for robust health by working nine hours a

day and living almost entirely in the open air.

Jim came out when supper was ready and helped eat it there on the shore. At other than mealtimes it was his custom to stay on board the flatboat, and not only so, but to keep himself below decks, although the weather was still very warm. He had got over his drunkenness, but he was still moody, apparently in resentment of the rough-and-ready treatment he had received at Phil's hands.

He rarely talked at all; when he did talk, it was usually in the dialect of an entirely uneducated person. But now and then he used expressions that no such person would employ.

"He seems to slip into his grammar now and then," was Irv Strong's way of putting it.

CHAPTER VIII

THE RIGHT TO THE RIVER

By the time that the last of the cargo was bestowed, the boat was so full that there was scarcely a place in which to hang the four fire-extinguishers which Mr. Schenck had supplied for the protection of the cargo, of which he owned a considerable part.

The river by this time was bank full. Indeed, the flatboat lay that last night almost under an apple tree, and directly over the place where three days before the boys had cooked their meals.

When the final start was made, therefore, it was only necessary to give three or four strokes of the great "sweeps" to shove the craft out into the stream. After that she was left free to float. The biggest bars were at least ten feet under water, and the boat "drew" less than three feet, heavily laden as she was. For the rest, the current could be depended upon to "keep her in the river," as boatmen say, and the boys had nothing to do,

between Craig's Landing and Louisville, fifty or sixty miles below, except pump a little now and then, cook their meals, and set up the proper lights at night. Of course someone was always "on watch," but as the time was divided between the five, that amounted to very little.

As the boat neared Louisville, Ed suggested to his brother that he had better land above the town, and not within its limits.

"Why?" asked Phil. "We've got to get some provisions as well as hire a falls pilot, and it will be more convenient if we land at the levee."

"But it will cost us five or ten dollars in good money for wharfage," replied Ed.

"But if we land above the town, how do we know the man owning the land on which we tie up won't charge us just as much?" asked Irv Strong, who had never seen a large city and wanted to get as good a glimpse as he could of this one.

"Because the Mississippi River and its tributaries are not 'navigable' waters, but *are* 'public highways for purposes of commerce,'" responded Ed. "If they weren't that last, we couldn't run this boat down them at all."

"Not navigable?" queried Will More-
raud. "Well, looking at that big steamboat
out there, which has just come from Cincin-
nati, that statement seems a trifle absurd."

"Let me explain," said Ed. "The Eng-
lish common law, from which we get ours,
calls no stream 'navigable' unless the tide
ebbs and flows in it. And as the tide does
not ebb and flow in the Mississippi much
above New Orleans, neither that great river
nor any of its splendid tributaries are recog-
nized by the law as navigable."

"Then the law is an idiot," said Irv
Strong.

"One of Dickens's characters said some-
thing like that," responded Ed, "when he was
told that the law supposes a married woman
always acts under direction of her husband.
But both he and you are wrong, particularly
you, as you'll see when I explain. It is
absolutely necessary for the law to determine
just how far a man's ownership of land lying
along a stream extends. You see that?"

"Of course," was the general response.

"Yes," continued Ed, "otherwise very
perplexing questions would arise as to what
a man might or might not do along shore.
Now in England, where our law on the sub-

ject comes from, it is a fact that the tide ebbs and flows in all the navigable parts of the rivers and nowhere else. So the law made the tide the test, or rather recognized it as a test already established by nature.

"Now in order that commerce might be carried on, the law decreed that the owner of land lying on a navigable stream should own only to the edge of the bank — or to the 'natural break of the bank,' as the law writers express it. This was to prevent owners of the shores from levying tribute on ships that might need to land or anchor in front of their property.

"But on streams that were not navigable, no such need existed. On the contrary, it was very desirable, for many reasons, that the owners of the banks should be free to deal as they saw fit with the streams in front — to straighten or deepen them, and all that sort of thing. So the law decreed that on streams not navigable the owner of the bank should own to 'the middle thread of the water,' wherever that might happen to be.

"Now as all these great rivers of ours, the very greatest in the world, by the way, are in law non-navigable, it follows that the men who own their banks own the rivers also, the

man on each side owing to the middle thread of water. Naturally, these men could step in and say that nobody should run a boat through their part of the river without paying whatever toll they might choose to charge. Under such a system it would be impossible to use the rivers at all. It would cost nobody knows how many thousands of dollars in tolls to run a boat, say from Cincinnati to New Orleans."

"Well, why don't it, then?" asked Will Moreraud. "Why can't every farmer whose land we pass come out and make us pay for using his part of the river?"

"For the same reason," said Ed, "that the farmer can't come out and make you pay toll for passing over a public road which happens to cross his land."

"How do you mean? I don't understand," said Irv.

"Well, the only reason the farmer can't make you pay toll for crossing his land on a public road is, that the road is made by law a public highway, open to everybody's use, and it is a criminal offence for anybody to obstruct it, either by setting up a toll-gate, or building a fence, or felling trees across it, or in any other way whatever. And that's

the only reason a man who owns land along these rivers can't charge toll for their use or put any sort of obstruction in them without getting himself into trouble with the law for his pains."

"How's that?" asked one of the boys.
"This river isn't a public road."

"That is precisely what it is," said Ed.
"Realizing the difficulty created by the fact that this great river system is not legally navigable while its actual navigation is a common necessity, Congress early passed a law making the Mississippi River and all its tributaries 'public highways for purposes of commerce.' That's why nobody can prevent you from running boats on them, or charge you for the privilege."

The boys were deeply interested in the explanation, which was new to them, and so they sat silent for a while, thinking it over, as people are apt to do when they have heard something new that interests them.

Presently Phil said:—

"That's all very clear and I understand it, but I don't quite see what it has to do with where we land at Louisville."

"Well," said Ed, "I can explain that. As the river is a public highway for purposes

of commerce, nobody can charge you for any legitimate use of it, or its shores below high-water mark, such use, for example, as landing in front of his property, a thing which may be absolutely necessary to navigation. But if a man or a city chooses to spend money in making your landing easy and convenient, say by building a levee or wharf, putting in posts for you to make your boat fast by, or anything of the kind, that man or city has a right to charge you, not for landing, but for the use of the improvements and conveniences."

"Oh, yes, I see," said Phil. "Every city does that, and so if you land at its improved landing, you must pay. Well, we'll land on unimproved shores above Louisville, and above or below every other town that we have occasion to land at. That's business. But I don't see why Congress didn't solve the whole riddle by adopting a new rule as to what are and what are not navigable streams."

"What rule?" asked Ed.

"Well, the common-sense rule, that a stream which is actually navigable shall be regarded as navigable in law."

"Actually navigable by what?" asked

Ed. "There isn't a spring branch in all the country that isn't actually navigable by some sort of boat. Even a wash-basin will float a toy boat."

"Oh, but I mean real boats."

"Of what size?"

"Well, big enough to carry freight or passengers."

"Any skiff drawing three inches of water can do that. Such a rule would include Indian Creek and Long Run, and even all the branches we go wading in, as navigable streams. And then again, some streams are practically navigable even by steamboats at some seasons of the year, and almost or altogether dry at others. This great Ohio River of ours, in its upper parts at least, goes pretty nearly dry some summers. No, I don't see how any other line than that of the tide could have been drawn, or how the other difficulty could have been met in any better way than by declaring the Mississippi and all its tributaries 'public highways for purposes of commerce.' That was the simplest way out, and the simplest way is usually the best way."¹

¹ Ed's exposition of the law and the reason for it is sound enough. But different states, by statutes or court decisions, have somewhat modi-

“Yes,” said Irv Strong, “and as the simplest way to relieve hunger is to eat, I move that we stop talking and get dinner.”

The suggestion was accepted without dissent, and the two whose turn it was to cook went below to start a fire in the stove.

fied it, particularly as regards the extent of bank ownership. Probably Ed knew this, but didn't think it necessary to go into details, which, after all, do not change the general truth. — *Author*.

CHAPTER IX

WHAT HAPPENED AT LOUISVILLE

Just before the landing was made at Louisville, Jim Hughes was seized with an attack of cramps and took to his bunk, where he remained until near the time for the boat to be afloat again. The boys had feared that he might go ashore there and get a new supply of liquor, and they had even made careful plans to prevent him from bringing any aboard. His sudden sickness rendered all their plans superfluous.

At Louisville Phil got a fresh supply of newspapers, giving all the latest news concerning the great bond robbery, and took them aboard to read at leisure. He learned that there was no need of hiring a pilot to take the boat over the falls, which in fact are not falls at all, but merely rapids. At very high water such as just then prevailed, the only difference between that part of the river called the falls and any other part was that

that part had a much swifter and far less steady current than prevailed elsewhere.

"I could take your money for piloting you over the falls," said the genial old pilot to whom Phil had applied, "but it would be robbery. I'm a pilot, not a pirate, you see. All you've got to do, my boy, is to put your flatboat well out into the river and let her go. She'll amble over the falls at this stage of the water as gently as a well-built girl waltzes over a ball-room floor. She'll turn round and round, just as the girl does, but it'll be just as innocent-like. There'll be never less than twenty-five foot o' water under your gunwales, and there simply can't any harm come to you. Don't pay anybody anything to pilot you over. Do it yourself, and if anything happens to you, just let old Jabez Brown know where it happened, please. For if there's any new rocks sprouted up on the falls of the Ohio since the water rose, an old falls pilot like me just naterally wants to know about 'em."

After laying in the provision supply that was needed, including especially a big can of milk packed in a barrel of cracked ice, Phil returned to the boat and announced his purpose of "running the falls" without a

pilot. It was at supper in the cabin that he made the announcement, and Jim Hughes, who had been lying in his bunk with his face toward the bulkhead, suddenly sat up.

"Good!" he said. "They ain't no use fer a pilot when the river's bank full this way. When'll you start, Phil?"

"Just after daylight to-morrow morning," replied the captain.

"Well, I feel so much better," said Jim, getting out of his bunk, "I think I'll sample the pork and potatoes and throw in just a little o' that hot corn bread and the new butter for ballast."

"For a man who a few hours ago was violently ill with an intestinal disorder," remarked Irv Strong a little later with a very pronounced note of sarcasm in his tone, "it seems to me, Jim, that you're eating a tolerably robust supper. Now if I'd had the cramps you've been suffering from to-day, I really wouldn't venture upon cabbage and potatoes boiled with salt pork. I'd try something 'bland' first, like a half pound of shot or a pig's knuckle, or a bologna sausage or a few soft-boiled cobble-stones."

But Jim was deaf to the sarcasm and went on eating voraciously.

"Wonder what that fellow is afraid of," said Phil to Irv as they went out on deck to set the lights and make ready for the night.

"Don't at all know," responded Irv, "unless he owes money to somebody in Louisville. All I know is that he must have feigned that attack of cramps, else he couldn't eat now in the way he does. He didn't want to go ashore with you as you proposed, to hunt for a falls pilot."

"Yes," said Ed Lowry, "I've known all day that he was shamming, because he hasn't had the slightest touch or trace of proper symptoms. Even when he professed to be in the most excruciating pain his pulse wasn't in the least bit disturbed. I'm no doctor, but I know enough to say positively that a man with any such cramps as he pretended to have simply couldn't have kept his pulse calmly beating seventy-two times a minute as his did. I timed it three times and then quit bothering with the fellow because I knew he was shamming."

"Wonder what he meant by it," said Will.

"Shoo!" said Constant; "he's listening at the top of the gangway."

"And *I* wonder what *that* means," said

Phil, whose alert observation of the professed pilot had never been relaxed since the episode at Craig's Landing; "I wonder what he's listening for."

There was naturally no response, for the reason that nobody had anything to suggest. So the boys went toward the bow where the anchor-light hung, to hear Phil read in his newspapers all the latest details about the great bond robbery. They read on deck rather than in the cabin, because one boy must at any rate remain there on watch, and they all wished to hear.

The newspapers related that one of the gang of robbers was believed to have got away with the stolen bonds and money, and that the main purpose now was to find him. One man connected with the crime was already in custody, and from hints given by him it was hoped that he might turn state's evidence in his own resentment against the "carrier of the swag," who, it was believed, had deserted his fellow thieves, or some of them, and meant to keep the whole of the proceeds of the robbery for himself and one or two others. At any rate, the man in custody had given hints that were thought to be distinctly helpful toward the discovery

of the "carrier" and his partners who had betrayed the rest of their fellows.

The case was very interesting, but the boys must be up early in the morning, so at last they broke up their little confab, and all but one of them went to bed. Constant Thiebaud, who first reached the ladder-head, found Jim Hughes seated there with his head just above the deck.

"I thought you were in bed long ago," said Constant.

"So I was," said Jim; "but I got restless and came out for some air."

It wasn't at all the kind of sentence that Jim Hughes was accustomed to frame, and the boys observed the fact. But they had got used to what Irv Strong called Jim's "inadvertent lapses into grammar," and so they went to their bunks without further thought of the matter.

CHAPTER X

JIM

IT didn't take long to "run the falls." From where the flatboat lay above Louisville to the lower end of the rapids was a distance of about eight or ten miles. Not only was the river bank full, but a great wave of additional water — a rise of four or five inches to the hour — struck them just as they pushed their craft out into the stream. There was a current of six miles an hour even as they passed the city, which quickened to eight or ten miles an hour when they reached the falls proper.

The boat fully justified the old pilot's simile of a girl waltzing. She turned and twisted about, first one way and then the other, and now and then shot off in a totally new direction, toward one shore or the other, or straight down stream.

It all seemed perilous in the extreme, and at one time Jim Hughes hurriedly went below and brought up his carpet-bag, which he

deposited in one of the skiffs that lay on deck.

"What's the matter, Jim?" asked Phil, who was more and more disposed to watch the fellow suspiciously. "What are you doing that for?"

"Well, you see we mout strike a rock, and it's best to be ready."

"Yes," said Phil, "but what have you got in your carpet-bag that you're so careful of?" and as he asked the question he looked intently into Jim's eyes, hoping to surprise there a more truthful answer than he was likely to get from Jim's lips.

"Oh, nothin' but my clothes," said Jim, hastily avoiding the scrutiny.

"Must be a dress-suit or two among them," said Phil, "or you'd be thinking less about them and more about your skin. Let's see them!" he added suddenly, and offering to open the bag.

Jim snatched it away quickly, muttering something which the boy didn't catch. But by that time the falls were passed and the flatboat was floating through calm waters between Portland and New Albany. So Jim retreated to the cabin and bestowed his precious carpet-bag again under the straw of

his bunk, where he had kept it from the first.

"Wonder what he's got there, Phil," said Irv Strong, who had been attentive to the colloquy.

"Don't know," replied Phil; "but if things go on this way, the time will come when I'll decide to find out."

"By the way," broke in Will Moreraud, "did any of you see him bring that carpet-bag aboard?"

Nobody could remember.

"Guess he sneaked it aboard as he did that jug," said Phil, "and as he did his cramps."

"Don't be too hard on the fellow, boys," said Ed, whose generosity was always apt to get the better of his judgment. "Remember he's ignorant, and ignorance is always inclined to be suspicious. Probaby he hasn't more than a dollar's worth or so in that carpet-bag; but as it is all he has in the world, he's naturally careful of it. He's afraid some of us will steal his things. If he knew more, he would know better. But he doesn't know more. So he guards his poor little possessions jealously."

There was silence for a minute. Then Phil said:—

"See if he's listening, Constant;" and when Constant had strolled to the gangway and reported "all clear," Phil had this to say:—

"I'm not over-suspicious, I think. I don't want to be unjust to anybody. But I'm responsible on this cruise, and it's my duty to notice things carefully."

"Of course," said Irv Strong, the other "irreclaimable." "I haven't a doubt you noticed that I ate four eggs and two slices of ham for breakfast this morning. But before you 'call me down' for it, I want to say that I'm going to do the same thing to-morrow morning, because, since I came on the river, I've got the biggest hunger on me that I ever had in my life, and not at all because I have any diabolical plot in my mind to starve the crew of this flatboat into submission or admission or permission or any other sort of mission."

But Phil did not smile at the pleasantry. He hesitated a moment before replying, as if afraid that he might say too much; for Phil, the captain, was a very different person from the happy-go-lucky Phil his comrades had hitherto known. After a little while he said:—

"You remember, don't you, that Jim Hughes wanted to 'get down the river' so badly that he shipped with us without pay? If he is so poor that he has only that carpet-bag and only a few dollars' worth of stuff in it, why didn't he try to 'strike' us for some sort of wages? Does anybody here know where he came from, or why he came, or where he is trying to go to, or why he wants to go there, or in fact who he is, or anything about him? Can anybody explain why he shammed cramps yesterday?"

"To all the highly interesting questions in that competitive examination," said Irv Strong, "I beg permission to answer, in words made familiar to one by frequent school use — 'not prepared to answer.'"

All the boys laughed except Phil. He was serious. The *boy* hadn't at all gone out of him, as was proved by the fact that in spite of the October chill in the air he just then slipped off his clothes and "took a header" into the river. But the serious *man* had come into him with responsibility, as was shown by the fact that he used a towel to rub himself with after his bath. Having donned his clothes, he continued: —

"There may be nothing wrong about Jim

Hughes. I don't say there is anything wrong. But there is a good deal that is suspicious. So, while I accuse him of nothing, I'm watching him, and I have been watching him ever since we left Craig's Landing. I don't believe he was drunk there, for one thing."

"Don't believe he was drunk!" exclaimed the boys in a breath. "Why, you had to knock him down yourself to save the landing!"

"Yes, of course," said Phil. "But I took pains afterward to smell his breath while he was supposed to be in a drunken stupor, and there wasn't a trace of whiskey on it."

"But you remember we found his jug hid among the freight."

"You did," replied Phil; "and you reported to me, though you may have forgotten the fact, that it was 'full up to the cork.' Those were your own words, Will."

Will remembered, though he had not before thought of the significance of the fact.

"Well, Phil, what was the matter with him, then?" asked Ed.

"Shamming, just as he shammed the cramps yesterday."

"But for what purpose?"

"I don't know, any more than you know why he pretended to have cramps. My theory is that he was so anxious to get down the river that he tried to make us miss Craig's Landing entirely. The sum and substance of the matter is this. At Craig's Landing I wanted to put the fellow ashore. Now I don't want to do anything of the kind, and I won't either, till I can read a good many riddles that he has given me to puzzle over."

"Can we help you to read the riddles?"

"Yes. Watch him closely, and tell me everything you observe, no matter how little it may seem to mean."

Just then Jim Hughes came up out of the cabin scuttle, and all the boys except Phil found occasion to go to other parts of the boat. When you have been talking unpleasantly about another person, you naturally shrink from talking to him.

Phil, however, stood his ground. "Hello, Jim!" he called out. "How are the cramps, and how's the carpet-bag? Going to try to earn your board now by steering a little?"

Jim hesitated in embarrassment. Suddenly Phil began bombarding him with questions like shots from a rapid-fire gun.

"Where did you come from, anyhow, Jim? What's your real name? What are you hiding from? How much do you know about the river? and about flatboating? Have you really ever been down the river before, or was that all a sham like your cramps yesterday? Who are you? What are you?"

Jim struggled for a moment. There was that in his face which might have appalled anybody but a full-blooded, resolute, dare-all boy. But he quickly mastered himself.

"See here, Phil," he said in persuasive tones, "you're mighty hard on a poor feller like me, and I don't know why. That was a vicious clip you hit me at Craig's Landing."

Phil instantly responded, and again after the fashion of a breach-loader. "So you remember that, do you? Then you were not so drunk as you pretended."

"Well," said Jim, "I was pretty full, but of course I knew who hit me."

"You were not drunk at all," said the boy. "You hadn't even been drinking. I smelt of your breath, and the blow I struck didn't knock you senseless, for an hour, as you pretended, or for six seconds either. Now look here, Jim, I don't know what your

purpose is in all this shamming, but I know for a fact that it is shamming, and I've had quite enough of it."

With that the boy turned away in that profound disgust which every healthy-minded boy or man feels for a lie and a liar.

CHAPTER XI

THE WONDERFUL RIVER

As the "Knobs" — which is the name given to the high hills back of New Albany — receded, the day was still young. It was also overcast and cool. So Ed, who was always studying something, brought his big map up on deck and, spreading it out, lay down on his stomach to study it. He worked over it till dinner time, and in the afternoon he spread it out again.

The boys having gathered around him, he said: —

"I say, fellows, we are making a journey that we ought to remember as long as we live. We are going over a small but important part of the greatest river system in the world."

" 'Small but important part,' " said Will, quoting. "Well, I like that."

"What's your objection," said Ed Lowry, for the moment borrowing Irv Strong's

playful method, — “what’s your objection to my carefully chosen descriptive adjectives?”

“Well, we’re going over pretty nearly the whole of it, aren’t we?”

“Not by any manner of means,” responded Ed. “We aren’t going over more than a small fraction of it.”

“Why, the Ohio River alone is thirteen hundred miles long,” said Will; “I remember that much of my geography; and most of the Mississippi lies below the mouth of the Ohio, doesn’t it?”

“It’s lucky you’ve passed your geography examinations in the high school, Will,” said Ed. “Now come here, all you fellows, and take a look. This map shows the entire system of rivers of which the Mississippi is the mother. It is the greatest river system in the world. There is nothing, in fact, to compare it with but the Amazon and its tributaries, and they have never done anything for mankind, because they lie almost wholly in an unsettled and uncivilized tropical region that has no commerce and no need of any, while the Mississippi and its tributaries have built up an empire. They have in effect *created* the better part of this vast country of ours that is feeding the world and —”

"Oh, come now," said Irv Strong. "You aren't writing a composition or an editorial for the Vevay *Reveille*." This was in allusion to the fact that Ed sometimes published "pieces" in the local newspaper.

"Well, no," said Ed, laughing at his own enthusiasm. "Besides, I'll come to all that some other time perhaps. At present I want to give Will some new ideas about the bigness of our river system. True, the Ohio is twelve or thirteen hundred miles long, but about half of it lies above Vevay, so we're covering only six or seven hundred miles of it. From Cairo to New Orleans—the part of the Mississippi we shall traverse—is about one thousand and fifty miles long. So we're only going to travel over sixteen or seventeen hundred miles of river. Now there are about fifteen or sixteen thousand miles of this river system that steamboats can, and actually do, navigate, and nobody has ever really reckoned the length of the rest—the parts not navigable. We're going over only about one-tenth of the navigable part—one twenty-fifth part perhaps of the whole."

By this time the boys were all lying prone around the big map, their feet radiating in

every direction from it, like light-rays from a star.

"See here," said Ed; "here's the Tennessee River. It's a mere tributary of the Ohio, yet it is about two-thirds as long as the main river. Its head waters are in Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. It starts out through Tennessee and tries, in a stupid sort of fashion, to find its way to the Gulf of Mexico through Alabama. But it gets discouraged by the mountains down there, turns back, throws a dash of water into the face of the state of Mississippi, returns to Tennessee and travels north clear across that state and Kentucky, and finally in despair gives up its effort to find the sea and turns the job over to the Ohio. Look at it on the map!"

"And as if it thought the Tennessee had more than it could do to drain so great a region," said Phil, studying the map, "the Cumberland also went into the business and after pretty nearly paralleling its sister river for a great many hundreds of miles, fell into the Ohio only a few miles above the mouth of the Tennessee. The two together are longer than the Ohio itself."

"Very decidedly," said Ed. "And then

there are all the other tributaries of the Ohio,—look at them on the map. Together they again exceed its total length.”

The boys looked at the map and saw that it was so. Then Ed resumed:—

“But, after all, the Ohio and all its tributaries combined amount to a very small part of the great system. The lower Mississippi itself from Cairo to the mouth is almost exactly as long as the Ohio. Then there are the upper Mississippi,—stretching clear up into Minnesota,—the Illinois, the Wisconsin, etc., the Missouri and its vast tributaries flowing from the Rocky Mountains, the Arkansas, the Red River, the Ouachita, the White, the St. Francis, the Yazoo, the Tallahatchie, the Sunflower, the Yalobusha—and a score of others, to say nothing of the vast bayous that connect with the wonderful river down South. Here they all are on the map. Look!”

The next fifteen minutes were given up to a study of the map, interested fingers tracing out the rivers, and a continual chatter contributing, after the manner of boys' talk, to the general stock of information. Presently Irv Strong spoke. He had never before in his life been silent so long.

"I remember, at this stage of the proceedings, the wise remark of our honored teacher, Mrs. Dupont, that 'eyes are excellent to see with, but one interpretative brain means more than many additional pairs of eyes.'"

"What's all that got to do with it?" asked Constant. "She was talking about Darwin and Spencer when she said that. What's either of them got to do with this river?"

"Ah, Constant!" said Irv, in mock melancholy. "You grieve me to the heart. You never will see the inward and spiritual meaning of my outward and visible quotations. I mean that Ed Lowry has studied out this whole thing and knows 'steen times more about it and what it means than we blockheads would find out by studying the map for a dog's age. I venture that assertion boldly, without having the remotest notion of what constitutes a dog's age. My idea is that we fellows ought to shut up, though I'm personally not fond of doing that, and let Ed gently distil into our minds his information about all these things. Let's have the benefit of the 'interpretative brain'!"

"Let's take a header first," cried Phil, shedding his clothes again. "I'll beat the best of you in a swim around the boat, or if I lose, I'll wash the dishes for a whole day."

And with that he went head foremost overboard, Will and Irv following him.

When they reappeared on deck, blowing like porpoises and glowing like boiled lobsters, Ed said:—

"You fellows are regular water-rats; Phil is, anyhow. He's in this water half a dozen times a day, no matter how cold the wind is."

"That's just it," said Phil. "The water isn't anything like so cold as this October air." Then, with mock seriousness: "Believe me, my dearly beloved brother, it is to escape the frigidity of the atmosphere, or, as it were, to warm myself, that I jump into the river. You were reading a poem the other day in which the stricken-spirited scribe said:—

'For my part I wish to enjoy what I can—

A sunset, if only a sunset be near,

A moon such as this if the weather be clear,'

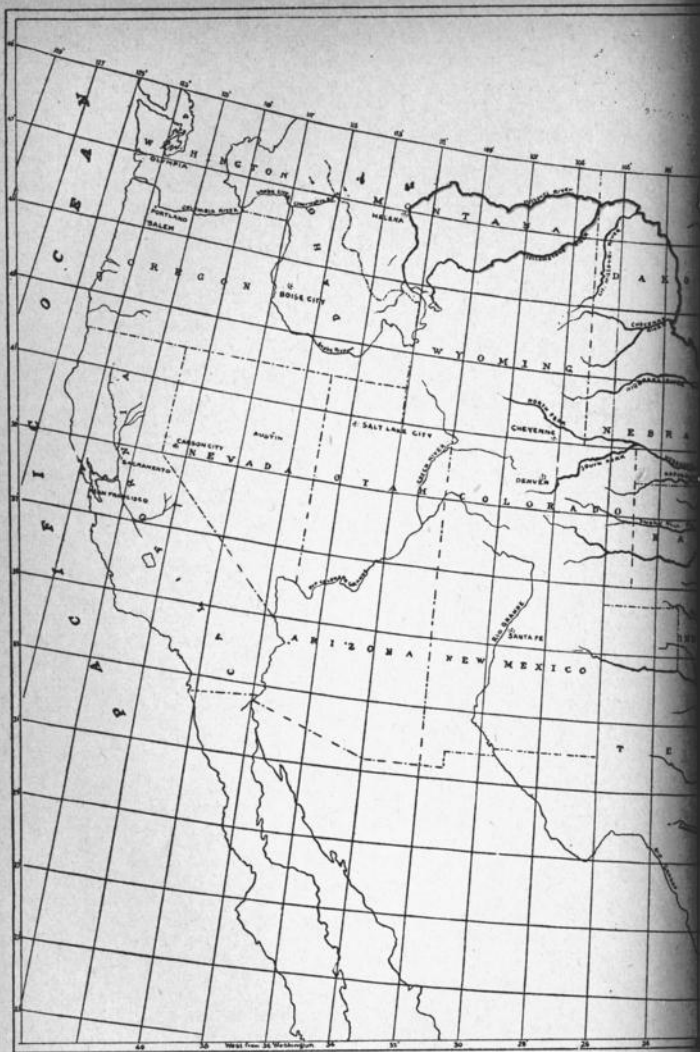
and much else to the like effect. As you read the glittering, golden words, I said in my

soul: 'Bully for you, oh poet! I'm your man for those sentiments every time.' And just now the poet and I agree that nothing in this world would minister so much to our immediate enjoyment as to jump off the boat again on the larboard side, dive clear under her and come up on the starboard. Here goes! Who's the poet to follow me?" And overboard the boy went, feet first this time, for after striking the water and sinking to a safe depth, he must turn himself about and swim under water for fifty or sixty feet before daring to come to the surface again.

Nobody tried to perform the feat in emulation of the reckless fellow. It involved a great many dangers and a still greater many of disagreeable possibilities such as broken heads, skinned backs, and abraded shins. Of that I can give my readers full assurance because I've done the thing myself many times, and bear some scars as witnesses of its risks.

But it was Phil's rule of life never to let anybody "do anything in the swimming way" that he couldn't do equally well. He had once seen somebody dive under a steamboat and come up safely on the other side.

So he straightway dived under the same steamboat and came up safely on the other side. After that, diving under a flatboat was a mere trifle to him.



MAP OF THE MISSISSI

Prepared expressly for this work under the personal direction



MISSISSIPPI RIVER AND ITS TRIBUTARIES

by Lieut.-Col. Alexander McKenzie, Corps of Engineers, U. S. Army

CHAPTER XII

THE WONDERFUL RIVER'S WORK

"Now, then," said Phil, wrapping a blanket around his person, for the air was indeed very chill, and prostrating himself over the map, "now, then, let the 'interpretative brain' get in its work! I interrupted the proceedings just to take a personal observation of the river we are to hear all about. Go on, Ned!"

"Wait a bit — I'm counting," said Ed; "twenty-five, twenty-six, twenty-seven, twenty-eight. There. If you'll look at the map, you'll see that the water which the Mississippi carries down to the sea through a channel about half a mile wide below New Orleans, comes from twenty-eight states besides the Indian Territory."

"What! oh, nonsense!" were the exclamations that greeted this statement.

"Look, and count for yourselves," said Ed, pointing to various parts of the map

as he proceeded. "Here they are: New York, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, and the Indian Territory. Very little comes from New York or South Carolina or Texas, and not a great deal from some others of the states named, but some does, as you will see by following up the lines on the map. The rest of the states mentioned send the greater part of all their rainfall to the sea by this route."

"Well, you could at this moment knock me down with a feather," said Irving Strong. "Aren't you glad, Phil, that we jumped in away up here before the water got such a mixing up?"

"But that isn't the most important part of it," said Ned, after his companions had finished their playful discussion of the subject.

"What is it, then? Go on," said Irv. "I'm all ears, though Mrs. Dupont always thought I was all tongue. What is the most important part of it, Ed?"

"Why, that this river *created* most of the states it drains."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, I mean that but for this great river system it would have taken a hundred or more years longer than it did to settle this vastest valley on earth and build it up into great, populous states that produce the best part of the world's food supply."

"Go on, please," said Will Moreraud, speaking the eager desire of all.

"You see," said Ed, "in order to settle a country and bring it into cultivation, you must have some way of getting into it, and still more, you must have some way of getting the things it produces out of it, so as to sell them to people that need them. Nobody would have taken the trouble to raise the produce we now have on board this boat, for instance, — the hay, grain, flour, apples, cornmeal, onions, potatoes, and the rest, — if there had been no way of sending the things away and selling them somewhere. Unless there is a market within reach, nobody will produce more of anything than he can himself use."

"Oh, I see," said Irv. "That's why I

don't think more than I do. I've no market for my crop of thoughts."

"You're mistaken there," said Constant, who was slow of speech and usually had little to say. "There's always a market for thoughts."

"Where?"

"Right around you. What did we go into this flatboat business for except to be with Ed? He can't do half as much as any one of us at an oar, or at anything else except thinking, and yet we would never have come on this voyage —"

"Oh, dry up!" said Ed, seeing the compliment that was impending. "I was going to say —"

"And so was I going to say," said Constant; "and, in fact, I *am* going to say. What I'm going to say is that there isn't a fellow here who would be here but for you, Ed. There isn't a fellow here that wouldn't be glad to do all of your share of the work, if Phil would let him, just for the sake of hearing what you think. Anyhow, that's why Constant Thiebaud is a member of this crew."

It was the longest speech that Constant Thiebaud had ever been known to make,

and it was the most effective one he could have made, because it put into words the thought that was in every one's mind. That is the very essence of oratory and of effective writing. All the great speeches in the world have been those that cleverly expressed the thought and the feeling of those who listened. All the great books have been those that said for the vast, dumb multitudes that which was in their minds and souls vainly longing for utterance.

When Constant had finished, there was silence for a moment. Then Irv Strong said impressively : —

“AMEN !”

That exclamation ended the silence, and expressed the common sentiment of all who were present. For even Jim Hughes, who was listening, had begun to be interested.

Ed was embarrassed, of course, and for the first time in his life words completely failed him. He sat up ; then he grasped Constant's hand, and said, “I thank you, fellows.” And with that he retreated hurriedly to the cabin for a little while.

Constant went to the pump, and labored hard for a time to draw water from a bilge that had no leak. Will went to inspect the

anchor, as if he feared that something might be the matter with it. Phil and Irving jumped overboard, and swam twice around the boat.

Finally, all came on deck again, and Will said : —

“Go on, Ed. We want to hear.”

Ed at once resumed, Jim Hughes meantime working with the steering-oar.

“Well, this great river gave the people who came over the mountains, and afterward the people who came up it from New Orleans, not only an outlet to the sea, but a sort of public road, over which they could travel and trade with each other. When the upper Ohio region began to be settled, a great swarm of emigrants from the East poured over the mountains, and made a highway of the river to get themselves and all that belonged to them to the upper Mississippi, the lower Mississippi, and the Missouri River country. My father once told me, before he died, that in his boyhood you could tell a steamboat bound from Pittsburg or Cincinnati to St. Louis from any other boat, because she was red all over with ploughs, wagons, and all that sort of thing. Agricultural implements were all painted red

in those days, and as they weren't very heavy freight they were bestowed all over the boat,—on the boiler deck guards, on the hurricane deck, and sometimes even in the cabin, and on top of the Texas.¹ Now, without these ploughs, wagons, harrows, and so forth, how could the pioneers ever have brought the great Western country under cultivation? And without the river how could they ever have got these necessary implements, or themselves, for that matter, to the regions where they were needed?"

"Couldn't they have taken them over-land?"

"Only in a very small and slow way. There were no railroads, no turnpikes, and even no dirt roads at that time. It would have cost ten times more to take a wagon-load of ploughs through the woods and across the prairies, from Pittsburg or Cincinnati to Missouri or Iowa, than the wagon and the ploughs put together were worth when they got there. But the river came to the rescue. It carried the people and all

¹The "Texas" of a western river steamer is an extra cabin, built above the main cabin and under the pilot-house, for the accommodation of the boat's officers. It was named "Texas" because about the time of its naming Texas was added to the Union. This cabin was also something added. — *Author*.

their belongings cheaply and quickly, and then it carried their produce to New Orleans; and so the great West was settled.

"In the meantime the people in Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and other towns saw that they could make all the wagons, ploughs, and other things wanted by the people further west much cheaper than the same things could be sent over the mountains from the East. Thus, factories and foundries sprang up, new farms were opened and new towns built."

"Were there steamboats from the first?" asked one of the boys.

"No; when Vevay was settled, Fulton hadn't yet built the first steamboat that ever travelled, and when steamboats did appear they were few and small. Flatboats, just like this one, carried most of the produce to New Orleans; but as flatboats couldn't come back up the river, there were a good many keelboats that brought freight and passengers up as well as down stream."

"What are keelboats?"

"Why, they were large barges built with a keel, a sharp bow, and a modelled stern — in short, like a steamboat's hull. These keelboats floated down the river, and the

men then pushed them back up stream with long poles. When the current was too strong for that they got out on the bank and hauled the boat by ropes. That was called 'cordelling.' The steamboats grew, however, in number and size when they came, and as long ago as 1835 there were more than three hundred of them on the Mississippi alone. In 1850 there were more than four thousand on these rivers. They drove the keelboats out of business, but the flatboats continued because of their cheapness till after the Civil War, when the great towboats came into use. These, with their acres of barges, could carry freight even cheaper than flatboats could. For a long time the steamboats carried all the passengers, too, and many of them were palaces in magnificence. But the railroads came at last and took the passenger business away, and much of the freight traffic also, because they are faster, and still more because they don't have to go so far to get anywhere."

"Why, how's that? I don't understand," said Irv.

"Yes, you do, if you'll think a bit," responded Ed.

"Couldn't *think* of thinking. I'm too

tired or too lazy so tell me," was Irv's rejoinder.

"Well, you know the river is crooked, and the steamboats must follow all its windings, while the railroads can run nearly straight."

"Yes, I know," said Irv, "but the crookedness of the river isn't enough to make any very great difference."

"Isn't it? Well, down in Chicot County, Arkansas, there is one bend in the river so big that from the upper landing on a plantation to the lower landing on the same plantation, the distance by river is seventeen miles, while the distance across the neck from one landing to the other is less than a mile and a half!"

"Whew!" said Phil. "And are there many such trips round Robin Hood's barn for us to make on the way down?"

"That's best answered by telling you that from Cairo to New Orleans the distance by river is about one thousand and fifty miles, while by rail it is a little over four hundred miles. But come. It's getting dark, and I've got to bake some corn pones for supper, so I must quit lecturing."

CHAPTER XIII

THE TERROR OF THE RIVER

FOR the next few days the voyage was uneventful. There was very little to be done at the sweeps — only now and then a ten minutes' pull to keep the boat off the banks and in the river. For the water was now so high that there was no such thing as a channel to be followed.

In many places the stream had overflowed its banks and flooded the country for miles inland on either side. Sometimes a strong current would set toward the points where the water was going over the banks, and a constant watchfulness was necessary to prevent the boat from being drawn into these currents and "going off for a trip in the country," as Irv Strong expressed it. Whenever she manifested a disposition of that kind, all hands worked hard at the sweeps till she was carried out of the danger.

During these days Ed read a great deal, and the other boys read a little and talked

not a little. On one or two days there were heavy all-day rains, and at such times Ed would have liked to remain in the cabin when not needed at the sweeps, and the other boys, hearing him cough so frequently, pleaded with Phil to let him stay under cover.

"We never really need him for rowing," said they, "and he ought to stay down below all the time when it's wet, for the sake of his health."

"That's just where you differ in opinion from the doctor," responded Phil. "*He* says I'm to keep Ed in the open air on deck all the time. Air is his only medicine, the doctor insists, and I'm going to give him his medicine, for I've made up my mind to take him back to Vevay a much 'weller' fellow than he's ever been before. So on with your rubber goods, Ed, and out with you!"

"You're entirely right, Phil," said the elder brother. "And I'm much 'weller,' as you call it, already. I don't cough so much or so hard as I did. I sleep better and eat better and feel stronger. I guess I've been too much taken care of."

"Oh, as to that, I expect to make an ath-

lete of you yet," said Phil. Then turning to Irving, with moisture in his eyes, as Ed mounted to the deck, he added: "I don't know, Irv, but I'm doing what the doctor told me was best. It *hurts* me, but I do it for *his* sake."

"Of course you do. And of course it's best, too. Ed really is getting better. I've watched him closely."

"Have you?" asked Phil, eagerly. "And are you sure he's getting better? Oh, are you *sure*?"

"Of course I am," said Irv, beginning to feel the necessity of lapsing into light chatter to escape an emotional crisis. "Of course I am. Why, haven't you noticed that since we ran out of milk and sugar he's drunk his coffee clear like an honest flat-boatman? And haven't you noticed that he rebukes my ignorance and your juvenility with a vigor that no really ill fellow could bring to bear? He's all right—Look!" as the two emerged on deck. "He's actually trying to teach Jim Hughes how to splice a rope! Nobody but a man full of robust energy to the bursting point would ever try to teach that dullard anything."

"He isn't a dullard," replied Phil. "He shams all that, I tell you."

Irv didn't argue the point. He didn't care anything about it. He had accomplished his purpose. He had diverted Phil's and his own thoughts, and prevented the little emotional breakdown that had been so imminent.

Why is it that boys are so ashamed of that which is best and noblest in their natures?

They were nearing Cairo now, and there was no time for further talk. With the river at its present stage, and with a high wind blowing, and a heavy rain almost blinding them, it was not an easy thing to get their boat safely into the pocket between Cairo and Mound City, amid the scores and hundreds of coal barges that were harboring there. For the flatboat even to touch one of the coal barges, unless very gently indeed, meant the instant sinking of many hundreds of tons of coal, and in all probability, the loss of the flatboat also.

At one time Phil — for he had ceased to think of Jim as a pilot, or even as a person who could lend any but merely muscular assistance anywhere — was on the point of giving up the idea of landing at all. He

debated with himself whether it would not be wiser to float on past Cairo, into the Mississippi. But the boat was really very short of provisions. The milk supply had given out two days after passing the falls; their meal was almost exhausted; their salt had got wet; they had no butter left; there was only half a pound of coffee in their canister; and no flour whatever remained. There was a little bacon in their cargo, and there were flour, eggs, cornmeal, onions, and potatoes also. But it was their agreed purpose not to risk complications in their accounts by taking any of their cargo for their own use except in case of extreme necessity.

"And as for eggs," said Irv Strong, "I fear that those in our cargo are beginning to be too far removed from the original source of supply,—too remotely connected with the hens of Switzerland County, Indiana, as it were,—too—well, they seem to me far more likely to give satisfaction to educated palates in New Orleans 'omelettes with onions' and the like, than on our frugal table. Besides, our cabin is rather small and it would be troublesome to have to go up on deck every time the cook wanted to break an egg."

"You forget, Irv," said Ed, "we aren't more than ten or twelve days out yet, and eggs keep pretty well for a much longer time than that."

"True," said Irv; "but it seems to me that we've been on the river for a month. At any rate, Phil's plan of not eating up our cargo is a good one."

Between Cairo and Memphis lay about two hundred and forty miles of difficult river, and in all that distance there was not a town of any consequence, at least as a market in which to buy boat stores. So the necessity of landing at Cairo for supplies overrode all considerations of difficulty and danger in the young captain's mind, and after some very hard work and some narrow escapes, he succeeded in securely tying up *The Last of the Flatboats* in the bend.

During their stay at Cairo Jim Hughes was again ill, afflicted this time with chills and fever. But he angrily refused to have a doctor called, and as Ed could find no trouble with his pulse or temperature, the crew did not insist upon summoning medical assistance.

"Let's put him ashore and be rid of him," suggested Will Moreraud.

"Yes, let's!" said Constant. "He's of no use to us, and he spoils the party by his presence."

"No," decided Phil, "I wanted to put him ashore at Craig's Landing, but I've got over that desire. He interests me now in his way. I've discovered a good deal about him, and I mean to find out more. He's going somewhere, and I want to find out where it is. No, boys, we'll keep him on board for a while."

At Cairo Phil bought a large supply of newspapers from Chicago, St. Louis, Memphis, and New Orleans. They reported increasing floods in every direction. The upper Mississippi was at a tremendous stage. The Missouri was pouring a vast flood into it. The Tennessee and Cumberland were adding enormously every hour to the great volume of water that was pouring down out of the overflowed and still swelling Ohio. In short, one of those great Mississippi floods was at hand which come only when all the rivers—those from north, west, east, and south—"run out" at the same time.

The river was full of drift; great uprooted trees and timbers from houses and barns that

had been swept from their foundations and reduced to wreckage; driftwood from thousands of miles of shore. Flotsam of every conceivable kind covered the face of the waters so completely that it looked as if one might almost walk across, stepping from one floating mass to another.

And there was a menace in it, too, that was ever present. The uprooted trees refused to float steadily. They turned over and over like giants troubled in their sleep with Titanic nightmares. They lashed their wide-reaching limbs in fury, while currents and cross-currents caused the floating stuff to rush hither and thither, now piling it high and grinding it together with destructive energy, now scattering it again and leaving great water spaces clear.

Now and then a house or a barn would float by, crushed half out of shape, but not yet twisted into its original materials. Altogether the river presented a spectacle that would have inspired any old Greek poet's imagination to create a dozen new gods and a score of hitherto unknown demons to serve as the directors of it all.

So *The Last of the Flatboats* tarried in the bend above Cairo, waiting for the worst of

the drift to run by before again venturing upon the bosom of the great flood.

"I say, Ed," said Phil, looking out upon the vast waste of water with its seething surface of wreckage, "nothing in all that you have told us about the river has given me so good an idea of its tremendous power as the sight of that," — waving his hand toward the stream.

"Of course not," replied the elder. "Nothing that anybody could say in a lifetime could equal that demonstration of power. Nobody that ever lived could put this wonderful river into words. I have told you fellows only of the good it has done — only of its beneficence. You see now what power of malignity and destructiveness it has. This single flood has already destroyed hundreds of lives and swept away scores and hundreds of homes, and obliterated millions of dollars' worth of property. Before it is over the hundreds in each case will be multiplied into thousands. Even now, right here at Cairo, a great disaster impends. Every able-bodied man in the town has been sent with pick or shovel or wheelbarrow to work night and day in strengthening and raising the levees. There

are ten thousand people in this town. With the Mississippi on one side and the Ohio on the other, and with their floods united across country above the town, these helpless people have nothing in the world but an embankment of earth between them and death. Their homes lie from twenty to thirty feet below the level of the water that surrounds them on every side. And that level is rising every hour, every minute. It is already several inches above the top of their permanent levees. The flood is held in check only by a temporary earthwork, built on top of the permanent one. It is no wonder that the embankments are ablaze with torches and that a thousand men are working ceaselessly by night and by day to build the barriers higher."

"What if a levee should break?" asked Will, in awe.

"Ten thousand people would be drowned in ten minutes," answered Phil, who had been studying the matter even more closely than Ed had done. "Cairo lies now in a triangle, with the floods on all three sides. If the levee should give way at any point on any side, Niagara itself would be a mere brook compared with the torrent that would

rush into the town. One of the engineers said to me to-day that the pressure upon the levees at this stage of water amounts to thousands of millions of tons. Should there be a break at any point, it would give to all this ocean of water a sudden chance to fall thirty feet or so. Now think what that would mean! The engineer, when I asked him, answered, — ‘ Well, it would mean that in ten minutes the whole city of Cairo would be swept completely off the face of the earth. Not only would no building be left standing in the town, but there would be literally not one stone or brick left on top of another. Indeed, the very land on which the city stands, the entire point, would be scooped out fifty feet below its present level and carried bodily away into the river. The site of the town would lie far beneath the surface of the water.’ ”

“ And all this may happen at any moment now ? ” asked Constant.

“ Yes,” said Phil. “ But it is not likely, and brave men are fighting with all their might to prevent it. Let us hope they will succeed.”

“ Why do people live in such a place ? ” asked Will.

"Why do men live and plant vineyards high up on the slopes of Vesuvius, knowing all the time the story of what happened to Herculaneum and Pompeii?" asked Irv.

"It's sometimes because they must, because they have nowhere else to live."

"Yes," said Ed, "but it is oftener because they have the courage to face danger for the sake of bettering themselves or their children in one way or another. Did it ever occur to you that all that is worth while in human achievement has been accomplished by the men who, for the sake of an advantage of one kind or another, were willing to risk their lives, encounter danger in any form, however appalling, endure hardships of the most fearful character, and take risks immeasurable? That is the sort of men that in frail ships sailed over the seas to America and conquered and settled this country, fighting Indians and fevers and famines and all the rest of it. It was that sort of men, — and women, too, — for don't forget that in all those enterprises the women risked as much as the men did and suffered vastly more, — it was that sort of men and women who pushed over the mountains and built up this great West of ours. Talk

about the heroism of war ! why, all the wars in all the world never brought out so much of really exalted heroism as that displayed by a single company of pioneer emigrants from Virginia or North Carolina, crossing the mountains into Kentucky, Tennessee, or Indiana."

"Then these Cairo people are heroes in their way?" asked Irv.

"Yes," replied Ed, "though they don't know it. Heroes never do. The hero is the man who, in pursuit of any worthy purpose,—though it be only to make more money for the support of his family,—calmly faces the risks, endures the hardships, and performs the tasks that fall to his lot. The highest courage imaginable is that which prompts a man to do his duty as he understands it, with absolute disregard of consequences to himself."

That night Phil read his newspapers very diligently. Especially, he studied the portraits and the minute descriptions given of the man who was "carrying" the proceeds of the great bank robbery. Somehow, Phil was becoming more and more deeply interested in that subject.

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE HOME OF THE EARTHQUAKES

ONE night soon after *The Last of the Flatboats* left Cairo, Phil's compass showed that the Mississippi River, whose business it was to run toward the south, was in fact running due north. Phil recognized this as one of the vagaries of the wonderful river. Consulting his map, he found that the river knew its business, that the boat was in New Madrid Bend, where for a space the strangely erratic river runs north, only to turn again to its southerly course, after having asserted its liberty by running in a contrary direction as it does at Cairo, where a line drawn due north from the southerly point of Illinois cuts through a part of Kentucky, a state lying to the south of Illinois. No ordinary map shows this, but it is nevertheless true. Illinois ends in a hook, which extends so far south and so far east as to bring a part of Illinois to the southward of Kentucky.

Phil had fully grasped this fact. He had reconciled himself to the eccentricities of the wonderful river, and was entirely content to float northward, so long as that seemed to be the river's will.

But about midnight there came a disturbance. First of all there was a great roar, as of artillery or Titanic trains of cars somewhere in the centre of the earth. Then there were severe blows upon the bottom of the flat-boat, blows that threatened to break its gunwales in two. Then three great waves came up the river, curling over the flat-boat's bow and pouring their floods into her hold, as if to swamp her. Then the boat swung around, changed her direction, and for a time ran up the stream, while waves threatened at every moment to overwhelm her.

Phil, who was on watch at the time, ran to the scuttle to call his comrades, but there was no occasion. The tremendous thumps on the bottom of the boat and the swaying of everything backward and forward had awakened them, and, half clad, they were rushing on deck.

Just then the boat struck upon a shore bar and went hard aground. The water

that had come in over her bow had more than filled the bilge; but how far the disturbance had made the boat leak, Phil could not find out, for she was now resting upon a sandbank near the shore, and of course, supported as she was by the river bottom, she could not settle farther. So Phil ordered all hands to the pumps, in order to get out the wave water, and to find out as soon as she should float again what water there might be coming in through leaks caused by the disturbance just experienced.

A little pumping showed that the boat was not leaking seriously. The water in the hold went down in about the same proportion that the pumps poured it out, thus showing that no additional supply was coming in anywhere.

In half an hour the pumps ceased to "draw." That is to say, no water came out in response to their activity. But the flatboat was still aground.

"Never mind about that," said Irv Strong. "The river is still rising rapidly, and it will soon float us."

"Yes," answered Phil, "if we are on a level bar and if the boat has undergone no strain. You see as long as we have bottom

under us, we shan't leak to any serious extent. But when we float again, the great weight of our cargo will make every open seam admit water to its full capacity."

"Of course," said Irv. "But what makes you think there are any open seams?"

"Nothing," answered Phil, "except a general impulse of precaution. We went aground very easily. In fact, I didn't know we were aground till I saw the water flowing by, and by the way, it is RUNNING UP STREAM!" As he said this he leaned over the side and observed the water carefully.

The other boys joined him and observed the same phenomenon, largely in wonder, but almost half in fright. The Mississippi River was unquestionably running the wrong way, and that, too, when a great flood was pouring down it and seeking its way to the sea.

"What does it all mean, Ed?" asked Will Moreraud. "Tell us about it, for of course you know."

"I don't know whether I know or not," responded Ed, with more of hesitation than was usual in his tone. "I think we have had a small earthquake. We are in the midst of a region of small earthquakes. We

are in New Madrid Bend, and for the best part of a century that has been a sort of earthquake nest."

"The river is running down stream again," called out Constant, "and we are beginning to float, too."

"So we are," said Irv Strong, going to the side and inspecting. "Let's go below and find out whether or not we're leaking."

The suggestion was a timely one. Phil indeed had anticipated it, and when his comrades went below they found him there with a lantern, minutely inspecting every point where incoming water might be looked for.

Their search clearly revealed the fact that the flatboat—which was now again floating down the stream—was not leaking more than she did ordinarily, not so much that a few minutes' pumping now and then could not keep her bilge empty.

Having satisfied themselves of the boat's safety, the boys returned to the deck, and renewed their demands upon Ed for an explanation.

"Well, you see," said Ed, "we're in New Madrid Bend. Now, as I said a while ago, for the best part of a century, and probably

for all the centuries before that, this region has been the home of earthquakes, not very great ones, but such as we have just experienced. Along about 1811 and 1812 it was distressed with much severer ones in an uncommon degree. We have just had the Mississippi River running up stream for five or ten minutes as a result of one of these disturbances. In 1811 it ran up stream for three full days and nights. Great fissures were opened in the earth all over the country round about, and as they always, or at least generally, ran north and south, the settlers used to fell trees east and west, and build their cabins upon them, so that they might not be swallowed up by the earthquakes."

"Why didn't they run away from so appalling a danger?" asked Irv Strong.

"Because they were pioneers," answered Ed, "because they were the sort of heroes we were talking about at Cairo, men who took all the risks that might come to them in order that they might secure advantages to themselves and their children. Men of that sort do not run away from earthquakes, any more than they run away from Indians, or fevers, or floods, or any other dangers. And by the way, these same people had

Indians to contend with, in their very ugliest moods."

"How so?" asked two of the boys at once.

"Why, in the time of the great earthquakes, all of Western Tennessee and Kentucky, and the greater part of Mississippi, Georgia, and Alabama were inhabited by savage Choctaws, Cherokees, Creeks, and other hostile tribes. At that time the great Indiana chief, Tecumseh, conceived his plan of uniting all the tribes from Indiana — then a part of the Northwest Territory — to Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, and Florida, in a league for determined resistance to the westward advance of the whites.

"It was an opportune time, for a little later the British, being at war with us, came to Florida and undertook to form an offensive and defensive alliance with the Indians, whom they supplied with guns and ammunition, for the destruction of the United States. And but for Jackson's superb war against the Creeks, and later his victory at New Orleans, they would have succeeded in splitting this country in two.

"When Tecumseh went south to secure

the coöperation of the Creeks, Choctaws, and Seminoles in this plan for the destruction of our country, he told the Muscogees that on his return to the north he would 'stamp his foot' and they would feel the earth tremble.

"The New Madrid earthquakes of 1811 and 1812, which extended into Alabama and Georgia, came just in time to fulfil this prophetic threat, and there is no doubt that they played a great part in provoking the most dangerous Indian war this country ever knew—the most dangerous because, before it was over, there came to our shores a great British army, the flower of English soldiery, under command of Pakenham, Wellington's most trusted lieutenant—to capture New Orleans and secure control of our wonderful river, and all the region west of it."

"And why didn't they do it?" asked Will Moreraud.

"Because of Andrew Jackson," answered Ed. "He went to New Orleans to meet them. He had no army, but he created one mostly in a single afternoon. His only experienced troops were three hundred Tennessee volunteers under Coffee, one of his

old Indian fighters. But he had some backwoods volunteers, and he enlisted all the merchants he could in New Orleans, and all their clerks, all the ragamuffins of the city, all the wharf rats, and all the free negroes there, and armed them as best he could. Half of Pakenham's force had moved from Lake Borgne to a point a few miles below the city. Without waiting for a force fit to fight them with, Jackson cried 'Forward' to his motley collection of men, and on the night of December 23, 1814, he attacked the great veteran English army in the dark. It was a fearful fight, and the vigor of it and its insolence as a military operation so appalled the British, that they waited for more than two weeks for the rest of their forces to come up before trying again to capture the city, — a thing which they had intended to do the next morning without the loss of a man. In the meantime, Jackson had fortified himself, and reënforcements had come to him, so that when the British were at last ready, on the 8th of January, 1815, to advance to what they still expected to be the easy conquest of the city, they were 'licked out of their boots.' That, in brief, is the story of the battle which for

the second time decided American independence. For the British in the War of 1812-14 had nothing less in view than the reconquest of our country, and the restoration of the states to the condition and status of British colonies."

"But how about the earthquakes?" asked Irv; "why is this region subject to them more than others?"

"I'm not sure that I know," said Ed. "But countries in the neighborhood of volcanoes are usually either peculiarly subject to earthquakes or especially exempt from them. It seems that sometimes the volcanoes act as safety valves, while sometimes they don't work in that way till after the region round about has been greatly shaken up, preparatory to an eruption."

"But what have volcanoes got to do with New Madrid Bend?" asked Phil. "There aren't any volcanoes in the United States."

"No," said Ed, thoughtfully; "but there are some hot springs over in Arkansas, not very far from here, and they are volcanic of course in their origin and character. Perhaps if the Arkansas hot springs were a robust volcano, instead of being what they are, there would not be so many earthquakes

in this part of the country. If they threw out stones and lava and let off steam generally as Vesuvius and Etna and the others do, perhaps this part of the country wouldn't have so many agues."

Just then the boat heeled over, the river was broken into great waves again, and all creation seemed to be see-sawing north and south. Phil called the boys to the sweeps, as a matter of precaution, but the boat was helpless in the raging river. She was driven ashore again; that is to say, she was driven over the brink of a submerged river bank, where she stuck securely in the mud.

This second earthquake did not last more than thirty or forty seconds, but that was long enough to get *The Last of the Flatboats* into the worst trouble that she had yet encountered. She seemed to be bending in the middle as if resting upon a fallen tree with both ends free.

Phil quickly manned the skiffs and instituted an inspection. By the use of poles and lead lines he soon discovered that two-thirds of the boat's length lay upon a reasonably level bank, the remaining third overhanging it. It was this that was bending her so dangerously.

"Get inside, boys, quick," he called to his comrades. "The boat's bow overhangs the bank. We must get all the freight out of it as quickly as possible."

Then in brief sentences he gave his commands.

"Roll those apple barrels into the cabin! Carry those bags of meal on deck and well astern! Take the anchor there, too! Lighten the bow all you can!"

The boys worked like beavers, and after a while the entire forward part of the boat was free of freight. The cabin as a consequence was full, and the deck so piled up with bags and barrels that ordinary navigation would have been impossible. But at any rate, the danger of breaking the boat in two was averted.

Phil then got into a skiff with Irv, and armed with some lanterns, went carefully all around the boat, measuring depths and looking for possibly open seams or other damage. When he returned to the deck he reported: —

"We are lying in about six inches of Missouri mud with two and a half feet of water above it, trespassing to that extent upon somebody's farm. But the reports

from up the rivers when we were at Cairo were that at least twelve inches more water might be expected within forty-eight hours, and as it is raining like Noah's flood now, and we only need a few inches of water to set us free, we'll be afloat again by morning if we don't have another earthquake to send us still farther out into the country."

The event justified Phil's prediction. About five o'clock in the morning the flatboat floated again, and with a few vigorous strokes of the sweeps she was sent out into the middle of the river. Then Phil gave orders for the restoration of the freight to its proper place. Not until that was done was it possible to get breakfast, for the cabin had been piled full of freight, and when it was done, Phil devoted himself for an hour or more, before he would eat, to an inspection of the boat. He found and stopped a few leaks that had been made by the strain, which had caused the oakum to loosen in the seams.

The rain continuing, the boys had a dull day of it, but at any rate their boat was in good condition, and was now again floating down stream toward her destination.

CHAPTER XV

IN THE CHUTE

BELOW New Madrid the swollen river was so full that only the line of trees on either side indicated its borders. In many places it had so completely overflowed its banks that it was forty or fifty miles wide in fact. In other places, where the banks were high, the river was confined for brief spaces within its natural limits, and rushed forward with the speed of water in a mill-race.

The driftwood had by this time largely run out, and while there was still much of it in the river, its presence no longer involved any particular danger. Still, it was necessary to observe it; and it was especially necessary to keep a close watch on the boat's course, lest she should be drawn into some bayou or pocket, where danger would impend.

Nevertheless, the boys had considerable leisure, and Ed devoted a good deal of the time, at their request, to expounding to

them all the lore that he had gathered from his books. One day he brought out his map again, and got them interested in it until they lost sight of other things around them. For that matter, Jim Hughes was on the steering-bridge, and was supposed to be directing the course of the boat. It was his duty, of course, to call attention to anything that might need attention; so the boys allowed themselves to become absorbed in Ed's explanations and in their own study of the map.

It was about sunset when Phil raised himself and took a look ahead. He suddenly sprang to his feet and called out hurriedly, but not excitedly, "Starboard sweep, boys."

He himself ran to the steering-oar, and, in spite of some remonstrance from the pilot, took possession of it.

"What are you doing, Jim," he called out, "running us into this chute? Give it to her, boys, with all your might."

But it was of no use. It was too late. The boat had already been driven into the chute behind an island, and must now go through it. Jim Hughes had successfully managed that.

A chute is that part of the river which

lies between an island and the shore nearest to it. At low water, the chutes in the Mississippi are not usually navigable at all. But when the river is high, they are deep enough and wide enough for a steamboat to pass through; and, as passing through the chute usually saves many miles of distance against a strong current, the steamboats going up the stream always "run the chute" when they can. But as these chutes are rarely wide enough, even in the highest water, for two boats to pass each other safely within them, the law forbids boats going down the river to run them at all.

Phil had been instructed in all this by Perry Raymond, and he was therefore much disturbed when he found the flatboat hopelessly involved in the head of the chute.

He explained in short, crisp, snappy sentences to his fellows the violation of law they were committing, and the danger there was of snags, fallen trees and other obstructions, in running the chute under the most favorable circumstances.

But he was in for it now, and there was only one thing to be done. Go through the chute he must. The problem was to get through it as quickly and as safely as

possible. If he could get through it without meeting any up-coming steamer and without running the boat afoul of any snags or other obstructions, all would be well enough, except that it would still leave Jim Hughes's action unexplained and puzzling. Should he meet a steamboat in the narrow passage, he must take the consequences, whatever they might happen to be. He kept the boys continually at the sweeps, in order to give him good steerage way; and earnestly adjured them to be alert, and to act instantly on any order he might give, to all of which they responded with enthusiasm.

"How long is this chute, Jim?"

"How do I know?" answered that worthy, or more properly, that unworthy.

"I thought you knew the river. You shipped as a pilot," said the boy. "Hard on the starboard, boys; hard on the starboard! There, that'll do. Let her float now!"

Then turning to Jim, he said again:—

"You shipped as a pilot. You pretended to know the river. Probably you do know it better than you now pretend. You deliberately ran us into this channel. You did it on purpose. You must know the chute

then. What did you do it for? What do you mean by it?"

"Yes, I shipped as a pilot," answered the surly fellow, "but I shipped without pay, you will remember. I was careful to assume no obligation for which I could be held responsible in law."

Phil started back in amazement. Neither the sentence nor the assured forethought that lay behind it fitted at all the character of the ignorant lout that the man who spoke had pretended to be. Phil now clearly saw that all this man's pretences had been false, that his character and his personality had been assumed, and that, for some purpose known only to himself, the fellow had been deceiving him from the start. Not altogether deceiving him, however, for Phil's suspicions had already been so far aroused that it could not be said that he had been hoodwinked completely. But for these suspicions, indeed, he would not now so readily have observed the man's speech and behavior. He would not so accurately have interpreted his truculence when he commanded him to "go to a sweep," and the man answered, "Not if I know it!" and went to the cabin instead.

But at that moment Phil had no time to deal further with the fellow, or even to think of him. For just as dark was falling, the flatboat swung around a sharp bend in the chute, and came suddenly face to face with a great, roaring, glaring, glittering steamboat that was running the chute up stream at racing speed.

The steamboat whistled madly, and reversed her engines full force. The captain, the pilot, both the mates, all the deck-hands, all the roustabouts, and most of the male passengers on board shouted in chorus, with much of objurgation for punctuation marks, to know what the flatboat meant by running the chute down stream.

Phil paid no attention to the hullabaloo, but gave his whole mind to the problem of navigating his own craft. The steamboat's wheels, as she backed water so mightily, threw forward great waves which, catching the flatboat under the bow, drove her stern-on toward the bank. By a vigorous use of the sweeps, and a great deal of tugging on his own part at the steering-oar, Phil managed to slew the boat around in time to prevent her going ashore; and fortunately there was just passageway enough to let her

slip by the steamer, grazing the guards in passing.

It was the work of a very few minutes, but it seemed an age to the anxious boy; and as the steamer resumed her course, her crew sending back a volley of maledictions, his only thought was one of congratulation that he had escaped from so desperate an entanglement.

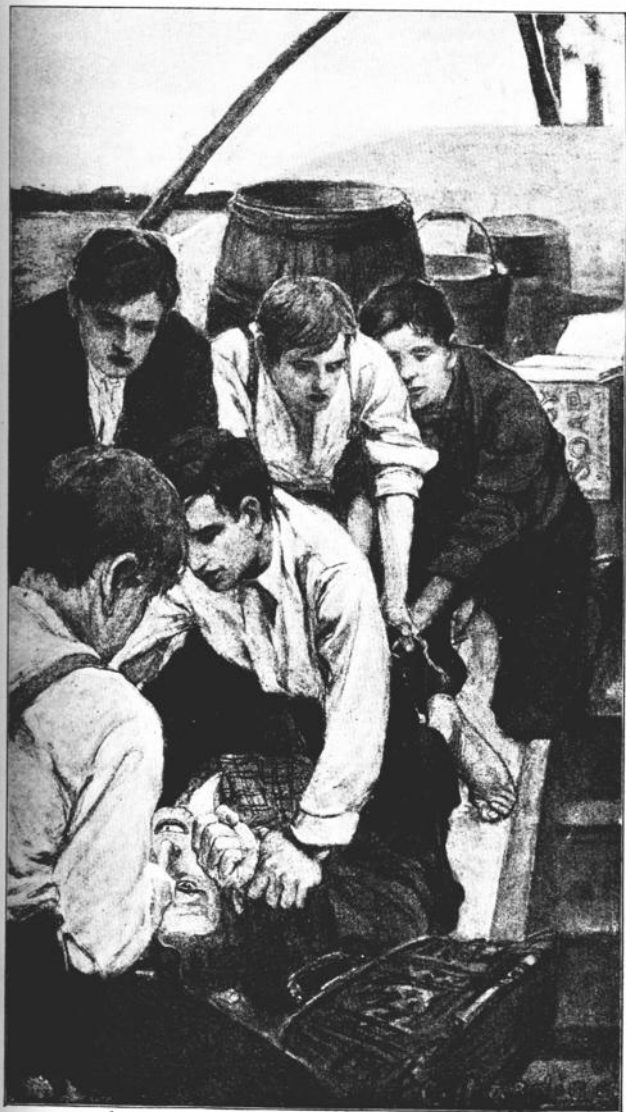
Just then, however, he observed Jim Hughes at the stern, climbing into the towed skiff, into which he had already thrown his carpet-bag. He observed also that before engaging in this manœuvre the pilot had set up a handkerchief at the bow, apparently as a signal, and that some rough-looking men were gathered on the shore just astern.

Quick as a flash Phil realized that for some reason Jim Hughes was quitting the boat, and was in communication with the men on shore.

Without quite realizing why he should object to this, he proceeded to put a stop to it. He called to his comrades, who could now leave the oars, as the boat was floating out of the chute and into the main river again, to come to his assistance. Without

parley they tumbled over the end of the boat into the skiff, which had not yet been cast loose, and there seized the runaway. He fought with a good deal of desperation, but five stalwart Hoosier boys are apt to be more than a match for any one man, however strong and however desperate he may be. They quickly overcame Jim Hughes and hustled him back on board the flatboat. There they held him down, while one of them, at Phil's request, ran for some rope. A minute later they had their prisoner securely tied, both as to arms and as to legs, and dropped him, feet first, down the cabin stairs.

No sooner was he out of the way than the men on shore began firing at the flatboat. They had refrained prior to that time, apparently, lest they should hit their comrade, for such he manifestly was. Their firing was at long range, however, and it was now nearly dark. The swift current soon carried the boat wholly beyond reach of rifle-shots and out into the river. Lest the desperadoes on shore should follow in skiffs or otherwise, Phil ordered the boys to the sweeps again, and kept them there until they had driven the boat well over toward the opposite shore. Then he summoned a council of war.



THE FIGHT WITH THE PILOT.

"A minute later they had their prisoner securely tied."

"What are we going to do with that fellow?" he asked.

"Well," said Ed, "you have got him well tied and—"

"Yes, but," said Irv, "have we any right to tie him? He hasn't committed any crime."

"Yes, he has," said Phil. "At least, we caught him in the act of committing one. He was trying to steal one of Perry Raymond's skiffs. That's worth twenty-five dollars. If he hadn't anything worse in his mind, his attempt on the skiff was grand larceny."

"That's so," said Ed, "and we can turn him over to a magistrate at the first landing for that."

"I don't think I shall make any landing," said Phil, "until we get to Memphis, and in the meantime I am going to know all there is to know about this fellow. When he came on board he had his hair shaved close with a barber's mowing-machine, but, unfortunately for him, he didn't bring one of the machines with him. His hair is growing out again now, and I have been comparing several of its little peculiarities closely with descriptions and portraits in the news-

papers I got at Cairo of the fellow who is running away with that swag. Boys, I believe we have got the man."

Phil's comrades were positively dumb with astonishment. At last the silence was broken.

"If we have," said Irv Strong, "this voyage will pay, for the rewards offered for this man are very heavy."

"Yes," said Phil; "I hadn't thought of that, but that's so. There are five thousand dollars on his capture."

Just then there was a flash in the dark from the cabin scuttle, and a bullet whistled over the heads of the boys. Jim Hughes had managed to extricate himself, in part at least, from his bonds, and had begun to use a weapon which he had doubtless hidden before that time, and of which the boys had known nothing.

Ed was the first to act. He was always exceedingly quick to think. He called to the boys to follow him, and, disregarding Jim's fusilade, ran to the scuttle.

In an instant, by their united efforts, they pushed the fellow back and closed the lid that covered the stairs. Then Ed remembered that there was a door leading out of

the cabin into the hold of the boat. He suggested to two of the boys that they go below, and close that with bales of hay and the like. They did so hurriedly, piling the hay and some apple barrels against the door, until it would have required the strength of half a dozen men to push it open. In the meantime Ed had possessed himself of a hatchet and nails, and had securely nailed down the scuttle.

Just then Irv Strong thought of something.

"Suppose he gets desperate? He could easily set fire to things down there."

"That's so," said Phil, who had just returned from the hold. "Bring the fire-extinguishers."

By the time they got the four large carbonic acid receptacles a new thought had occurred to Ed.

"Bring an auger, boys. There's one lying forward there. The big one."

It was quickly brought, though none of the boys could guess what Ed intended to do. He took the auger, and quickly bored an inch hole in the scuttle. A flash and a bullet came through it, but nobody was hurt.

"Now, give me an extinguisher," said Ed.

Putting the nozzle of the hose through the hole, he turned the apparatus upside down, and allowed its contents to be driven violently into the little cabin. When the first extinguisher was exhausted he turned on the hose of another, and after that of a third.

For a while the imprisoned man, shut up in a box ten feet by twelve and not over five or six feet high, indulged in lusty yells, but these soon became husky, and presently ceased entirely. The moment they did, Ed called out:—

“Rip off the scuttle quick, boys; he’s suffocated.”

The boys did not at all understand what had happened, but they acted promptly in obedience to their wisest comrade’s order. When the scuttle was opened and a lantern brought, Jim was seen lying limp at the foot of the little ladder.

“Now, be careful,” said Ed. “Irving, you and Phil—you’re the strongest—go down, hold your breath, and drag him up. Be sure to hold your breath. Do just as you do when you’re diving.”

They made an effort, but almost instantly came back, gasping for air, sneezing, and with eyes and noses tingling.

"Catch your breath quick," said Ed, "and go down again. You must get him out, or he will be dead, if he isn't dead already."

They made another dash, this time acting more carefully upon the instruction to treat the descent as if it were a dive, and carefully holding their breath. In a brief while they dragged the body of the pilot out upon the deck, and Ed gave directions for restoring life by artificial respiration.

"You see, he's practically a drowned man," he said.

"Drowned?" said Will Moreraud. "Why, he's not even been in the water, and that little dash with the hose wouldn't drown a kitten."

"Never mind that," said Ed; "quick now; he's drowned, or just the same thing. We must bring him to life."

"Well, slip that rope around his arms and legs while we do it," said Phil, "or we'll have trouble when he comes to."

This was a suggestion which they all recognized as altogether timely, and so the apparent corpse was carefully secured by two of the boys, while the rest worked at the task of restoring him to life.

He "came to" in a little while, and lay stretched out upon the deck, weak and exhausted. Then, at Ed's suggestion, the boys went below by the forward door, rolled away the obstructions, and threw open the door of the cabin, so that all the air possible might pass through it. It was half an hour at least before breathing became comfortable in that little box. Then Phil made a thorough exploration of Jim's carpet-bag, bunk, and everything else that pertained to him. His only remark as to the result of his personal inquiry was:—

"I guess we needn't trouble ourselves about having arrested this man."

While waiting for the air to render the cabin habitable again, Constant said, "But, Ed, how did he *drown* without going into the water? I don't understand."

"Neither do I," said Will Moreraud; "but he was drowned all safe enough. I've seen too many drowned people not to know one when I see him."

Then Ed explained:—

"That cabin is a little box about ten feet by twelve, and six feet high, and when shut up it's nearly air tight. It contains only a little over seven hundred cubic feet of air. These

chemical fire extinguishers are filled with water saturated with soda or saleratus. There is a bottle in each one, filled with oil of vitriol, or a coarse, cheap sort of sulphuric acid. It is so arranged that when you turn the thing upside down the bottle breaks, and the acid is dumped into the water. Now when you pour sulphuric acid into a mixture of water and soda, the soda gives off an enormous quantity of what is commonly called carbonic acid gas, though I believe its right name is carbon dioxide. At any rate, it is the same gas that makes soda water 'fizz.' But when you turn one of these machines upside down you get about ten or twenty times as much of the gas in the water as there is in the same quantity of soda water; and when you turn this doubled and twisted soda water loose it gives off its gas in enormous quantities. Now this gas is heavier than air, so when it was set loose down in the cabin there, it sank to the bottom, and the air floated on top of it. As the cabin filled up with the gas the air came out through the hole in the scuttle and the cracks round it. Pouring that gas into the cabin was just like pouring water into a jug; the gas took

the place of air just as the water in the jug takes the place of the air that was in it at first.

"Suppose you let a lighted lantern down into the cabin, Will," suggested the older boy, "and see what happens."

Will did so, and the lantern went out as promptly as it would have done if plunged into water.

"You see," said Ed, "this gas puts out fire, and it puts out life in the same way. It smothers both. It absolutely excludes oxygen, and neither animal life nor fire can exist without oxygen. Do I make the thing clear?"

"Perfectly," said all the boys.

"Then that's why we choked so when we went down the ladder?" said Phil.

"Certainly. Your air was as completely cut off as if you had dived into water. That's why I cautioned you to hold your breath just as if you had been diving into the river."

CHAPTER XVI

"TALKING BUSINESS"

NATURALLY the boys were too much excited over their capture to talk of anything else, and for a time they did not even think or talk of the most important phase of that. They discussed the shooting, which all of them saw to be reason enough for the arrest, but it was not until well on into the night that any of them thought to ask Phil about the results of his search of Jim's satchel.

Meantime they had carried the pinioned man below and securely bound him to his bunk. Then they had cooked and eaten their supper, talking all the time, each playfully describing his own consternation at every step of the late proceeding. Finally Will Moreraud said:—

"By the way, what does it all mean?"

"Yes," joined in Irv Strong, "it at last begins to dawn upon my hitherto excited consciousness, that we have not yet heard

the results of Phil's explorations among Jim's effects. Tell us all about it, Phil."

They were sitting in the cabin, or half way in it. That is to say, Phil was sitting in the mouth of the scuttle above, watching the river and the course of the flatboat; Irv sat just below him on the steps, and the other boys were gathered around the little table at the foot of the ladder.

"One of you come up here, then," said Phil, "and keep the lookout while I tell you about it. I thought you'd ask after you got through relating your personal experiences."

Ed volunteered to take the place at the top of the stairs, although his frail nerves were now quivering after the strain he had been through. Phil seized the carpet-bag which he had instinctively kept under his hand all the time, and descended the ladder.

There he opened it and spread its contents on the table.

"These are what I have found," he said, suppressing his excitement. "This big bundle of government bonds," laying it on the table; "this big bundle of railroad and other securities," laying that down in its turn; "this great wad of greenbacks, and, best of all, *these!*"

As he finished, he held up a bundle of letters.

"What are they? Why are they the best part of all?" queried the boys in a breath.

"They are letters from Jim Hughes's fellow criminals. I called them 'best of all' because they will enable the authorities to catch and convict the whole gang!"

The exultation of the crew was great.

"We shall have rendered a great service to the public, shan't we?" asked Constant.

"A very great service, indeed. And that's what we must rejoice in," answered Ed. "But we mustn't fail to render it. We mustn't let the thief slip his bonds and escape."

Hughes was lying there in his bunk all the while, but they paid no attention to him. They had ceased to think of him as a man. To them he was only a criminal, just as he might have been an alligator or a rattlesnake.

"Oh, we'll take good care of that," responded Phil. "From this moment till we deliver him to the officers of the law, we'll keep one fellow always right here on guard over him. It will mean double duty for

some of you to-night, for I'm going ashore presently."

"Going ashore! What for, and where?" was eagerly asked.

"There's a little town down here somewhere, as I see by the map, and when we get to it I'm going ashore to send telegrams. You see, Hughes's 'pals' might have somebody at Memphis armed with a *habeas corpus* or something of that sort, and take him away from us. I've a mind to deliver the fugitive myself. So I propose to have officers to meet us with warrants and things when we reach Memphis."

"Good idea," said Irv.

"And there's the town just a little way ahead," called out Ed, from the top of the ladder.

Phil went at once on deck, leaped into the skiff and rowed rapidly ahead of the slowly floating flatboat, or as rapidly as the drift would let him. When he reached the village he found to his disappointment that there was no telegraph office there. But he learned that there was one at the hydrographic engineer's station a few miles below, on the opposite side of the river.

By this time the flatboat had passed him,

and he had a long “stern chase” through the darkness and drift before he could overtake and board her again.

Then, assigning Ed to guard their prisoner in the cabin, he called the other boys to the sweeps.

“The river is very wide here,” he explained, “and the telegraph station is on the other side. We must take the boat well over there.”

The boys pulled with a will, and long before the station came in view the flatboat was close in shore on the farther side of the river.

Meantime, or a little later, something happened in the cabin. Ed was reading a book, when suddenly the prisoner called out:—

“Ed.”

“Yes?” said the boy, laying down his book.

“I’m awfully tired, lying in one position. Can’t you turn me over a bit?”

Ed went at once to his relief. His torture was no part of the purpose of anybody on board. But after Ed had readjusted the ropes so that the fellow could rest more comfortably, the prisoner said:—

"See here, Ed, I want to talk to you. You fellows have made a tremendous strike, for of course there's no use in disguising the truth any longer, to you at least, or pretending to be what I have tried to appear. You've got your man and you've got the proofs dead to rights. You've found me with the swag in my possession. If you turn me over to the law, I'll go up for ten or twenty years to a certainty. There is no use in defending myself. The case is too clear, too complete. Do you see?"

"Certainly" responded Ed. "You must pay the penalty of your crime. We have no personal hard feeling against you, Jim, except that you ought not to have tried to involve us boys as you have done, and —"

"Well, you see, Ed," interrupted the bound man, "I was desperate. There was a big price on my head, and hundreds of men were looking for me everywhere. On the one hand, a prison stared me in the face, on the other was freedom with abundant wealth to enjoy it with. If I could get down the river, I thought I should have everything snug and right. I didn't mean to get you boys into any trouble—really and truly I didn't, Ed. My plan was to

blunder into that chute, and while you fellows were all scared half to death about it, to slip ashore. I had those men on the bank just for safety's sake. They don't really know anything about me or what I've got — what I did have," he corrected, with sudden recollection that his carpet-bag was no longer in his possession.

"Those men were hired by my partners to have horses there and run me off into Mississippi, and I was to give them a hundred or two for the job, besides paying for the horses we might ride to death. Really and truly, Ed, that's all there was of that."

"I see no particular reason to doubt your statement, Jim," replied the boy. "But what of it?"

"Well, you see, I want to talk business with you, Ed, and I wanted you to know, in the first place, that I hadn't tried to harm you boys in any way — at least, till I was caught in a trap by that sharp brother of yours." There was a distinct touch of malignity in the man's tone as he mentioned Phil, to whom he justly attributed his capture.

"Never mind that," he resumed after a moment. "I want to talk business with

you, as I said. Here are you five boys, all alone on the river. Anything might happen to a flatboat. You're likely to make, as nearly as I can figure it out from your talk, about fifty or a hundred or at most a hundred and fifty dollars apiece out of the trip, after paying steamboat passage back. Now you've caught me. If you surrender me — ”

“Which of course we shall,” broke in Ed, in astonishment.

“As I was saying” continued Jim, “if you surrender me, you'll probably get the reward offered, though that's never quite certain.”

“What possible difference can that make?” asked Ed, indignantly. “You're a thief. We have caught you with hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of other people's property in your possession. We have only one thing to do. We must deliver you to the officers of the law. We should do that if not a cent of reward was offered. We should do it simply because we're ordinarily honest persons who think that thieves ought to be punished and that stolen property ought to be returned to its owners. What has the reward to do with it?”

"I'm glad you look at it in that way," said the prisoner. "At most the reward is a trifle, as you say. Five thousand dollars to five of you means only a thousand dollars apiece. Now I've a business proposition to make. Suppose you let me slip ashore somewhere down here, I'll leave behind me — I'll put into your hands all the coupon bonds. They're better than cash — they are good for their face and a good deal more anywhere. You boys can sink the old flatboat down the river somewhere, sell out the bonds to any banker, and go ashore rich — worth more than anybody in Vevay's got, or ever will have."

The man spoke eagerly, but not excitedly, and he watched closely to see the effect of his words.

Ed preserved his self-control. Indeed, it was his habit always to grow cool, or at least to seem so, in precise proportion to the occasion for growing hot. He waited awhile before he spoke. Then he said: —

"Jim Hughes, — or whatever your name is — well, I'll simply call you Thief, for that name belongs to you even if nothing else that you possess does, — you thief, if you had made such a proposition as that to my

father, he would have — well, he was said to be hot-headed. I'm not hot-headed —"

"No. You're reasonable. You're —"

"Stop!" shouted Ed. "If you weren't tied up there and helpless, you'd make me hot-headed, too, like my father, and I'd do to you what he would have done. As it is, I'm cool-headed. I'll 'talk business' with you; and the business I have to talk is just this: I forbid you from this moment to open your mouth again, except to ask for water, while you are on this flatboat. If you say one other word to me or to any of my companions I'll forget that I am not my hot-headed father, and — well, it will be very greatly the worse for you. Now not a word!" seeing that the fellow was about to speak. "Not a word, except the word 'water,' till my brother turns you over to the officers of the law. I'm not captain, but this particular order of mine 'goes.' I'm going to ask my brother to pass it on to the others, and it will be enforced, be very sure. They are not cool-headed as I am, particularly Phil. He's like my father sometimes. Remember, you are not to speak any word except 'water' till you pass from our custody."

The high-strung boy tried to control himself, but he was livid with rage. He choked and gasped for breath as he spoke. Weak as he was physically, he would certainly have assaulted the man who had deliberately proposed to make him a partner in crime, but for the fact that the fellow was bound, hand and foot, and therefore helpless. In his rage Ed ran up the ladder and called for his brother, meaning to ask that the man be released from his bonds in order that he, Ed Lowry, might wreck vengeance upon him for the insult.

Phil had gone ashore to send his telegrams. Irv Strong had been left in command of the boat. He asked Ed what was the matter. Ed, still choking with rage, explained as well as he could, growing more excited every moment, and ended by demanding:—

“Let the scoundrel loose! cut the ropes that bind him, and give me a chance at him!”

“Hold on, Ed,” said Irv. “The wise Benjamin Franklin once said: ‘No gentleman *will* insult one; no other *can*.’ This thief, burglar, bank robber, that we’ve got tied in a bunk down there, *can’t* insult *you*.”

He doesn't know our kind. He isn't in our class. It never occurs to his mind that anybody is really honest. It seems to him a question of price, and he thinks he has offered you mighty good terms. If any man who understood common honesty and believed in its existence had made such a proposition to you, your wrath would be righteous. As it is, your wrath is merely ridiculous. Of course a trapped bank burglar tries to buy his way out with his swag. Of course such a creature doesn't know what honest people think or feel — he has no capacity to understand it any more than he could understand Russian. Go below, Constant, and watch that thief. Ed, you must recover yourself. Phil will come aboard presently, and I really don't suppose you want to tell Phil precisely what has happened and leave *him* to — well, let us say to *discipline* Jim Hughes."

"No, no; oh, no!" said Ed, suddenly realizing what that would mean. "Phil would — oh, I don't know what he wouldn't do. For conscience' sake don't tell him what happened!"

"Suppose you go forward then," suggested Irv, "and sit down on the anchor

and cool off, and so far recover yourself that Phil won't notice anything or ask any questions when he comes aboard."

The suggestion was very quietly given, quite as if the whole matter had been one of no consequence. But it was instantly effective. Irv well knew that Ed's greatest dread was that Phil's fiery temper might get the better of him sometime. So Irv had shrewdly appealed to that fear.

"I will; I'll cool down at once," said Ed, rising in his earnestness. "Nobody knows what Phil would do or wouldn't do if he knew of this. Irv, you must prevent that. Make all the boys pledge themselves not to let him know, at least till Hughes is out of our hands."

Irv was glad enough to make the promise and to fulfil it. For he, too, knew with what reckless fervor the high-mettled boy would be sure to inflict punishment for the insult should he learn of it.

"Phil is the jolliest, best-natured fellow in the world," explained Irv, when he asked the other boys not to tell their captain what had happened, "but you know what a temper he has — or rather you don't know. None of us does, because nobody has ever made

the mistake of stirring him up with a real, vital insult."

"No," said Will, "and I pity the fellow that ever makes that particular mistake."

"We'll never tell him," said Constant. "If we did, we mightn't be able to deliver our prisoner."

CHAPTER XVII

AT ANCHOR

PHIL had sent two telegrams,—one to the authorities at Memphis, and the other to the plundered bank in Cincinnati. In each he had announced his captures,—the man and the funds,—and in each he had asked that officers to arrest and persons to identify the culprit should be waiting at Memphis on the arrival of the flatboat.

On his return to the flatboat he felt himself so excited and sleepless that he sent his comrades below to sleep and by turns to watch the prisoner. He would himself remain on duty on deck all night. As the night wore away, the boy thought out all the possibilities, for he felt that for any miscarriage in this matter he would be solely responsible.

Among the possibilities was this: that should the flatboat arrive at Memphis before some one could get there from Cincinnati to

identify the prisoner, he might be discharged for want of such identification. It would take a day or two to send men by rail from Cincinnati to Memphis, while the fierce current of this Mississippi flood promised to take the flatboat thither within less than twenty hours.

After working out all the probabilities in his mind as well as he could, Phil called below for all his comrades to come to the sweeps. He did not tell them his purpose; they were too sleepy even to ask. But studying the "lay of the land" on either side, he steered the flatboat into a sort of pocket on the Tennessee shore, and to the bewilderment of his comrades, ordered the anchor cast overboard.

By the time that the anchor held, and the boat came to a rest in the bend, the boys were much too wide awake not to have their minds full of interrogation marks.

"What do you mean, Phil?" "Why have we anchored?" "How long are we to remain here?" "What's the matter, anyhow?" "Have you gone crazy, or what is it?"

These and a volley of similar questions were fired at him.

He did not answer. He went to one side of the boat and then to the other to observe position.

"How much anchor line is out, Will?" he presently asked.

"Nearly all of it," answered his comrade.

"This won't do," said Phil. "Up anchor."

The boys were more than ever puzzled. But they tugged away at the anchor windlass till the flukes let go the bottom and the anchor was halfway up. Then Phil called out:—

"That will do. Put a peg in the windlass and let the anchor swing in the water. To the sweeps! Hard on the starboard! We must push her inshore and into shallower water, where the anchor will hold her, and where no steamboat is likely to run over us. Who would have thought it was so deep over here?"

The boys now began to understand why the first anchorage had been abandoned and a shallower one sought for, but they did not yet know what their captain meant by anchoring at all. They did not understand why, on so clear a night, with a river so generously flooded, he did not let things

take their course and get to Memphis as quickly as possible.

Presently the anchor, dragging at half cable, fouled the bottom and, with a strain that made the check-post creak, the flatboat came to a full stop.

"That will do," said Phil. "This is as good a place as any. Pay out some more anchor line and let her rest."

"But what on earth are you anchoring for?" asked the others, "and how long are we going to lie here?" queried Ed.

"Nearly two days and nights," was the reply, — "long enough to let somebody travel from Cincinnati to Memphis who can identify Jim Hughes and take him off our hands. I suppose it would be all right if we went on without waiting. But I'm not certain of that, and I'm not taking any chances in this business, so we'll lie at anchor here for nearly two days. Go to bed, all of you except the one on watch over Jim Hughes. I'm not sleepy, so I'll stay on deck for the rest of the night."

But by that time the boys were not sleepy either, so they made no haste about going to their bunks.

"We'll be pretty short of something to

eat by that time," said Constant, who was just then in charge of the cooking. "We have only a scrap of bread left. The eggs and fresh meat and milk are used up, and we'll have to fall back on corn-bread and fried salt pork."

"Well, that's food fit for the gods," said Irv Strong, "if the gods happen to be healthy, hungry flatboatmen. But how important the food question always is in an emergency! How it always crops up when you get away from home!"

"Yes, and at home too," said Ed; "only there we have somebody else to look after the three meals a day. It's the most important question in the world. If all food supplies were cut off for a single month, this world would be as dead as the moon."

"That's true," broke in Will. "And really, I suppose the world isn't very forehanded with it at best. I wonder how many years we could last, anyhow, if the crops ceased to grow."

"Not more than one year," replied the older boy. "There never was a time when mankind had food enough accumulated to last for much more than a year, and probably there never will be. If there should be no

crop for a single year, hundreds of thousands would starve every month, and a second failure would simply blot out the race. As for forehandedness, we actually live from hand to mouth, especially the people in the big cities. Only last winter a great snow-storm blockaded the railroads leading into New York for only three or four days, and even in that short time the price of food went up so high that the charitable institutions had all they could do to keep poor people from starving. So far from the world generally being forehanded for food, there never was a time when the food on hand was really sufficient to go round."

"Well, of course," said Will, meditatively, "there are always some people so 'down on their luck,' as the saying is, that they can't earn a living, but there's always enough food for them if they could get hold of it."

"You're mistaken," said Ed. "There is nearly always something like a famine in parts of India and Russia, and even in Italy and other parts of Europe there are great masses of very hard-working people who never in their lives get enough to eat."

There were exclamations of surprise at

this, but Ed presently continued: "In many European countries the peasants do not see a piece of meat once a year, and in hardly any of them do the poorer people get what we would think sufficient food. In fact, their food is not sufficient. They are always more or less starved, and that's the reason so many of them are the little runts they are."

"Then we are better off than most other nations?" said Irv.

"Immeasurably!" said Ed. "Ours is the best fed nation in the world. It is the only nation in which the poorest laborer can have meat on his table every day in the year, for even in England the poorer laborers have to make out with cheese pretty often."

"What's the reason?" asked Phil, who had acquired the habit of using short sentences and as few words as possible since his burden of responsibility had borne so heavily upon him.

"There are several reasons. Our soil is fertile — but so is that of France and Italy, for that matter. I suppose the great reason is that we do not have to support vast armies in idleness. In most of the European countries they make everybody serve in the army

for three or four years. It costs a lot of money to support these armies and it costs the country a great deal more than that."

"In what way?" asked Constant, who, being on sentry duty over Hughes, was sitting halfway down the ladder.

"Why, by taking all the young men away from productive work for three years. Take half a million young men away from work and put them in the army, and you lose each year all the work that a man could do in half a million years, all the food or other things that half a million men could produce in a year?"

"And the other people have to make it all up," drawled Irv. "I don't wonder they're tired."

"And besides making it all up, as you say," responded Ed, "those other people have to work to feed and clothe and house and arm all these men, besides transporting them from one place to another, and paying for costly parades and all that sort of thing. Why, every time one of the big modern guns is fired at a target it burns up some man's earnings for a whole year! Some man must work a year or more to pay the expense of doing it!"

"Then why don't the people of those countries 'kick'?" asked Will, "and abolish their armies?"

"Because the people of those countries have masters, and the masters own the armies, and the armies would make short work of any 'kick.' In our country the people are the masters, and they have always refused to let anybody set up a great standing army. When we have a war, the people volunteer and fight it to a finish. Then the men who have been doing the fighting are mustered out, and they go back to their work, earn their own living, and put in their time producing something that mankind needs."

"Cipher it all down," said Irv, "it's liberty that makes this the best country in the world to live in."

"Precisely!" said Ed, with emphasis. "And about the most important duty every American has to do is to remember that one, supreme fact, and do his part to keep our country as it is."

CHAPTER XVIII

AT BREAKFAST

THE day was dawning by this time, and the conversation was broken up. Constant set to work to prepare breakfast while the others extinguished the lanterns, trimmed them, filled them with oil, and "cleaned up" generally.

When breakfast was served, the scarcity of supplies was apparent. There were some "cold-water hoecakes," — that is to say, bread made of corn-meal mixed up with cold water and a little salt, and baked in cakes about half or three quarters of an inch thick upon a griddle. There was a dish of fried salt pork, and with it some fried potatoes. And there was nothing else, except a "private dish" consisting of two slices of toast made from the scrap of stale wheat bread left, with a poached egg on each of them. There was no coffee and no butter, the last remains of that having been used upon the toast.

The "private dish," Constant explained, was for Ed. "You see, we're out to get him well, and his digestive apparatus doesn't take kindly to fried things. I've saved four more eggs for him — the last we've got, — and six more slices of stale wheat bread. The rest of you are barbarians, and you'll wrestle with any sort of hash I can get up till we get to Memphis."

Ed protested vigorously against the favoritism shown him, but the others supported Constant's plan, and the older boy had to yield.

"Well, I am deeply grateful for your kindness, boys," he said, "and I'm duly grateful also to the thousands of men in various parts of the country who have worked so hard to furnish me with these two slices of toast."

The boys looked up from their plates.

"Here's another revelation," said Irv. "My ill-furnished intelligence is about to receive another supply of much-needed rudimentary information. Go on, Ed. Tell us about it. How in the world do you figure out your 'thousands' of men who have had anything to do with those two slices of toast?"

"Oh, that was a joke," said Will.

"It was nothing of the kind," answered Ed. "I can't possibly count up all the people who have worked hard to give me this toast, but they certainly number greatly more than a thousand."

"We're only waiting for wisdom to drop from your lips—" began Irv, with his drawl.

"O, quit it, Irv!" said Phil; "you'll learn more by listening than by talking."

"That is probably so," said the other, "though I remember that we heard something away up the river, about how much a person learns of a subject by talking about it."

"Yes, but —"

"Listen," said Ed, "and I'll explain. The wheat out of which this toast was made was grown probably in Dakota or Minnesota. There was a farmer there, and perhaps there were some farm-hands also, who ploughed the ground, sowed the seed, reaped the wheat, threshed it, winnowed it, and all that. Then —"

"Yes, but all that wouldn't include more than half a dozen," said Phil.

"Yes, it would," said Irv, "for there's

all the womenfolk who cooked the men's meals and — ”

“Never mind them,” said Ed, “though of course they helped to give me my toast. Let's count only those that contributed directly to that kindly end. These farmer people used ploughs, harrows, drills, reapers, threshing-machines, wagons, and all that, and somebody must have made them. And back of those who made them were those who dug the iron for them out of the ground, and cut the wood in them out of the forest, and the men who made the tools with which they did all this, and — ”

“I see,” said Irv. “It's the biggest endless chain imaginable. Thousands? Why, thousands had a hand in it before you even get to the farmer — the men who made the tools, and the men who made the tools that made the tools, and so on back to the very beginnings of creation. And if we face about, there are the men that ran the railroads which hauled the wheat to mill, and the millers, and all that. Oh, the thousand are easy enough to make out.”

“Yes,” said Ed, “and then the railroads and the mills had to be built. The men that built them, the engineers, mechanics,

and laborers, all helped to give me my two slices of toast. So did the men behind them, the men who made their tools and their materials, the woodsmen who chopped trees for ties, the miners who dug the iron, the smelters, the puddlers, the rolling-mill men, who wrought the crude ore into steel rails; then there are all the men who made the locomotives, and the cars, and the machinery of the mills, and — ”

“ Oh, stop for mercy’s sake,” said Will. “ It’s no use to count. There aren’t thousands, but millions of them. And of course the same thing is true of our clothes, our shoes, and everything else.”

“ But with so many people’s work represented in it,” asked Irv, reflectively, “ why isn’t that piece of toast an enormously costly affair? ”

“ Simply *because* so many people’s work is represented in it,” answered Ed. “ If one man had to do it all for himself, it would never be done at all. Just imagine a man set down on the earth with no tools and nobody to help him. How much buttered toast do you suppose he would be able to turn out in a year? Why, before he could get so much as a hoe he would have to

travel hundreds of miles, dig some iron and coal, cut wood with which to convert the coal into coke, melt the iron out of its ore, change it into steel, and shape it into a hoe. Why, even a hoe would cost him a year's hard work or more, while a wagon he could hardly make without tools in a lifetime. Now he can earn the price of a hoe in a few hours, and the cost of a wagon in a few days or weeks, simply because everybody works for everybody else, each man doing only the thing that he can do best."

"Then we all work for each other without knowing it," said Will.

"Of course we do. When we fellows were diving for that pig-iron, we were working for the thousands of people who will use or profit by the things that somebody else will make out of that pig-iron and —"

"And for the somebody else," said Irv, "that will make those things out of the pig-iron, and for all the 'somebody elses' that work for them, and so on in every direction! Whew! it makes my head swim to think of it. But what a nabob you are, Ed! Just think! Thousands and even millions of people are, at this moment, at work to make you comfortable!"

"Yes, and each one of the millions is at work for all the others while all the others are at work for him. Theorists sometimes dream out systems of 'coöperative industry,' hoping in that way to better men's condition. But their very wildest dreams do not even approach the complex and perfectly working coöperation we already have in use."

"Just think of it!" said Irv. "Suppose that every man in our little town of two or three thousand people had to do everything for himself! He would have to raise sheep for wool, card, spin, and weave it, and fashion it into clothes. He would have to raise cotton and linen in the same way, and cattle too, and keep a tannery and be a shoemaker and a farmer and a mason and a carpenter and all the rest of it. And then he would have to mine his own iron and coal, and make his own tools and—well, he wouldn't do it, because he couldn't. He'd just wander off into the woods hunting for something that he could kill and eat, and he'd try to kill anybody else that did the same thing, for fear that the somebody else would get some of the game that he wanted for himself. He'd be simply a savage!"

"Well, but even savages go in tribes and hunt together and live together," said Will.

"Of course they do," answered Ed, "and that's their first step up toward civilization. When they do that they have learned in a small way the advantage of working together, each for all and all for each. The better they learn that lesson, the more civilized they become."

"Then the theorists are right who want the state to own everything and everybody to work for the state and be supported by it?" asked Phil.

"Not a little bit of it," said Ed. "That would be simply to go back to the tribal plan that savages adopt when they first realize the advantages of working together, and abandon when they grow civilized. We have worked out of that and into something better. With us, every man works for all the rest by working for himself in the way that best serves his own welfare. Under our system every man is urged and stimulated by self-interest to do the very best and most work that he can. Under a communistic or socialistic or tribal system, every man would be as lazy as the rest would let him be, because he would be sure of a share in

all that the others might make by their labor. It is sharp competition that makes men do their best. It is in the 'struggle for existence' that men advance most rapidly."

"Wonder if that wasn't what Humboldt meant," said Irv, "when he called the banana 'the curse of the tropics,' adding that when a man planted one banana tree he provided food enough for himself and his descendants to the tenth generation, in a climate where there is no real necessity for clothes."

"Exactly," said Ed. "Somebody once said that 'every man is as lazy as he dares to be.'"

"Well, I am, anyhow," yawned Irv, "and so I'm going up on deck under the awning to make up some of that sleep I lost last night."

CHAPTER XIX

SCUTTLE CHATTER

THE pocket in which *The Last of the Flatboats* lay at anchor was well out of the path of passing steamboats. It was also pretty free from drift-wood, except of the smaller sort. So there was nothing of any consequence to be done during the two days of waiting. It was necessary to pump a little now and then, as the very tightest boat will let in a little bilge water, especially when she is as heavily loaded as this one was. There were what Irv Strong called "the inevitable three meals a day" to get, but beyond that there was nothing whatever to do.

Ed's books were a good deal in demand at this time. Irv and Phil managed to do some swimming in spite of the drift-wood and the coldness of the water. For the rest, the boys lounged about on the deck, with now and then a "long talk" at the scuttle or in the cabin if it rained. Their "long talks" on deck were always held around the

scuttle, so that the one on guard over Hughes might take part in them. There were only five steps to the little ladder that led from deck to cabin, and by sitting on the middle one the boy on guard could keep his feet on the edge of the prisoner's bunk and let his head protrude above the deck.

They had naturally been thinking a good deal about what Ed had told them concerning food, and now and then a question would arise in the mind of one or another of them which would set the conversation going again.

"I wonder," said Will Moreraud, "how men first found out what things were good to eat?"

"By trying them, I guess," said Phil. "I read in a book somewhere that whenever the primitive man saw a new beast he asked first, 'can he eat me?' and next, 'can I eat him?'"

"Yes," said Ed, "and that sort of thing continued until our own time, when science came in to help us. You know where the jimson weed got its name, don't you?"

None of them had ever heard.

"Well, 'jimson' is only a corruption of 'Jamestown.' When the early settlers landed

at Jamestown they found so many new kinds of grain, and animals, and plants that they began trying them to see which were good and which were not. Among other things they thought the burs of the jimson weed — the poisonous thorn-apple of stramonium — looked rather inviting. So they boiled a lot of the burs and ate them. Like idiots, they didn't confine the experiment to one man, or better still 'try it on a dog,' but set to work, a lot of them at once, to eat the stuff. It poisoned them, of course, and made a great sensation in Jamestown. So they named the plant the Jamestown weed."

"I remember," said Irv, "my grandfather telling me that when he was young, people thought tomatoes were poisonous, and he said it took a long time for those that tried them to teach other people better."

"That's what I had in my mind," said Ed, "when I said that there was no known way to find out whether things were good to eat or not except by trying them, till modern science came to our aid."

"How does modern science manage it?" asked Will.

"Well, if any new fruit or vegetable should turn up now, a chemist would analyze

it to find out just what it was composed of. Then the doctors who make a study of such things would 'try it on a dog,' or more likely on a rabbit or guinea pig, to find out if it had any value as a medicine. They try every new substance in that way in fact, whether it is an original substance just discovered or some new compound. They even tried nitro-glycerine, and found it to be a very valuable medicine. So, too, they have got some of our most valuable drugs from coal oil, simply by trying them."

"Good for modern science!" said Phil. "But, Ed, what were the other new things the colonists found in this country?"

"There were many. But those that have proved of most importance are corn, tobacco, tomatoes, watermelons, turkeys, Irish potatoes, and sweet potatoes."

"Oh, come now," said Irv, raising his head and resting it on his hand, "you said *Irish* potatoes."

"And why not? They are a very important product, and the crop of them sells for many millions of —"

"*But* they didn't originate in this country, did they? Weren't they brought here from Ireland?"

"Not at all. They were taken from here to Ireland."

"Then why are they called Irish potatoes?"

"Because they proved to be so much the most profitable crop the Irish people could raise that they soon came to be the chief crop grown there. I don't know whether the colonists found any of them growing wild in Virginia or not. They are supposed to have originated in South America and Mexico. At any rate, they are strictly native Americans. By the way," said Ed, "the people who thought tomatoes poisonous were not so very far out in their reckoning. Both the tomato and the potato are plants belonging to the deadly nightshade family, and the vines of both contain a virulent poison."

"Perhaps somebody tried tomato vines for greens," said Phil, "and got himself ready for the coroner before the tomatoes had time to grow and ripen."

"That isn't unlikely," said Ed. "At any rate, an experiment of that kind would have gone far to give the fruit a bad name."

"However that may be," said Irv, "it is pretty certain that men must have found out

what was and what wasn't good to eat mainly by trying. There's salt now. It is the only mineral substance that men everywhere eat. All the rest of our foods are either animal or vegetable."

"And that's a puzzle," replied Ed. "Man must have got a very early taste of salt, or else there wouldn't be any man."

"How's that?"

"Why, the human animal simply can't live without salt. He digests his food by means of an acid which he gets from salt, and from nothing else whatever. So he must have had salt from the beginning."

"The Garden of Eden must have been a seaport then," mused Phil. "Adam and Eve probably boiled their new potatoes in water dipped up from the docks."

The boys laughed, and Ed continued:—

"It is a curious fact that the ancients, even as late as Greek times, knew nothing about sugar; at least, in its pure state. They got a good deal of it in fruits and vegetables, of course, and the Greeks used honey very lavishly. They not only ate it, but they made an intoxicating liquor out of it which they called mead. But of sugar, pure and simple, they knew nothing whatever. Their

language hasn't even a word for it. Yet in our time sugar is one of the most important products in the world, so important that many nations pay large bounties to encourage its cultivation."

"By the way," asked Phil, after a few moments' meditation, "what is the most important crop in this country?"

"Wheat" — "cotton," answered Will and Constant respectively.

"No," said Ed, "corn is very much our most important crop."

"More so than wheat?"

"Four to one and more," said Ed. "Our corn crop amounts to about two thousand million bushels every year — often greatly more. Our wheat crop averages about five hundred million bushels. And as corn has more food value in it, pound for pound, than wheat has, it is easy to see that not only for us, but for all the world, our corn crop is quite four to one more important than our wheat."

"But I thought corn wasn't eaten much except in this country?" queried Irv. "The Germans and French and English don't eat it."

"Don't they, though?" asked Ed, with a quizzical look. "Don't they eat enormous

quantities of American pork, bacon, and beef? And what is that but American corn in another shape?"

"That's so," said Irv, this time sitting bolt upright. "I've heard that the big farmers all over the West keep tab on the price of meat and corn. If meat is high and corn low, they bring up all their hogs from the woods, fatten them on the corn and sell them. But if meat is low or corn high, they sell the corn."

"And they know to the nicest fraction of a pound," added Ed, "how much corn it takes to make a given amount of pork."

"Well, even if we didn't sell any corn at all to other nations," said Phil, "I should think our crop would help them. *We* eat a great deal of it, and if we hadn't it, we'd eat just so much wheat instead, and so we should have just that much less wheat to sell to them."

"Exactly," said Ed. "Every thing that feeds a man in any country leaves precisely that much more to feed other men with in other countries."

"And what a lot it does take to feed a man!" exclaimed Will.

"Not so much as you probably imagine,"

said Ed. "A robust man requires about a pound and a half of meat and a pound and a half of bread per day. Vegetables are simply substitutes for bread and cost about the same. Eggs, milk, etc., take the place of meat and cost less. So by reckoning on three pounds of food a day, half meat and half bread, or their equivalents, we find that a strong, healthy, hard-working man can be fed at a cost of about fifteen cents a day. The coarser and more nutritious parts of beef and mutton and good sound pork can be bought at retail at an average of eight cents a pound—often much less. The man's meat, therefore, will cost him twelve cents a day or less. Good flour can be had at about two cents a pound. The man's bread will, therefore, cost him about three cents a day, making the total cost of his food about fifteen cents a day, or less than fifty-five dollars a year."

"But it costs something to cook it," said Phil.

"Yes, but not much. I have calculated only the actual cost of the raw materials, but my figures are too high rather than too low, for corned beef and chuck steaks are often sold at retail as low as three or four

cents a pound, and neck pieces, heads, hearts, livers, and kidneys even lower, while I have allowed eight cents a pound as an average price for all the meat that the man eats. Now, allowing for the cost of cooking and for unavoidable waste, I reckon that a strong, healthy American citizen can feed himself abundantly on less than seventy-five dollars a year."

"But what if he can't get the seventy-five dollars?" asked Will.

"In this country any man in tolerable health can get it easily. There is no excuse in this country for what somebody calls 'the poverty that suffers,' at any rate among people who have health. Why, one hundred dollars a year is a good deal less than thirty cents a day, and anybody can earn that."

"What does cause 'the poverty that suffers,' then?" asked Will.

"Drink, mainly," broke in Phil.

"By the way," said Irv, looking up from some figures he had been making, "does it occur to you that our corn crop alone, even if we produced nothing else in the world, would furnish food enough for all the people in this country?"

"No ; how do you figure it, Irv ?" asked Will.

"Why, Ed says the corn crop amounts to 2,000,000,000 bushels. There are 56 pounds in a bushel, or 112,000,000,000 pounds in the crop. That would give every man, woman, and child in our 70,000,000 population 1600 pounds of corn per year, or pretty nearly four and a half pounds apiece each day in the year, while Ed says no man needs more than three pounds of food per day. So the corn crop, whether eaten as bread or partly in the shape of meat, furnishes a great deal more food than the American people can possibly eat. No wonder we ship such vast quantities of food-stuffs abroad !"

"That's encouraging," said Phil ; "but it's bedtime. Hie ye to your bunks ! Whose watch is it ?"

And so the scuttle chatter ended.

CHAPTER XX

AT MEMPHIS

ABOUT ten or twenty miles above Memphis the flatboat met a steamboat. It was out looking for the flatboat. Not only had bank officers and law officers arrived at Memphis, but they had become so apprehensive at the delay of the flatboat that they had chartered the steamboat and gone in search of her.

One of the bank officers came aboard, and to him Phil explained the situation, receiving in return the warmest congratulations upon the capture.

"We'll take you in tow," said the bank officer. "That will hurry matters, and we've men waiting at the wharf with all the necessary papers and arrest warrants."

"But you must land us above or below the town," said Phil.

"Why? Why not at the wharf?"

"Because we're making this voyage as

cheaply as possible, and mustn't pay any unnecessary wharfage fees."

"Wharfage fees be hanged!" replied the man. "I'll take care of all that. Why, I'd pay your wharfage fees at every landing from here to New Orleans. I'd buy your flatboat and all her cargo ten times over. Why, my boy, you don't know what a big piece of work you've done, or how grateful we are. Wharfage fees!" with an accent of amused disgust. "What are wharfage fees when you've caught the fellow and secured the plunder? And even that isn't the best of it. The letters you've got" — for Phil had outlined their contents in his telegram to Cincinnati — "have enabled us to arrest the whole gang already. We've got 'em all, and you're entitled to the credit of enabling us to break up the strongest band of bank robbers that was ever organized in this country. So —" signalling to the steamer — "send a line aboard and we'll be at Memphis in an hour or two. In the meantime you and your companions must take breakfast on the steamboat."

The flatboat was quickly made fast at the side of the steamer, and three of the boys went aboard for breakfast, the other two

following when the first three returned. For until all legal forms should be completed, and Jim Hughes safely delivered to the officers of the law, Phil had no notion of leaving that worthy or the flatboat holding him, in charge of anybody except himself or his comrades. When he himself went to breakfast, he left Irv Strong in command, with Constant for his assistant, and Ed as guard over Hughes in the cabin.

At Memphis the legal formalities were conducted on the part of the boys by a lawyer whom Phil employed to see to it that their interests should be guarded. They lay there for two days. Jim Hughes was delivered to the authorities. The reward of five thousand dollars was paid over to Phil in currency. He divided the money equally among the crew. But as it would never do to carry so great a sum with them on the flatboat, they converted it into drafts on New York, which all the boys sent to the bank in Vevay, the money to be held there till their return.

As to supplies for the flatboat, the Cincinnati banker made some lavish gifts. He sent on board fresh beef enough to last sev-

eral days, four hams, two strips of bacon, two pieces of dried beef, ten pounds of coffee, five pounds of tea, a bag of flour, a sack of salt, a dozen loaves of fresh bread, a big box of crackers, five pounds of butter, a basket of eggs, two or three cases of canned vegetables and fruits, some canned soups, a large can of milk packed in ice, a sack of dried beans, a bunch of bananas, a box of oranges, and finally, a large, iced cake with miniature American flags stuck all over it.

"I can talk now," said Hughes to Ed, after the law officers had received and handcuffed him; "and I've got just one thing to say. I never had anything against any of you fellows except that brother Phil of yours. But for his meddling, I'd be a free man now. I've 'got it in for' him."

"Oh, as to that," drawled Irv Strong, "by the time you've served your ten or twenty years in State Prison, I imagine Phil will be sufficiently grown up to hold his own with you. He's a 'pretty sizable' fellow even now, for his age."

"Tell us something more interesting, Jim," said Will Moreraud. "Tell us why you tried to run us on Vevay Bar and again on Craig's Bar."

"I didn't try to run you on them. I tried to run you behind them into the Kentucky shore channel."

"What for?"

"Oh, I was in a hurry to get down the river, and I didn't want you to make that long stop at Craig's Landing. If I could have run you behind those bars, you'd have been at Carrollton before you could pull up, and of course it wouldn't have paid you to get the boat towed back up the river. I was trying to hurry, that's all; and I knew the river better than Captain Phil suspected."

That was all of farewell there was between the crew of *The Last of the Flatboats* and her late pilot. When some one suggested to Phil that he should speak for the party and express regret at the necessity that had governed their course, Phil said:—

"But I don't feel the least regret. I am glad we've secured him and his gang. It restores a lot of plunder to the people to whom it belongs; it breaks up a very dangerous band of burglars; and it will help teach other persons of that kind how risky it is to live by law-breaking. Perhaps it will help to keep many people honest. No, I'm not sorry that we've been able to render

so great a service to the public, and I'm not going to pretend that I am."

"You're right, Phil," said Ed.

"Of course he is," said Irv; "and as for Jim Hughes, he will get only what he deserves. If there were no laws, or if they were not enforced by the punishment of crime, there wouldn't be much 'show' for honest people in this world."

"There wouldn't be any honest people, I reckon," said Will, "for honest people simply couldn't live. Everybody would have to turn savage and robber, or starve to death."

"Yes," said Ed. "That's how law originated, and civilization is simply a state of existence in which there are laws enough to restrain wrong. When the savage finds that he can't defend himself single-handed against murder and robbery, he joins with other savages for that purpose. That makes a tribe. It must have rules to govern it, and they are laws. It is out of the tribal organization that all civilized society has grown, mainly by the making of better and better laws, or by the better and better enforcement of laws already made."

"Then are we all savages, restrained only by law from indulging in every sort of

crime?" asked Phil. "I, for one, don't feel myself to be in that condition of mind."

"By no means," replied the elder boy. "We are the products of habit and heredity. We have lost most of our savage instincts by having restrained them through generations, just as cows and dogs have done. You see, it is a law of nature that parents are apt to transmit their own characteristics to their children. As one of the great scientific writers puts it, 'the habit of one generation is the instinct of the next.' If you want a dog to hunt with, you choose one whose ancestors have been in the habit of hunting, because you know that he has inherited the habit as an instinct. Yet the highest-bred setters, pointers, and fox hounds are all descended ultimately from a common ancestry of wild dogs, as fierce, probably, as any wolf ever was. They have been for many generations under law,—the law of man's control,—and so they have not only lost their wildness, but have acquired new instincts, new capacities, and a new intelligence."

"I see," said Phil, meditatively. "It is a long-continued course of timely spanking that has slowly changed us from savages into

fellows able to run a flatboat and inclined to wear trousers."

"Ah, as to that," said Irv, "we haven't quite got rid of our savage instincts even yet. I for one am savagely hungry for some of that beef our Cincinnati friend sent on board, and I suspect the rest of the tribe are in the same condition."

CHAPTER XXI

A WRESTLE WITH THE RIVER

AFTER the boat left Memphis it was necessary to proceed with a good deal of caution. A new flood had come down the river, bringing with it a dangerous drift of uprooted trees and the like. Moreover, in many places there were strong currents setting out from the natural river-bed into the overflowed regions on either side, and constant care was necessary to avoid being drawn into these.

Memphis is built upon the high Chickasaw bluffs, but a little way farther down the river the country becomes low and flat, and in parts it grows steadily lower as it recedes from the river, so that at some distance inland the plantations and woodlands lie actually lower than the bed of the great river. It has been said, indeed, with a good deal of truth, that the Mississippi River runs along on the top of a ridge.

“How did it come to do that?” asked

Will. "Why didn't it find its level as water generally does —"

"And as men ought to do, but usually don't," said Irv.

"It did at first, of course," said Ed. "But whenever it got on a rampage like this, it took all the region along its course for its right of way. It spread itself out over the country and went whithersoever it chose. Then came men who wanted its rich bottom lands for farms. So they built earth levees to keep the river off their lands. As more and more lands were brought under cultivation, more and more of these embankments were built, and the river was more and more restrained. Now there is nothing in the world that resists and resents restraint more than water does. So the river breaks through the levees every now and then and floods the plantations, drowning cattle, sweeping away crops and houses, and creating local famines that must be relieved from the outside."

Before beginning his explanation Ed had dipped up a glassful of the river water and set it on the deck. It was thick with mud, so that it looked more like water from a hog wallow than water from a river. He turned

now and gently took up the glass. There was a deep sediment in the bottom and the water above was beginning to grow somewhat clearer.

“Look here,” said the boy. “If we let that water sit still long enough, all the mud would sink to the bottom and the water above would become clear. That’s what we should have to do with our drinking and cooking water on this boat if we hadn’t brought a filter along. Now you see that the water of this river is carrying more mud than it can keep dissolved. This mud is sinking to the bottom all the way from St. Louis to New Orleans. It is building up the bottom, raising it year by year, and so raising the river higher and higher. When the river was left free, the same thing happened, but whenever a flood came it would leave its built-up bed, run over its banks, and cut new channels for itself in the lowest country it could find. There are many lakes and ponds well away from the present river that were obviously a part of the channel once.

“When men began confining the river within its banks at all but the highest stages of water, and in many places at all stages, it

couldn't leave its old channels for new ones, no matter how much it had built up the bottom, and so the bed of the river steadily rose from year to year. That made the surface of the flood water higher, and so men had to build higher and higher levees to keep the floods from burying their plantations. As they have nothing better to make their embankments out of than the soft sandy loam of the bottom lands, the levees are not very strong at best, and the higher they are raised, the greater is the water pressure against them when the river is up. So they often give way, and when they do that the river rushes through the gap, or crevasse, as it is called, rapidly widening and deepening it, and pouring a torrent over all the country within reach. In such a flood as this men are kept watching the levees day and night to stop every little leak, lest it become a crevasse, and it is often necessary to forbid steamboats to pass near the shore, because the swells they make would wash over the tops of the levees and start crevasses in that way. Sometimes a strong wind pushes the water up enough to break a levee and destroy hundreds of lives and millions of dollars' worth of property, for when a levee breaks,

the region behind it is flooded too rapidly to permit much more than escape alive, and often it doesn't permit even that."

"What a destructive old demon this river is!" said Irv.

"Yes, at times," replied the elder boy. "But it does a lot of good work as well as bad. It created all the lands that it overflows, and if man tries to rob it of its own, I don't see why it is to be blamed for defending its possessions."

"How do you mean that it created all the lands that it overflows?" asked Constant, who always wanted to learn all he could.

"Why, the geologists say that the Gulf of Mexico used to extend to Cairo, covering all the flat region in the Mississippi Valley south, except here and there a high spot like that on which Memphis stands. The high spots were islands in the Gulf."

"But where did the land come from then?"

"Why, the Mississippi built it with its mud. It carries enough mud at all times to make half a state, if it were all brought together. When the river's mouth was at Cairo, the river kept pouring mud into the Gulf. The mud sank, and in that way the

shore-line was extended farther and farther south, spreading to the right and left as it went. The river is still doing this down at its mouth below New Orleans, and it has been doing it for millions of years. It has simply filled in all that part of the Gulf that once covered eastern Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and the lower parts of Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri."

"But why don't other rivers do the same thing?" asked Constant.

"They do, in a degree," said Ed. "You know there is always a bar in the sea just off the mouth of a river."

"Yes, but —"

"Well, most rivers carry very little mud in their water, and that little goes to make the bar at the mouth. The Mississippi carries so much mud that its bars become land, and the river cuts a channel through them, carrying its mud still farther into the sea. Then again, the Mississippi has floods every year or twice a year, and in some years three times, such as most rivers never have. This is because it carries in a single channel the water from twenty-eight states and a territory, as we saw on the map one day up the river. Now as soon as the river mud forms

a bar that shows above water, vegetation begins to grow on it. When the next flood comes, it covers the new-made land and builds it higher by depositing a great deal more mud on top of it and among the vegetation, which, by checking the current at the bottom, helps the mud to lodge there. In that way, all the lowlands for hundreds of miles along this river were created. It took hundreds of thousands of years — perhaps millions of years — to do it, but it was done.”

Ed did not give this long explanation all in one speech. He was interrupted many times by Phil’s call of all hands to the sweeps, when rowing was necessary, and by other matters of duty, which it has not been necessary to detail here.

Whenever it was possible to land the boat for the night, the boys did so, and when no banks were in sight where a mooring could be made, they sought for some bend or pocket reasonably free from the more dangerous kinds of drift, and came to anchor for safety during the hours of darkness. Navigation was difficult and perilous now even in daytime when they could make out the course of the river by sight and keep

away from treacherous shore currents, for the drift was very heavy. By night it was doubly dangerous.

Even in the daytime Phil kept the entire crew on deck at all times except when one of them went below to prepare food. Their meals were eaten on deck with a broad plank for table, even when it rained heavily, as it very often did. They slept on deck, too, under a rude shelter made of the tarpaulin. All this Phil regarded as necessary under the circumstances. Even when tied up to the trees or anchored in the snuggest cove to be found, it was sometimes necessary to jump into skiffs and "fend off" great threatening masses of drift. To this duty the calls were very frequent indeed.

Poor Phil got scarcely any sleep at all during these trying days and nights. The sense of responsibility was so strong upon him that he scarcely dared relax his personal watchfulness for a moment. But under the urgent pleadings of his comrades he would now and then leave another on duty in his place and throw himself down for a nap. He did this only when the conditions seemed most favorable, and usually even then he was up again within the half hour.

The escapes of the boat from damage or destruction were many and narrow, even under this ceaseless watching, and the strain at last began to show its effects upon the tough nerves of Captain Phil. He almost lived upon strong coffee. The coffee was an excellent thing for him under the circumstances, but his neglect to take other food was a dangerous mistake. He was still strong of body, but he was growing nervous and even a trifle irritable.

His comrades remonstrated with him for not sleeping, and begged him to eat.

"I don't want to eat, I tell you," he said, with much irritation in his voice.

"But you'll break down, Phil, if you keep this up," said Ed, "and then where shall *we* be? Without your judgment and quickness to see the right thing at a critical moment this boat would have gone to the bottom days ago. We *need* you, old fellow."

The boys all joined in the pleading, and Phil at last sat down with them and tried to eat, but could not.

"No, no, don't drink any coffee yet," said Will, almost pulling the cup out of his hands. "It'll kill the little appetite you've

got. Eat first, and drink your coffee afterward."

"Wait a minute," said Irv, stretching out his long legs, and with a spring rising to his feet. "Wait a minute, and I'll play Ganymede, the cup-bearer."

He went below, where he broke an egg in a large soda-water glass and whipped it up with an egg-beater. Then he filled the glass with milk, of which they still had a gallon or so left, and again using the egg-beater, whipped the whole into a lively froth, adding a little salt to give it flavor and make it more digestible.

"Here, Phil," he said, as he reappeared on deck, "drink this. You'll find it good, and it is food of the very best sort, as well as drink."

Phil took the glass, tasted its contents, and then drained it at a draught.

"Make me another, won't you, Irv?" said Phil about five minutes later; "somehow that one has got lonely and wants a companion."

Irv was glad enough to do so, and by the time Phil had slowly swallowed his second glass, he not only felt himself fed, but he was so. His nerves grew steady again,

there was no further irritation in his voice, and by the time that the next meal was ready the boy had regained his appetite.

The boat came to anchor for the night a little after supper, and as the anchorage was particularly well protected behind a heavily timbered point of submerged land, Phil consented to take a longer sleep than he had done for several days past.

Irv and Constant remained on duty for several hours, after which Ed and Will took their places. Only twice during the night did Phil awake. Each time he arose, went all around the deck, inspecting the situation, and then lay down again upon the boards.

By morning he was quite himself again.

CHAPTER XXII

IN THE FOG

THE boat was now in a part of the river where the land on both sides lies very low, behind very high levees. These are the richest cotton lands in the world, and their owners have tried to reclaim all of them from the river floods instead of taking only part of them for cultivation. Along other parts of the stream there are levees only here and there, leaving the river a chance to spread out over great areas of unreclaimed land, thus relieving the levees of much of the pressure upon them. Here, however, the line of embankment is continuous on both sides of the stream. For long distances the river is held between the two lines of artificially made banks.

The water was now within a few inches of the top of the levees, and twenty or thirty feet above the level of the lands in the rear. The strain upon the embankments was almost inconceivably great, while the destruc-

tion which any break in that long line of earthworks would involve was appalling even to think of.

The boys could see gangs of men at work wherever any weakness showed itself in the embankments, while sentinels, armed with shotguns, were everywhere on guard to prevent mischief-makers from cutting the levees. For, incredible as it may seem, men have sometimes been base enough to do this in order to let the river out of its banks, and thus reduce the danger of a break farther up stream where their own interests lay. For, of course, when a crevasse occurs at any point it lets so much water run suddenly out of the banks that the river falls several inches for many miles above, and the strain on the levees is greatly reduced.

As the boys were floating down the middle of the flood, watching the work on the levees with keen interest, the air began to grow thick. A few minutes later a great bank of dense fog settled down upon them, covering all things as with a blanket. The shores and the great trees that grew upon them were blotted out. Then as the fog grew thicker and thicker, even the river disappeared, except a little patch of it immediately

around the boat. On every side was an impenetrable wall of mist, and ragged fragments of it floated across the deck so that when they stood half the boat's length apart the boys looked like spectres to each other.

"I say, Phil, hadn't we better go ashore or anchor?" said Constant.

"Where is the shore?" asked Phil, quietly.

"Why, there's a shore on each side of us."

"Certainly. But in what direction? Which way is across the river, which way up the river, which way down the river?"

"Why, the current will tell that," said Constant.

"How are we going to find out which way the current runs?" asked Phil, with a quizzical smile.

"Easy enough; by looking at the drift-wood floating by," said the boy, going to the side of the boat to peer at the surface of the river through the fog. Presently he called out in amazement:—

"Why, the whole thing has stopped—the drift, the river, and the flatboat! We're lying here just as still as if we were on solid ground."

"On the contrary," said Phil, "we're floating down stream at the rate of several miles an hour."

"But —"

"Think a minute, Constant," said Phil. "We are floating just as fast as the river runs. The drift-wood is doing the same thing. The water, the drift, and the flatboat are all moving in the same direction at precisely the same speed."

"Oh, I see," said Constant, with an astonished look in his eyes. "We've nothing to measure by. We can't tell which way we're going, or how fast, or anything about it."

"Why not come to anchor, then?" asked Irv. "If we keep on floating, nobody knows where we may go to. If there should be any gap in the line of levees anywhere, we might float into it. It would just tickle this flatboat to slip off on an expedition of that sort. Why not anchor till the fog lifts?"

"First, because we can't," said Phil. "The water is much too deep. But even if we could, it would be the very worst thing we could do. It would bring us to a standstill, while everything else afloat would keep on swirling past us, some of it running into

us. If we should anchor here in the strong current, *The Last of the Flatboats* would soon have as many holes in her as a colander."

"Then what do you intend to do, Phil?" asked Ed.

"Precisely nothing whatever," answered the young captain. "Anything we might do would probably make matters worse. You see we were almost exactly in the middle of the river when the fog came down on us. Now, if we do nothing, the chances are that the current will carry us along somewhere near the middle, or at least well away from the shores. If it don't, we can't help it. The only thing we can do is to keep as close a watch as we can all around the boat, for we don't know which end or which side of her is in front now. I want one fellow to go to the bow, one to the stern, and one to each side, and watch. If we are about to run into a bank or anything else, call out, and we may save ourselves at the last minute. That's all we can do for the present. So go now!"

The wisdom of Phil's decision to do nothing except watch alertly was clear to all his comrades, so they took the places he had assigned them, while he busied himself first at one point and then at another, think-

ing all the while whether there might not be something else that he could do — some precaution not yet thought of that he could take. He went to the pump now and then and worked it till no more water came up. He went below two or three times to see that nothing was wrong with the cargo. The boys, meanwhile, were walking back and forth on their beats, each carrying a boat-hook with which to “fend off” the larger bits of drift which the eddies, cross currents, and those strange disturbances in the stream called “boils,” sometimes drove against the gunwales.

The “boils” referred to are peculiar to the Mississippi, I believe. They are whirlpools, caused by the conflict of cross currents, and, as Will Moreraud said during this day of close watching, they are “sometimes right side up and sometimes upside down.” That is to say, sometimes a current from beneath comes to the surface like water in a boiling kettle and seems to pile itself up in a sort of mound for a half minute or so, while sometimes there is a genuine whirlpool strong enough even to suck a skiff down, as old-time flatboatmen used to testify.

These were anxious hours for the young captain and his crew, but worse was to come. For night fell at last with the fog still on, and between the fog and the darkness it was no longer possible to see even the water at the sides of the boat from the deck.

The crew had eaten no dinner that day. They had forgotten all about their meals in the eagerness of their watching. Now that watching was no longer possible they remembered their appetites, and had an evening dinner instead of supper.

They set their lights of course, though it was of little use from any point of view. They could not be seen at a distance of twenty yards, and moreover there was nobody to see them.

"There's not much danger of any steamboat running into us now," said Phil, who had carefully thought the matter out."

"Why not?" asked Ed.

"Because this fog has lasted for nearly twelve hours now, and by this time every steamboat is tied up to some bank or tree. For no pilot would think of running in such a cloud after finding any shore to which he could make his boat fast."

"But how can a steamboat find the shore when we can't?" asked Will.

"Because she can keep running till she finds it; and if she runs slowly she can back when she finds it till she makes an easy landing. She has power, and power gives her control of herself. We have none, except what the sweeps give us. In fogs like this steamboats always hunt for the shores and tie up till the fog lifts. So after ten or twelve hours of it, there are no steamboats prowling around to run into us."

"Another advantage the steamboats have in hunting for the shore," said Will, "is that they can blow their whistles and listen for echoes. They can tell in that way not only in which direction the shore is, but about how far away it is."

"How do steamships manage in fogs out at sea?" asked Constant.

"Theoretically," replied Ed, "they slow down and blow their whistles or their 'sirens,' as they call the big steam fog-horns that can be heard for many miles. But in fact the big ocean steamships drive ahead at full speed—twenty miles an hour or more—blowing their sirens—till they hear some other ship's siren. Then they act according

to fixed rules, each ship turning her helm to port — that is to say to the left — so that they sail well away from each other.”

“But what if there are sailing vessels in the way?”

“They also have fog-horns, but they sometimes get themselves run down by steamships, and once in a great while one of them runs into the side of a steamship. The Cunard steamer *Oregon* was sunk in that way by a sailing craft. That sort of thing would happen oftener if the big steamships were to stop or run very slowly in fog. By running at full speed they make it pretty sure that they will themselves do any running down that is to be done. With their enormous weight and great speed they can cut a sailing vessel in two without much danger of serious damage to themselves, and as they have hundreds of people on board while a sailing ship has a very few, the steamship captains hold that it is right to shift the danger in that way.”

The night dragged slowly along. Now and then a little conversation would spring up, for the boys were sleeping very little, but often there would be no word spoken for an hour at a time.

The fog made the air very chill, and the boys, who remained on deck all night, had to stir about frequently to keep reasonably warm.

The fog began whitening at last as the daylight dawned, and all the boys strained their eyes to see through it.

But it showed no sign of lifting.

CHAPTER XXIII

THROUGH THE CREVASSE

As the daylight increased, it became possible to see a little further into the fog, and there was now a little air stirring in fitful fashion, which tore holes in the thick bank of mist, but only for a moment or two at a time.

Through one of these brief openings Phil presently made a startling discovery. The flatboat was running at an exceedingly rapid rate along a nearly overflowed levee on the Mississippi side of the river, and within fifty or sixty feet of it. The crest of the embankment rose only a few inches above the level of the water, and the current was swifter than any that Phil had seen since the flatboat had left the falls of the Ohio behind. What it all meant Phil did not know, nor could he imagine how or why the boat had drifted out of the main current to the shore in this way; but he felt that there was danger there, and calling his comrades to the sweeps, made every effort to regain the

outer reaches of the river. But try as they might at the oars, the boat persisted in hugging the bank, while her speed seemed momentarily to increase. Men on the levee were calling to Phil, but so excitedly that he could not make out their meaning.

Presently there was another little break in the fog-bank, and Phil saw what was the matter. Just ahead of the boat the levee had given way, and the river was plunging like a Niagara through a crevasse, already two or three hundred feet wide, and growing wider with every second. The boat had been caught in the current leading to the crevasse, and was now being drawn into the swirling rapid.

Phil had hardly time to realize the situation before the boat began whirling about madly, and a moment later she plunged head foremost through the crevasse and out into the seething waste of waters that was now overspreading fields and woodlands beyond. As the land here lay much lower than the surface of the river, and as the country had not yet had time, since the levee broke, to fill to anything like the river level, passing through the crevasse was like plunging over a cataract, and after passing

through, the boat was carried forward at a truly fearful speed across the fields. Fortunately, she encountered no obstacle. Had she struck anything in that mad career, the box-like craft would have been broken instantly to bits.

As she receded from the river she left the worst of the fog behind. It was possible now to see for fifty or a hundred yards in every direction, and what the boys saw was appalling. There were horses and cattle frantically struggling in the water, only to sink beneath it at last, for even the strongest horse could not swim far in a surging torrent like that.

There were cross currents of great violence too, and eddies and whirlpools created by the seemingly angry efforts of the water to find the lowest levels and occupy them. These erratic currents took possession of the boat, and whirled her hither and thither, until her crew lost all sense of direction and distance, and everything else except the necessity of clinging to the sweep bars to avoid being spilled overboard by the sudden careenings of the boat to one side and then the other, and her plungings as the water swept her onward.

Once they saw a human being struggling in the seething water. A moment later he was gone, but whether drowned or carried away to some point of rescue there was no way of finding out.

Once they swept past a stately dwelling-house, submerged except as to its roof; what fate had befallen its inhabitants they could never know, for the next instant a strong current caught the boat, and drove it, side first, straight toward a great barn that had been carried off its foundations and was now afloat. For a moment the boys expected to be driven against the barn with appalling violence—an event that would have meant immediate destruction. But the currents changed in an instant, so that the barn was carried in one direction and the boat in another. As the two drifted apart there were despairing cries from the floating building, which had been badly crushed in collision with something, and was in danger of falling to pieces at any moment. The boys looked, and caught a glimpse of a number of negro children clinging to the wrecked structure. An instant later the barn disappeared in what was left of the fog.

The boys were sickened by what they

had seen and by what they felt must be its sequel. It is a fearful thing to have to stand still, doing nothing, when human creatures are being carried to a cruel death before one's eyes. But as yet the boys could do nothing except cling to their own boat. Two of their skiffs had been carried away, and it would have been certain death to make even an effort to launch any of the others.

They were swept on and on for miles. They had passed beyond the cultivated lands and out into a forest. Here the danger was greater than ever, as a single collision with a tree would have made an end of everything. But the turbulence of the water was slowly subsiding at last, and the boat floated, still unsteadily indeed, but with less violent plungings than before. It was possible now, by exercising great care, to move about a little, and Phil quickly seized the opportunity to get some things done that he deemed necessary.

"Irv, you and Constant go to the star-board pump," he said hurriedly; "Ed and Will to the other; the boat must be badly wrenched, and she'll fill with water. Pump like maniacs."

The boys went to their posts, and managed to work the pumps, though with difficulty. Water came freely in answer to their efforts, showing that Phil's conjecture was correct.

Phil himself climbed down the little companionway, receiving some bruises and one rather ugly cut on the head as he did so, for the sudden tossings of the boat still continued, though less violently than before. He found matters below in rather better condition than he had feared. The space under the flooring—or the bilge, as it is called—was full, and there was a good deal of water washing about above the floor. The boat was too unsteady for Phil to estimate the depth of the leakage, or to discover the rapidity with which the water was coming in. But he hoped that diligent pumping might yet save the craft.

Having hurriedly made his inspection, he proceeded next to fill a basket with food, taking first that which could be eaten without further cooking,—canned goods, dried beef, and the like,—and, returning to the deck, deposited his stores in one of the skiffs. He repeated this several times, till he had fully provisioned two of the boats.

It did not require many minutes to do this, and they were minutes that he could not use to better advantage in any other way, for there was still no possibility of directing the flatboat's course by using the oars, and Phil deemed it wise thus to provision the skiffs, so that if the boat should sink, he and his comrades, or some of them, at least, might have a chance of escape in them without starving before reaching dry land somewhere.

The boat had passed safely through the first stretch of timber lands, and was now floating over a broad reach of open plantation country. But the fog was gone now, and, as there was woodland in sight a few miles farther on in the direction in which the current was carrying them, Phil and his friends felt that their respite was likely to be a brief one.

He relieved Ed at the pump, and ordered him to rest. But the boy protested that he was still fresh, and would have worked on if Phil had permitted. Even in this time of danger and hurried effort, Phil could not help thinking how greatly his brother's health and strength had improved.

"Ed's getting well," he said to Irv, as the two tugged at the pump.

"Yes," rejoined the tall fellow; "a month ago he couldn't have done such work as this to save his life."

"And twenty-four hours of such a fog as we've been through would have killed him to a certainty. Now he doesn't even cough."

A little later, as the boat began floating more steadily, Phil called out:—

"Go below, Ed, and see how much water is in the hold."

Ed's report convinced the young captain that the leaks were at least not gaining upon the pumps. An hour later, the boat having become quite steady again, Phil found that the pumps were gaining on the water, which by that time did not rise above the flooring.

The boat had by this time passed again into a forest, and, while the current was now a steady one, it was still very strong. Phil considered the situation carefully, and decided upon his course of action.

"Take a line in a skiff, Will, and pass it once around a tree, then run off with the end of it and hold on, letting it slip as slowly as possible on the tree till the boat comes to a halt. Then make fast."

To the others he explained:—

"We must check her speed gradually. In such a current as this to stop her suddenly would sling her against some tree like a whip cracker."

Then he turned to Irv, and said, "Take another line, and do the same thing on another tree."

By the time that Irv pushed off in his skiff Will had got his line in place around a tree, and had rowed away fifty yards with the end of it. As it tightened, the rope began slipping on the tree, dragging the skiff toward it. Phil called to Will:—

"Don't get hurt, Will! Let go your rope when you are dragged nearly to the tree."

Will did so just in time to save himself from an ugly collision, but his efforts had considerably checked the flatboat's speed, and by the time he let go the line Irv had the other rope around a tree and was repeating the operation. This second line brought the boat to a standstill, and under Phil's direction she was securely made fast both bow and stern, so that she could not swing about in any direction.

CHAPTER XXIV

A LITTLE AMATEUR SURGERY

"THE first thing to be done now," said Phil, "is to find out what damage we have suffered, and repair as much of it as we can."

"Better begin with your head then," said Will. "It seems to have sustained more damage than anything else in sight."

The cut Phil had received had covered his face and shoulders with blood, and his head was aching severely. But he was not ready to think of himself yet. He must first do everything that could be done for the safety of the boat and crew and cargo. So he dismissed Will's suggestion, saying:—

"Never mind about my head. I'll wash the blood off when other things are done. There's plenty of water, anyhow."

With that he went below again to inspect. He found that the water there had risen since the pumps were stopped until now it stood about two inches above the false bottom or

floor on which the cargo rested. Putting his head out through the scuttle, he called : —

“Two of you go to the pumps — one to each pump. Don’t work too hard, but keep up a steady pumping. As soon as the two get tired, let the other two take their places.”

He withdrew his head, but in a few moments after the pumps were started he thrust it out again to say : —

“Don’t pump so hard ! You’ll break yourselves down, and we can’t afford that now.”

He went below again, lighted a lantern and made as thorough an examination of the boat as possible, even moving a good deal of the freight about in order to get at points where he suspected the principal leaks to be. Two of these he closed by nailing blocks of inch board over them.

Meantime he made frequent observations of the water mark he had set, and was rejoiced to find that the pumps were taking water out more rapidly than it was leaking in.

He went on deck and announced the results of his inspection.

“The boat is leaking, of course, but not one-half so badly as there was reason to fear. The bilge is full, and the water stands about

an inch deep or a little less on the false bottom. But it stood two inches deep there an hour ago, so I expect that in another hour or so we shall get it down to the bilge, leaving the floor clear. It is important to do that quickly so that the wet part of our cargo, particularly the lower tier of hay bales, may have a chance to dry out. If it stays long in water, of course it will be badly damaged."

"Well, now," said Irv, "I'm going to take care of something else that's badly damaged. Get a pair of scissors, Ed, and some rags, and help me repair Phil's head."

Then, taking Phil by the arm, he continued:—

"Come to the bow, Phil, where we can get at the water easily. It will require a young lake to clean you up properly. Off with your shirt, young man!"

Irv treated the matter lightly, but he did not think of it in that way by any means. In common with the other boys, he was deeply concerned over the young captain's wound. The bleeding had long since ceased, but the boy's hair was matted, his face covered, and the upper part of his clothing saturated with blood.

The clothing was first removed. Then with wet cloths the face and shoulders were hastily sponged off.

"Now, Ed," said Irv, who lived, when at home, in the house with his uncle, a physician, and therefore knew better than any one else on the boat what to do for a wound, "you take the scissors and shear off Phil's hair just as close to the scalp as you can, particularly around the wound. Hair is always full of microbes, you know."

With that Irv passed through the hold and was absent for some little time. When he returned, he brought with him a tea-kettle of hot water which he had waited to boil, a basin, and a little box of salt.

"What are those for?" asked Ed, who had by this time reduced Phil to a condition of baldness.

"How much water is there above the false bottom now?" queried Phil, whose mind refused to be diverted from his duty as captain.

"The water to cleanse the wound, the salt to disinfect it, and I didn't notice any water above the floor," said Irv, replying to both questions in a single breath.

Ed laughed, but Phil eagerly asked,

"You mean that the water doesn't come over the flooring at all, — that there's no water above the bilge?"

"I didn't observe any," said Irv, "but I wasn't thinking particularly about it. I'll go and look again."

"No," said Phil; "I'll go myself if you'll get me a lantern, for it's so nearly dark now that it must be quite dark inside."

When the lantern came, Phil made a hurried inspection with a blanket thrown over his otherwise bare shoulders. Then he thrust his shaven head above the deck and called to the two boys at the pumps:—

"I say, fellows, you can stop one of the pumps now, and keep only one going. One of you go below and get supper. Make it a hearty one, for we haven't eaten a mouthful in twenty-four hours."

In the day's excitements not one of them had thought about food, but now that supper was mentioned they all realized that their appetites were voracious.

Having given his orders, Phil submitted himself again to the hands of his surgeons. Irv poured some of the hot water into a basin and added a tablespoonful or so of salt.

"You see," he explained, "the trouble

with wounds is that germs get into them, so the most important thing of all is to cleanse them thoroughly, and after that to keep them clean. I'm using boiled water"—he was sponging the wound as he talked,—“because boiling kills all the microbes there may be in water.”

“But what is the salt for?” asked Ed.

“To disinfect the wound. You see there must be lots of microbes in it already, and salt kills them. That's what we salt meat for when we wish to preserve it. The salt kills microbes, and so the meat keeps sound.”

“Then it is the presence of microbes that causes decay in meat?”

“Yes, or decay in anything else. If we hadn't thrown Jim Hughes's whiskey overboard, I'd wash this wound with that. It would make Phil jump, but it would do the work. You know nothing decays in alcohol. However, the salt will do, I think.”

When Irv had satisfied himself that the wound was sufficiently cleansed, he drew the edges of the cut together and held them there with sticking plaster.

“Now, Ed,” he said, “won't you please bring me some cloths that you'll find in the oven of the stove?”

Ed went at once, but wondering. When he returned, Irv finished dressing the wound, and all went to supper.

"Why did you put the rags in the oven, Irv?" asked Ed. "I noticed you didn't even try to keep them warm after I brought them to you."

"Oh, no. I roasted them for the same reason that I boiled the water — to sterilize them."

"You mean to kill the microbes?"

"Yes. You see everything is likely to be infested with disease germs, so you must never use anything about a wound without first sterilizing it with heat or some chemical. You can use unboiled water, of course, because water cleanses things anyhow, but it is better to use boiled water if you can get it, and every bandage should be carefully sterilized. That's why I started the fire, boiled the water, and put the rags in the oven to roast."

At supper Ed ate as voraciously as the rest, and the boys observed with satisfaction that the long fast, the very hard work, the severe strain of anxiety, and the prolonged exposure to the fog had in no way hurt him. Ed declared, indeed, that he was growing

positively robust, and his comrades agreed with him.

"What's the programme now, Phil?" asked one of the party when supper was done.

"A good night's sleep," answered the young captain. "In the morning we'll consider further proceedings with clear heads. One pump is sufficient to keep ahead of the leaks now, and we shall have to keep that going night and day as long as we remain afloat. So usually we'll keep two men awake to alternate at the pump, but for to-night we'll stand short watches, keeping only one man awake at a time. Two watches of an hour each for each of us will take us through the night. I'll take the first watch, as my head is aching too badly to sleep yet. So get to sleep, all of you. I'll wake one of you in an hour or so."

The boys objected. They wanted Phil to treat himself as an invalid, and let them do the watching and pumping, but he was obstinate in his determination to do his full share. So they stretched themselves in their bunks and were soon sleeping the sleep of very tired but very healthy young human animals.

CHAPTER XXV

A VOYAGE IN THE WOODS

It was long past midnight when Phil aroused one of his comrades to take his place on watch and at the pump. For the young captain had a good deal of careful thinking to do, and he could do it better alone in the dark than when surrounded by his crew. Moreover, he knew that until his thinking should be done he could not sleep even if he should try.

"I might as well stay on deck and let the other fellows sleep," he said to himself, "as to lie awake for hours in my bunk."

In the morning Phil called a "council of war."

"Now listen to me first, without interrupting," he said. "I've thought out the situation as well as I can, and have made up my mind what we ought to do. After I've told you my plan and the reasons for it, you can make any suggestions you like, and I'll adopt any of them that seem good to me."

"That's right," said Irv. "Let's hear what you've thought and what your plan is. Then we'll carry it out."

"No," said Phil. "I want you to criticise it first, so that if it's wrong I can change it."

"All right. Go ahead."

"First of all, then, we're out here in the woods. It isn't a comfortable or a proper place for a flatboat to be in, and we must get out of it as quickly as we can."

"But how?" broke in Will. "We're ten or twenty or maybe thirty or forty miles from the river, and we can't possibly get back again."

"I don't know so well about that," said Phil. "Of course we can't get back to the river at the point where we left it. But I'm not so sure that we can't get back to it somewhere else, and at any rate, I'm going to try. Listen, now! The water we're in is thirty-five feet deep."

"How do you know?" asked Constant.

"I've sounded it. So we've plenty of water, and there is no danger of our going aground. But we're not in any river, for we're in the midst of the woods, and woods don't grow in rivers. But this water that

we're in is running toward somewhere at the rate of six or eight miles a hour, and we must go with it. Somehow or somewhere it must run into some river, and that river must somewhere and somehow empty itself into the Mississippi."

"Why?" asked Constant.

"Because there isn't anything else for it to run into, and of course it can't stop running. Now my idea is this. We must cast the boat loose and let her float with the current. It will be very hard work to keep her from smashing into these big trees, but we must do all the hard work necessary. We'll tie up every night so long as we're in the woods, and we'll float all day. Sooner or later we'll run out of the woods and into a river, and when we do that we'll follow the river to its end, wherever it may happen to be."

"But have you any idea where we are?" asked Will.

"No," said Phil, "except that we are somewhere in the northern part of the state of Mississippi."

"I know where we are," drawled Irv Strong.

"Where?"

"We're in the woods."

"I'm pleased to observe that you still have 'lucid intervals,' Irv," said Ed Lowry. "But I have a rather more definite idea than that of our whereabouts. I studied it out on the map early this morning."

"Good, good! Where are we?" cried out all the boys in a breath, and with great eagerness.

"Come here and see," said Ed, unrolling his great river map. "You observe that a number of rivers originate in northern Mississippi and western Tennessee, almost under the levees of the Mississippi. There are the Big Sunflower, the Coldwater, and the Tallahatchie, with the Yalobusha only a little way off. All of them run into the Yazoo, which in its turn runs into the Mississippi near Vicksburg. All of them are marked on my map as navigable for a part of their course. All of them lie in a great flat basin or lowland swamp. But for the levees the Mississippi would flow into them whenever it rises to any considerable extent. In fact, they must originally have been mere bayous of the great river, running out of it and back into it again. The Mississippi levees have stopped all that ordinarily, but

the levees have given way this time, and so the Mississippi is now pouring its water into these rivers, and as there is too much of it for them to hold, it has filled the entire swamp country between them, making one vast stream of them all in effect. We are somewhere in between those rivers, and if we can keep our flatboat afloat and not wreck her among these trees, the current will sooner or later carry us into the natural channel of one or the other of them. That I understand to be Phil's idea, and he is right."

"That's all right," said Phil, who was restlessly pacing up and down the deck. "But has anybody any suggestion to make?"

Nobody had anything to offer.

"Very well, then," said the young captain, "let's get to work. We've talked enough. We must keep one fellow at a pump all the time. We can't do much with the sweeps while we're in the woods, and our greatest danger is that of running the boat into one of these big trees and wrecking her. To prevent that I want you, Irv, and you, Constant, — for you are the stoutest oarsmen, — to get into a skiff and carry

a line about a hundred feet in advance of the boat. She slews around pretty easily under a pull, and I want you two to guide her with a line. I'll tell you when you are to row to right or left to avoid trees, and the rest of the time you've only to keep the line taut so as to be ready for emergencies. Get into the skiff at once, and take a light line with you."

As soon as the skiff was in position and the guiding line stretched, Phil directed Will Moreraud to jump into another skiff and release the flatboat from her moorings.

It was perilous business navigating thus through a dense subtropical forest. Phil stood at the bow, intently watching and giving his commands in a restrained voice and with an apparent calm that sadly belied his actual condition of mind. Will and Ed "stood by" the sweeps, working the pumps, but holding themselves ready to pull on the great oars whenever Phil should find that mode of guiding the boat practicable.

Every now and then Phil would call to Irv and Constant in the skiff ahead, to pull with all their might to the right or left, and many times the flatboat, in spite of this diligence, had narrow escapes from disaster.

It was terribly hard work, and the mental strain of it which fell upon Phil was worse even than the tremendous physical exertion put forth by the other boys. There was no midday meal served that day, for it would have meant destruction for any one of the boys to leave his post of duty long enough even to prepare the simplest food.

About four o'clock in the afternoon Phil suddenly called to Irv : —

“Carry your line around a tree and check speed all you can!” Then turning to Will : —

“Jump into a skiff, Will, and take out another line, just as you did yesterday. When the boat stops, make fast!”

The boys obeyed promptly, and a few minutes later *The Last of the Flatboats* was securely tied to two great trees — one in front and one astern.

Then Phil threw himself down on the deck and closed his eyes as if in sleep, and the boys in the skiffs came back on board.

The captain was manifestly exhausted. The strain of watching and directing the course of the boat through so many hours and under circumstances so difficult, the still greater strain put upon his mind by his con-

sciousness that he alone was responsible for the safety of boat and crew and cargo, and finally the sudden relief caused by a glimpse ahead which his comrades had been too busy to share, had brought on something very like collapse.

The boys said nothing, lest they disturb him. He lay still for a quarter of an hour perhaps. Then he got up, stripped off his clothing, and leaped overboard.

Five minutes later he returned to the deck refreshed by his bath, and almost himself again.

As he dried himself with a towel, he said : —

“Two of you go below and get supper. Make it a big one, for we are all starving. And get it as quickly as you can.” Then, after a brief pause, he added : —

“You didn’t notice it, I suppose, but we’re out of the woods !”

“How so ?” asked Ed and Irv in unison.

“There’s an open river just ahead,” replied Phil. “Go forward and look. I’m going to sleep now. Wake me up when supper is ready.”

And in a moment the exhausted boy was sound asleep, stretched out upon a hard

plank, without pillow or other comfort of any kind.

“Poor fellow!” said Irv. “He’s got the big end of this job all the time.”

With that he dived below, and returning, placed a pillow under Phil’s bandaged head, and spread a blanket over him, for the air was chill.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE CREW AND THEIR CAPTAIN

UTTERLY worn out as he was, it was not a part of Phil's purpose — it was not in his nature, indeed — to neglect any duty. He ate a hearty supper with the boys, during which he talked very little. Once he said, suddenly : —

“I suspect it's the Tallahatchie.”

“What do you mean?” asked Ed.

“Why, the river we've reached. It lies to the left of our course. If it was the Sunflower, it would lie to the right. Anyhow, it runs into the Yazoo, and that's all we ask of it.”

“By the way, Ed,” said Irv, “how long is the Yazoo?”

“I don't know, I'm sure,” said Ed. “I'll get the map after supper, and look.”

“Don't bother,” said Phil. “The navigable part of it is one hundred and seventy-five miles long.”

"How did you come to know that?" asked Will. "I thought Ed was the geographer of this expedition."

"So he is. But I'm captain, worse luck to it, and it's my first business to know what lies ahead. So I looked this thing up on the map. The Yalobusha and Tallahatchie run together somewhere near a village called Greenwood, which is probably a hundred feet or so under water just now, — we may even float over the highest steeple in that interesting town, when we get to it, — and those two streams form the Yazoo. By the way, that little side issue of a river happens to be considerably longer, in its navigable part, than one of the most celebrated rivers in the world — the Hudson."

"You don't mean it?" exclaimed Irv, for once surprised out of his drawl.

"Maybe I don't. But I think I do. Ask Ed to study it out. I'm too tired to talk. I'm going to sleep for ten minutes now. Wake me up at the end of that time. Don't fail!"

With that the exhausted boy rolled into a bunk, and in an instant was asleep again.

Ed got out his maps and studied them for a while,

"He's right, boys," said the older one, after some measurements on the map.

"Of course he is," said Constant. "He's got into the habit of being right since we chose him to be 'It' for this trip. But go on, Ed. Tell us about it."

"Well," said Ed, still scrutinizing the map, "the navigable part of the Hudson, from New York to Troy, is about one hundred and fifty-six miles long. The navigable part of the Yazoo is, as Phil said, one hundred and seventy-five miles long. Oh, by the way —"

"What is the thought behind that exclamation?" said Irv, when Ed paused; for Irv's spirits were irrepressible.

"It just occurs to me," said Ed, "that this wonderful river of ours, the Mississippi with its tributaries, is almost exactly one hundred times as long—in its navigable parts—as the greatest commercial river of the East."

"In other words," said Irv, "the East isn't in it with us. Its great Hudson River would scarcely more than make a tail for the Mississippi below New Orleans. It would just about stretch from Cincinnati to Louisville. It would cover only a little

more than half the distance from St. Louis to Cairo, or from Cairo to Memphis."

"True!" said Ed, "and pretty much the same thing is true of every great river in Europe. Not one of them would make a really important tributary of our wonderful river. All of them put together wouldn't compare with the Ohio and its affluents."

"Phil's ten minutes are up," said Will. "I hate to wake him, but that was his order."

Phil had come, in this time of stress, to live mainly within himself. He was too much absorbed with his responsibilities to be able to put them aside, or even to treat them lightly.

"I'm 'It,' and so I'm responsible," he had said to Ed, "and I must think. Sometimes it doesn't pay to talk, and sometimes I'm too tired to talk. I must just give orders without explaining them. You explain it all to the other fellows, and don't let them misunderstand. I don't like the job of commanding, even a little bit. But you fellows set me at it, and I accepted the responsibility. I'll bear it to the end, but —"

"We all understand, Phil," said Irv

Strong, who had joined the brothers. "Your crew was never better satisfied with its captain than it is to-day. But it will be still more loyal to-morrow and next day, and every other day till the voyage is ended." Then in lighter vein — for Irv never liked to be serious for long at a time — he added: "Why, I wouldn't even whisper if you told me not to, and you remember Mrs. Dupont posted me first, and you next, as irreclaimable whisperers."

But to return to the night in question. When Phil was waked he took a lantern and made a minute inspection of the boat, inside and outside. Then he dropped into a skiff and rowed away to examine the moorings critically. On his return he said to his comrades: —

"The boat is leaking a good deal more than I like. The strain she received back there, yesterday or the day before, or a thousand years ago — I'm sure I don't remember when it was — is beginning to tell upon her. One pump is no longer quite enough to keep the water in the bilge. We must keep both going — not quite all the time, of course, and not very violently, but pretty steadily. So that's the order for to-night.

Two fellows on watch all the time, and both pumps to be kept going most of the time. I'll sleep till two o'clock. Then wake me, and I'll take my turn at a pump."

The boys would have liked to exempt him from that duty. But his tone did not invite question or protest of any kind. It did not admit even of argument. It was a command — and Phil was commander.

CHAPTER XXVII

A STRUGGLE IN THE DARK

BUT Phil was up long before the hour appointed. It was not yet midnight when he got out of his bunk to get a drink of water. As he did so he stepped into water half way up to his knees.

He instantly aroused his companions.

"The boat is sinking," was his explanation. "Get to the pumps quick."

Then lighting a lantern he made a thorough search of the hold in the hope of finding and stopping the leaks, but it was without avail.

With two boys at each pump the water could be kept down. That fact was established by an hour's hard work.

"But we can't keep up that sort of thing," said Phil. "We must stop the leaks or abandon the boat."

He thought for a while. Then he said to Ed:—

"Get some ropes, Ed, and make them fast

to the four corners of the tarpaulin. Bring each pair together about twenty feet away from the rag, and fasten them to another rope."

"What's your plan?" asked Irv, who was diligently pumping.

"I'm going to stretch the tarpaulin under the boat. Sailors stretch a sail that way sometimes to stop a leak."

But this was much more easily said than done. When the tarpaulin was ready, Phil took all hands away from the pumps and, sending them to the skiffs, made an effort to force the great stiff cloth under the bow. It was a complete failure. The current was much too strong.

Then he went to the stern, where he hoped that the current would be of assistance. But that attempt also failed. The current doubled up the tarpaulin against the end of the boat, and it refused to slip under. The effort was several times repeated, but always with the same result — failure.

Finally Phil ordered all hands back to the flatboat. He went below and presently returned with a ball of twine. Unwinding its entire length and carefully coiling it on deck, he told Ed to fasten its farther end to

one of the ropes attached to the tarpaulin strings.

"What are you going to do, Phil?"

"I'm going to put my swimming to some practical account. Two of you fellows get into a skiff, — yes, three of you, — and lie off the larboard side of the boat."

As they obeyed, the boy removed his clothes and tied the twine securely around his person.

"Watch the coil, Ed," he said to his brother, "and don't let it foul. Give me free string from the moment I go overboard. A very little pull would drown me!"

Then, taking a lantern, Phil scanned the water on both sides of the boat carefully for drift that might be in the way. When all was ready he leaped overboard, and after an anxious wait on the part of the boys he came to the surface again on the other side of the boat. He had repeated his old feat of diving under the flatboat, but this time it was harder than ever before. The strong current helped him a little, for the flatboat, tied bow and stern, lay almost athwart it. But a deal of difficulty was created by the necessity of dragging the twine after him. Ed saw to it that no tangle should occur,

but the string dragged upon the deck and over the side and again upon the bottom of the boat, so that a much longer time and far more exertion was necessary for the dive than had ever been required before. Indeed, when Phil came up he was barely clear of the gunwale and his ability to hold his breath was completely at an end. A second more and he must have inhaled water and drowned. He was for the moment too much exhausted to climb into the skiff that was waiting for him, or even to give directions to his companions.

Seeing his condition, Irv and Will leaped overboard with their clothes on, and actually lifted the boy into the skiff, pushing him over its side as if he had been a log or a limp sack of meal.

As soon as he was able to gasp he helped his comrades into the little boat, and called out:—

“Pull away on the string, boys, as fast as you can, otherwise the current will carry it out from under the boat, at one end or the other.”

They obeyed promptly and presently had the end of the rope in their grasp. Pulling upon this, they succeeded in getting the edge

of the tarpaulin under the starboard side of the flatboat. But there the thing stuck, and their tugging at the rope only resulted in drawing their skiff up to the flatboat's side. Phil quickly saw that "pulling without a purchase" was futile. He called out:—

"Row to that tree yonder, and we'll make fast to it."

When that was done the pulling was resumed, this time "with a purchase." But it was of no avail. The tarpaulin was drawn halfway under the boat, but there it stuck.

After a little Phil evolved a new idea. Releasing the skiff, he rowed to the flatboat and directed Irv to go aboard. Then returning to his former position, he again made the skiff fast to the tree.

"Now, Irv," he called out, "you and Ed go below and bring up two or three barrels of flour."

"What for?" asked Ed.

"Never mind what for. Do it quick," was the answer.

When the barrels of flour were on deck, Phil said:—

"Find the middle of the tarpaulin as nearly as you can, and roll a barrel of flour overboard into it."

The thing was quickly done. The weight of the barrel of flour caused the tarpaulin to sink below the flatboat's bottom, and it became possible to drag it under her for a further space.

"Roll another barrel overboard," said the captain, when the tarpaulin refused to come farther. This enabled the boys to drag the sheet still farther, and finally, with the aid of a third barrel, they brought its edge ten feet beyond the gunwale.

"Now," said Phil, "we've got to spill those flour barrels out of the cloth, or it won't come up to the boat's bottom and stop the leaks."

How to do this was a puzzle. After studying the problem for a while, Phil directed Ed and Irv on board the flatboat, and Will and Constant in the skiff, to relax the tension on the great square of sailcloth.

"I'm going down on top of it," he said, "to push the barrels off."

"But when you do that, it'll close up to the bottom of the boat and catch you in it," said Will. "Don't think of doing that!"

"I must," said Phil, "we're sinking; it's our only chance, and I must take the risk. Let me have your big knife, Constant."

"What are you going to do with it?" asked the boy, as he handed it to Phil.

"Cut my way out if I can, or perhaps cut a way out for the flour barrels. Good-by, boys, if I never get back. And thank you for everything."

With that he stepped upon the tarpaulin and slid down it under the boat. Presently he came back, gasping and struggling.

"I got one barrel out," he said. Then he waited awhile for breath, and went under again. This time he was gone so long that his comrades feared the worst, with almost no hope for a better result. But they could do nothing. Presently Phil came up, but so exhausted that he could only cling in a feeble way to the edge of the canvas. The boys dragged him into the skiff, and he lay upon its bottom for a time like one almost drowned, which indeed he was. When he had somewhat recovered, Irv called to him : —

"I'm going down next time, Phil. You shan't brag that you're a better water-rat than I am."

"No, you mustn't," said the boy ; "I've found out how to do the trick now. But I've lost your knife in the shuffle, Constant.

Cast the skiff loose and let's go aboard for another."

The boy was so exhausted that his companions simply forbade him to make another attempt.

"You shan't go down again," said Irv, "and that's all there is about it. If you've found out how to do the trick, as you say, save my life by explaining it to me, for I'm going down, anyhow."

The boy was too weak to insist. So he explained:—

"Don't go down on top of the sheet as I did. Dive under it. Find the barrels,—they're almost exactly in the middle,—and slit the tarpaulin under them so that they can drop through. Oh, let me do it, I'm all right now."

But Irv was overboard with a big butcher knife in his grasp, and the skiff was again securely fastened to its tree.

Irv dived three times. On coming up for the third time, he said with his irrepressible vivacity, "One, two, three times and out! Third time's the charm, you know. I beg to announce that there's a big slit in the tarpaulin and that the two barrels of triple X family flour are calmly reposing in

the mud that underlies *The Last of the Flatboats.*"

"Good!" said Phil. "But we must hurry."

And he gave rapid orders for drawing up the canvas on each side of the flatboat. Then he secured some tackle blocks and carried ropes from the two ends of the tarpaulin to the anchor windlass, and set the boys to draw it as tight as possible.

Then he went below, and found the water almost up to the level of the gunwales. That is to say, the boat proper, the part that floated all the rest, was very nearly full of water. A few inches more and the craft would have gone down like an iron pot with a hole in it.

There was hurried and anxious work at the pumps. At the end of an hour the gauge below showed that the water in the hold had been reduced by an inch or two.

"This will never do," said the young captain. "We can't keep on pumping like demons day and night till we get to New Orleans. We simply must find the leaks and stop them. The tarpaulin helps very greatly, but it isn't enough."

"But how?" asked Ed.

"First of all cast the flatboat loose and let her float," said skipper Phil. "It's daylight now."

"What good will that do?" asked one.

"None, perhaps. Perhaps a great deal. It will put us into a river for one thing. We're in about as bad a place for sinking as there could be. Maybe we shall float into a better one. Maybe we shall come to some place where the land is still out of water and let the boat sink where we can save part of the cargo. Maybe anything. Cast loose, while I study things below."

CHAPTER XXVIII

A HARD-WON VICTORY

PHIL's further explorations below, which occupied perhaps half an hour, convinced him that the pumps, if worked to their utmost capacity, were capable of emptying the hold of water within three or four hours, possibly somewhat sooner, as the tarpaulin was doing its work better, now that the flat-boat was cast loose. The current was no longer interfering, as the boat was now moving with the stream, and the weight of the craft was pressing it closer to the canvas beneath.

Phil realized that to keep the pumps at work to the full for so long a time would fearfully tax the crew's strength, taxing it perhaps even beyond its capacity of endurance. But he saw no alternative. The water simply must be got out of the hold. Till that should be done there would be no possibility of finding and stopping the leaks.

So going again on deck, he said to his comrades : —

“I’ll tell you what, boys, we’ve got to work for all we’re worth now for the next two or three hours. We must get at the inside of the bottom of the boat and find these leaks. We can’t do that till we empty her of water, or get her pretty nearly empty.”

“But how in the world are we to get at the leaks under all our freight?” asked Will Moreraud.

“We have got to move the freight,” said Phil.

“But where?” asked Irv.

“Well,” said Phil, “we’ve got to throw part of it overboard, I suppose, in order to give us room. Then we’ve got to shift the rest of it little by little from one spot to another, exposing a part of the bottom each time. We must find every leak that we can, and stop every one that is capable of being stopped. It will take two or three hours to pump the water out, and, I suppose, it will take two or three days to get these leaks fully stopped. In the meantime, we are all going to be enormously tired, and of course — ”

“And of course we’ll all be as cross as

a sawbuck," said Irv Strong; "tired people always are; what we've got to do is to look out and not quarrel."

"Oh, well," said Phil, "I will take care of that. I am as cross as two sawbucks already, but I haven't quarrelled with anybody yet, and I don't mean to. And I'll keep the rest of you too busy to quarrel. We will postpone all that until we get to New Orleans—"

"If we ever do get to New Orleans," said Ed.

"Ever get to New Orleans? Why, we have got to get to New Orleans. We have undertaken to do that job for the owners of this cargo, and we are going to do it, if we have to pump the Mississippi River three times through this boat in getting there. Our present task is to reduce the necessity for pumping as much as we can."

Phil found by experiment that one boy at each pump was nearly as efficient as two, and as the work of pumping was exhausting, he decided to keep only two boys at it, one at each pump. Then, taking the other two with him, he went below and with buckets they began dipping water from the hold and pouring it overboard at the bow. In this

way they added largely to the work of the pumps, and every fifteen minutes or so two of the boys handling buckets would go to the pumps, and the two tired fellows at the pumps would come below and work with buckets.

It was wearisome work, but there was at any rate the encouragement of success. By one o'clock in the afternoon the water in the hold was so far reduced that it was no longer possible to dip it up with buckets with any profit. So Phil stopped that part of the work, and decided to keep the boys on very short shifts at the pumps, leaving them to rest completely between their tours of duty. He let two of them work for ten minutes. Then another pair took their places for ten minutes. Then the fifth one of the party—for Phil did his “stint” like the rest—became one of the relief pair, thus giving one boy twenty minutes' rest instead of ten. This extra rest came in its turn of course to each of the boys, so that each boy worked forty minutes—ten minutes at a time—and rested sixty minutes out of every one hundred minutes or every hour and two-thirds.

About five o'clock in the afternoon Phil

made one of his frequent journeys of inspection in the hold. He came on deck with an encouraged look in his tired face.

"We've got the water pretty nearly all out now, boys. Our next job is to keep it out by stopping leaks. We'll work one pump all the time. I think that will keep even with the leaks, or pretty nearly so. If we find the water gaining on us, we'll set the other pump going for a while."

"And what's your plan for stopping leaks, Phil?" asked Irv.

"First of all we'll find the leaks," said Phil. "Then we'll do whatever we can to stop them."

"Oh, yes, we know that," said Irv, with a touch of irritation in his voice, "but you know I meant —"

"Come, Irv, no quarrelling!" said Will Moreraud. "You're tired and cross, but so are the rest of us."

"I own up, and beg pardon," said Irv, regaining his good nature by an effort, but instantly. "Phil, may I take time for a cold plunge before you assign me to my next duty?"

"Certainly," said Phil. "And I'll take one with you. Come, boys, we'll all be the

better for the shock of a shockingly cold bath. Jump in, all of you!"

And they all did, for, to the surprise of every one, Ed leaped overboard with them and swam twice around the boat before coming out of the very cold water and into the still colder air.

"Ed's getting well, Phil," said Irv.

"Yes," said Phil, as he watched his brother rubbing himself down. "Two weeks ago he would have come out of that water shivering as if with an ague, and the color of a table-cloth. Now look at him! He's as red as a boiled lobster, and he's actually laughing as he rubs the skin off with that piece of sanded tarpaulin that he has mistaken for a Turkish towel. Here, Ed, take a towel, or would you rather have some sandpaper or a rasp?"

"Thanks, old fellow," said Ed, who had of course heard all the remarks concerning himself, "but this cloth feels good. I believe I am getting better. I've quit 'barking' anyhow."

"That's so," said Irv. "You haven't dared utter a cough since that morning when *The Last of the Flatboats* tried to make the last of herself by quitting the river and com-

ing off on this little picnic in the Mississippi swamps."

"If you young gentlemen have quite finished your discussion of past happenings, and are ready to give attention to present exigencies," said Phil, in that mocking tone which he sometimes playfully adopted, "you'll please put your clothes on and report for duty in the hold, where there's some important work to be done. It's your turn at the pump, Constant. Get thee to thy task, and don't forget to remind me when your time's up."

"Now," said Phil, when they threw open the forward door of the flatboat to open a passage for taking out freight, "I suppose we ought to divide up the loss by throwing out about an equal quantity of each owner's freight. But we can't do it, so there's an end of that."

"Oh, the law will take care of all that," said Ed.

"The law? How?"

"Why the law requires everybody interested in the boat or the cargo to share the loss, when freight must be thrown overboard to save the ship."

"But how can that be done?" asked Irv.

"Why, we must keep account of what we throw overboard. When we sell the rest at New Orleans, we shall know just what was the value of the part jettisoned, — that's the law term for throwing things overboard, I believe, — and that loss must be divided among the owners of the boat herself, the owners of cargo on board, and the insurance companies, if any of the freight is insured. Each one's share of the loss will be in precise proportion to his interest."

"Illustrate," said Will Moreraud.

"Well," rejoined Ned, "suppose we find the boat and her total cargo to be worth one thousand dollars —"

"Oh, rubbish! It's worth many times that," broke in Will. "Why, I should value —"

"Never mind that," said the other. "I'm 'supposing a case,' as Irv says, and simply for convenience I take one thousand dollars as the total value of the boat and everything in her. Now, suppose we have to throw overboard one hundred dollars' worth. That is one-tenth of the whole. That tenth must be divided, not equally, but proportionally, among all the persons interested. Suppose the boat is worth two hun-

dred dollars. That is one-fifth the total value, and so the boat owners must bear one-fifth of the one hundred dollars' loss. That is to say, we fellows should have to 'pony up' twenty dollars among us, or four dollars apiece. A man owning three hundred dollars' worth of freight would be charged thirty dollars, and so on through the list."

"Oh, I see," said Phil, who in the meantime had been studying ways and means of accomplishing the practical purpose in hand. "And a very good arrangement it is. Now stop talking, and let's heave out some of these bales of hay."

"Why not take some of the other things instead?" asked Irv. "They are heavier, and to throw them over would lighten the boat more."

All this while the boys were at work getting the hay out.

"We aren't trying to lighten the boat," replied Phil. "We're only trying to make room, and the hay takes up more room, dollar's worth for dollar's worth, than anything else. So it's cheapest to 'jettison' hay—thanks for that new word, Ed. Now, heave ho!" And the first bale of hay went over the bow into the water.

"Now, another!"

In a brief time a considerable space was cleared.

"That will do, I think," said Phil. "We shan't have to 'jettison' anything more, if you fellows will stop your chatter and get to work. If you don't, I'll jettison some of the crew."

This brought a needed smile, for the boys were by this time almost exhausted with work and loss of sleep. Phil thought of this. He had not himself slept a moment since his discovery that the boat was sinking at midnight of the night before, while all the rest had caught refreshing little naps between their tours of duty at the pumps. But he left himself out of the account in laying his plans.

"See here, boys," he said, "there isn't room for more than one of you to work here with me at these leaks. One must stay at the pump on deck, of course, but the other two might as well go to sleep till we need you to move freight again."

"Oh, I like that," said Irv. "But why shouldn't *you* do a little of the sleeping, instead of shoving it all off on us, as you've done all day?"

"Oh, never mind about me. I shan't sleep till we get things in shape, so you and Ed go to sleep. You go and relieve Constant at the pump, Will, and let him come and help me."

"You said there was to be no quarrelling," said Irv, "and I have thus far obeyed. I have even stood Ed's exposition of the law about throwing freight overboard, without a murmur, but now I'm going to quarrel with the skipper of this craft, if he doesn't consent to take his full and fair share of the sleeping that simply has to be done. He always takes his full share of the work, even to the cooking. It was only yesterday that he made the worst pot of coffee we've had yet. I insist that he shall not be permitted basely to shirk his fair share of the sleeping."

The other boys echoed the kindly sentiment that Irv had put in that playful way, and Phil was touched by their consideration. Instinctively holding out his hands to them, he said : —

"Thank you, fellows. It's awfully good of you. But I simply could not sleep now. I cannot close my eyes till I see this work of stopping leaks so well advanced as to be sure that the boat is safe. I promise you

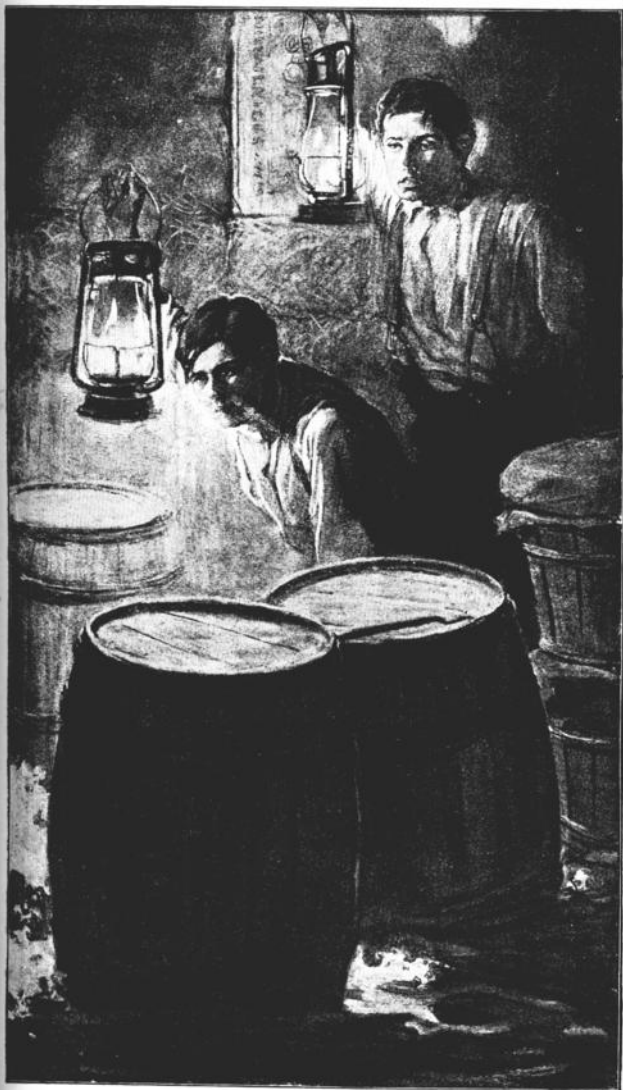
that just as soon as that is accomplished I'll let you fellows go on with the work, and I'll take even a double turn at sleeping."

"You'll promise that?"

"Yes. And by way of compromise, and to keep you from quarrelling, Irv, I'll let you postpone your first sleeping turn till you can get me something hot to swallow — a canned soup with an egg in it, or something else sustaining. I'm hungry."

During the day's excitements there had been no regular meals served on the boat, but as there happened to be a cold boiled ham in the larder and plenty of bread, the boys had indulged frequently in sandwiches. But it now occurred to them that Phil, in his anxiety, had quite forgotten to do this, and had, in fact, eaten nothing whatever for more than eighteen hours. So Irv hastened to prepare him some food of the kind he had asked for.

In the meantime, Phil and Constant, armed with hammers and nails, and bits of board which they from time to time sawed or cut to fit spaces, were busy at the leaks. When they had done all they could in that way within the space laid bare by the removal of the hay, they rolled other freight into that



A TOUR OF INSPECTION.

"'Hello! Irv; we've found the crevasse at last.'"

space, thus exposing another part of the bottom.

In this way the work went forward during the night, all of the boys except Phil securing some sleep in brief snatches, and all of them ministering, so far as they were permitted, to their captain's need for tempting food.

About daylight, in making a shift of freight, Phil suddenly came upon something that made him call out: —

"Hello! what's this? I say, Irv," — for Irving was then working with him, — "we've found the crevasse at last."

"I should say so," said Irv, with a slower drawl than usual, as he held up his lantern and looked. "The Mississippi River and all its large and interesting family of tributaries seem trying to come aboard here."

Just where the gunwale joined the bottom planks of the boat a great seam had been wrenched open, and the water was actually spouting and spurting through it.

"There's one consolation," said Phil. "There isn't any other leak like this anywhere."

"How do you know?"

"Why, if there were two such, we should

have gone to Davy Jones's locker long ago."

Then the two boys set to work trying to fasten a board over the open seam, but their efforts failed completely. Their united strength was not sufficient even to press the board against the timbers, much less to hold it in place long enough to nail it there. For the whole weight of the boat and cargo was pressing down into the river and forcing this jet of water upward through the opening.

"Call the entire crew, Irv," said Phil. "We shall need them all for this job — including the fellow at the pump."

Then, while Irv went to summon the boys, Phil secured a piece of plank three inches thick, very green and very heavy, which had been purchased at Vevay to serve as a staging over which to roll freight in taking it on or discharging it.

"Get me the brace and bit, Will — the quarter-inch auger bit. And, Ed, see if you can find the spikes that were left over in building the boat. And one of you bring the heaviest hammer on board, too."

All this while the boy was measuring, calculating, sawing, and hewing with an axe to fit his great plank to its place. He bored

holes in it at intervals, to facilitate the driving of spikes through its tough and tenacious thickness.

When all was ready, the boys made a strenuous effort to force the timber down against the crack, but to no purpose. Their strength and weight were not sufficient.

Presently a happy thought struck Will Moreraud.

"Wait a minute," he said, and with that he rolled several barrels of corn meal into the open space.

"Now," he cried, "three of you stand on one end of the plank while I drive it into place. Let the other end ride free of the bottom, but one of you hold it so that it can't slew away from the gunwale."

The boys did this, and Will succeeded in driving one end of the timber into place while three of his comrades stood upon that end of it. The other end was held up by the waterspout a foot from the bottom of the boat, but Ed was holding it against the gunwale, in the place where it was desired to force it down.

"Now, hold it so," said Will, "and I'll force it down."

With that he turned a two-hundred-pound

barrel of meal on end upon the plank just beyond the point where the three boys were standing. This pressed the timber down somewhat, and Will helped it with another barrel. Then he began bringing heavy sacks of corn and oats, so heavy that he could scarcely handle them. These he piled high on top of the meal barrels, and the combined weight forced the plank down to within an inch of the bottom.

With one end securely weighted down, he began piling freight in the same way upon the other. Now and then the resisting water would push the heavy and heavily weighted plank away from the gunwale and force a passage for itself between. But when the plank was securely weighted down upon the bottom, two or three of the boys, acting together, were able, with axes and heavy hammers, to drive it finally and firmly against the side of the boat.

Then with the long wrought-iron spikes it was firmly secured in its place, but Phil decided not to remove any of the freight that was piled on top of it, lest the tremendous water pressure from below should force even the great iron spikes out of their sockets and set the leak going again. Indeed, to prevent

this he directed his comrades to pile all the freight they could so that its weight should fall upon the protecting timber.

By the time that all this was done it was eleven o'clock in the morning, and Irv Strong turned to Phil with an earnest look in his eyes, and said:—

“We claim the fulfilment of your promise, Phil. You must go to sleep now.”

The other boys stood by Irv's side with faces as earnest as his own. It was obvious that he spoke for all of them and as the result of an understanding. Phil hesitated for a moment. Then he said:—

“Thank you, fellows, all of you. I'll do as you say.”

As he almost staggered toward the cabin in his exhaustion, he paused, still thoughtful of the general welfare, and said:—

“Irv, you take charge while I sleep, and call me if anything happens.”

Two minutes later the lad was deeply slumbering.

CHAPTER XXIX

RESCUE

WHEN Phil at last waked, Ed was putting supper on the table, and it was rather a late supper too, for the boys had purposely postponed it in order to let Phil get all the sleep possible. He had in fact slept for fully eight hours.

"Well, how do you feel now, skipper?" asked Will.

"I don't know exactly," answered the boy, yawning and stretching. "Stupid for the most part, hungry for the rest of it. I say, what time of day or night is it?"

"It's about eight thirty P.M.," answered Constant, pulling out his antique Swiss watch and consulting it.

"Yes, but *what* P.M.? What day is it? When did I go to sleep?"

The boys soon straightened things out in their captain's temporarily bewildered mind. The effort to do so was aided by the sight and smell of a great platter which

Ed at that moment set upon the table. It held a "boiled dinner." There was a juicy brisket of corned beef on top. Under it were peeled and boiled potatoes, boiled turnips still retaining their shape, and beneath all was the last cabbage on board, the remains of a purchase made at Memphis a week or ten days before, though to the boys it seemed many moons past.

As Phil eyed the savory dish he became for the first time fully awake.

"I say, fellows," he broke out, "what does this mean? Why didn't you have this sort of thing for dinner instead of keeping it for supper?"

"Because you weren't awake at dinner time to help us eat it, Phil. It's the last really good meal we're likely to see for days to come, and we —"

"You see," broke in Irv Strong, "we're bound to build you up again, Phil, if we have to do it with a hammer and nails. But how recklessly you expose your country breeding!" as he helped all round; "if you were captain of an ocean liner now instead of a flatboat, you would know that dinner before six o'clock is impossible to civilized man, and that the actual dinner hour in all

those regions where dress coats and culture prevail, ranges from seven to eight o'clock."

"You are unjust in your mockery, Irv," said Ed. "And by that you in your turn simply expose your provincialism—and ours, too."

"How?" asked Irv, chuckling to think that he had succeeded in diverting the conversation from channels in which it might easily have become emotional. For all the boys had been for hours under a strain of severe anxiety on Phil's account. They were full of admiration for the self-sacrificing way in which he had worked and thought and planned for the common welfare. They had been touched to the heart by his exhaustion after his strenuous work was done, and they had been anxious all that afternoon, lest the breakdown of his strength should prove to be lasting. His appetite at supper relieved that fear, but the very relief made them all the more disposed to be a trifle tender toward him. Irv had prevented a scene, so he didn't mind Ed's criticism.

"How's that, Ed?"

"Why, when you sneer at people because their customs are different from those that

we are used to, don't you see you are just as narrow-minded as they are when they sneer at us because our customs are not theirs."

"Oh, I didn't mean to sneer," said Irv. "But, of course, it does seem odd for people to eat dinner at six or seven o'clock in the evening, instead of eating it about noon."

"Not a bit of it. The dinner hour is a matter of convenience. In a little town like ours it is convenient for everybody to go home to dinner at noon, and so everybody does it. In a big city where people live five or ten miles away from their places of business, it is impossible. In such cities business doesn't begin till nine or ten o'clock in the morning, when the banks and exchanges open, and it is in every way handier to have dinner after the day's work is done. Our habits are just as odd to city people as theirs are to us."

"Oh, yes, I see that," said Irv, "and 'Farmer Hayseed' is just as snobbish when he laughs at 'them city folks' as the city people are when they ridicule him. It reminds me of the nursery story about the town mouse and the country mouse."

"How about the leaks, fellows?" asked Phil, who was now quite himself again.

"There aren't any to speak of," reported Irv. "We've gone over the whole bottom of the boat now, stopping every little crack, and now she's as dry as a bone. Five minutes' pumping in an hour is quite enough."

"All right!" said the captain. "Then we'll take off her bandages in the morning. With that tarpaulin wrapped around her she looks like Sally Hopper when she comes to school with a toothache and a swelled jaw bound up in flannel."

But the next morning brought with it some other and more pressing work than that of removing the tarpaulin.

At daylight the boat was floating easily and rapidly down the middle of the overflowed river, when Phil, who was on deck, saw half a mile ahead, a group of people huddled together upon a small patch of ground that protruded above the water. It was, in fact, the top of one of those very high Indian mounds that abound in the Sunflower swamp country.

Calling the other boys on deck, Phil took a skiff and rowed ahead as rapidly as he could. When he reached the little patch

of dry land, which was circular in shape, and did not exceed twenty feet in diameter, he found a family of people in a woful state of destitution and wretchedness.

They had no fire and no fuel. They had been for several days without food and were now so weak that they could scarcely speak above a whisper. The party consisted of a father, a mother, three big-eyed children, and a negro man.

The negro man, great stalwart fellow that he was, was now the most exhausted one of the party, while the youngest of the children, whom the others called "Baby," as if she were yet too small to carry a name of her own, was still chipper and full of interest in the strange things about her when she was taken on board the flatboat.

The work of rescue occupied a considerable time and cost the boys some very hard work. The people on the mound were too feeble from hunger and long exposure even to help in their own deliverance. The negro man had to be lifted bodily into a skiff and laid out at full length upon its bottom. The rest, except "Baby" were not in much better condition. The man could walk indeed, in an unsteady way, but he was so

dazed in his mind that it required force to keep him from dropping out of the skiff on the way to the flatboat.

The woman and the two older children were chewing strips of leather, cut from the man's boot tops. The baby continually sucked its thumb.

People in such condition are very difficult to manage. They are physically incapable of doing anything to help themselves, and mentally just alert enough to interfere querulously with the efforts of others to help them. To get such a company into frail, unsteady skiffs, to row them away to the flatboat, and then to "hoist them aboard," as Phil called the operation, required quite two hours of very hard work, but it was accomplished at last.

But to get them aboard was only the beginning of the work of rescue. They were starving and they must be fed. Phil was for setting out the remainder of the last evening's boiled dinner at once and bidding them help themselves. But Irv's superior knowledge of such matters prevented that disastrous blunder.

"Why, don't you know, Phil, that to give them even an ounce of solid food now would

be to kill them ! Open a can of consomme, and heat it quick."

When the soup was ready he peppered it lavishly, explaining to Ed :—

"The problem is not merely to get food into their stomachs, but to get their stomachs to turn the food to some account after we've got it there. In their weakened condition they can't digest anything solid, and it is a serious question whether their stomachs can even manage this thin, watery soup. So I'm putting pepper into it as a 'bracer.' It will stimulate their stomachs to do their work."

As he explained, he fed the soup to the sufferers—a single spoonful to each. They were clamorous for more, but Irv was resolute.

"Wait till I see how that goes," he said. "You can't have any more till I say the word."

The children cried. The woman hysterically laughed and cried alternately. The man sat still with bowed head and with the tears trickling down his face—whether tears of joy, of distress, or of mere weakness, it was hard to say.

The negro man was too far gone even

to swallow. Irv had to turn him on his back and literally pour a spoonful of soup down his throat. Then he said to Ed and Constant:—

“I’m afraid this man is dying. His hands are very cold and so are his feet—cold to the knees. Take some towels—no, here,” seizing a blanket from one of the bunks,—“take this. Dip it into boiling water,—fortunately we’ve got it ready,—wring the blanket out and wrap his feet and legs in it, from the knees down. Then take towels and do the same for his hands. Pound him, too, punch him, roll him about—bulldoze and kuklux him in every way you can till you get his blood to going again! It’s the only way to save the poor fellow’s life.”

By this time Irv deemed it safe to give each of his other patients another spoonful or two of the soup, and he even ventured to pour three more spoonfuls down the throat of the negro.

“He’s reviving a little,” Irv explained. “And as a strong man, with a robust stomach accustomed to coarse food, he can stand more soup than the others.”

Thus little by little Irv and Ed, with

such assistance from the other boys as they needed, slowly brought the starving party back to life. As the negro man had been the first to succumb to starvation, — perhaps because his robust physical nature demanded more food than more delicately constructed bodies do, — so he was the first to recover. By nightfall he was walking about on the deck, while all the rest were still lying in the bunks below as invalids.

After awhile Irv stopped him.

“Did anybody ever tell you that you’re an exceptional personage?”

“Lor’ no, boss. Well, yes, some o’ de black folks in de chu’ch done took ’ceptions to me sometimes ’cause I wouldn’t give enough to de cause, but fore de court, boss—”

“That isn’t what I mean,” broke in Irv, with smiles rippling all over him, and running down even to his legs. “I mean, did anybody ever notice that you were, — oh, well, never mind that; but tell me, would you like a good big slice of cold corned beef before you go to sleep?”

The negro answered in words. But his more emphatic answer was not one of words. He threw his arms around Irv in a giant’s

embrace that almost crushed the youth's bones.

"There, that will do," said Irv. "You have an engagement as a cotton compress or something of that sort, when you're at home, I suppose. But now, if I let you have a good big slice of cold corned beef to-night, will you eat it just as I tell you, take a bite when I tell you and at no other time, and stop whenever I tell you? Will you promise?"

"Shuah, sar, shuah," eagerly responded the man.

"But 'sure' isn't enough," replied Irv, half in amusement and half in seriousness, for he felt that his experiment was very risky, and he wanted to be able to regulate it, and stop it at any point. "Sure isn't enough. Will you promise me on the isosceles triangle?"

"Yes, boss."

"On the grand panjandrum?"

"For shuah."

"And even on the parallelopipedon itself?"

"Shuah, boss. I dunno what dem names mean, but for shuah I'll do jes' what you tells me to if you'll lem' me have de meat."

Irv was satisfied. He went below and prepared a sandwich. Returning, he allowed the man to eat it in bites, with long intervals between. It not only did no harm, it restored the man to such vitality that Phil decided to get some information out of him as to the flatboat's whereabouts.

He learned first that the rescued family sleeping below was that of a well-to-do planter; that the flood, coming as it did as the result of a crevasse, and therefore suddenly, had taken them completely by surprise, in the middle of the night, four or five days ago; that they had with difficulty escaped to the Indian mound in a field near by, and that they had not been able to take with them any food, or anything else except the clothes they had on. This accounted for the fact that the woman wore only a wrapper over her nightdress, that the man was nearly naked, and that the children were clad only in their thin little nightgowns.

Then Phil learned that *The Last of the Flatboats* was now in the Tallahatchie River, as he had guessed, not far from the point where it enters the Yazoo, at Greenwood. A little study of the map showed Phil that if this were true, he might expect to reach

Vicksburg within four or five days, which in fact is what happened, not on the fourth or fifth, but on the sixth day thereafter, early in the morning.

In the mean time the crew and their guests had eaten up pretty nearly all the boat's store of provisions, and *The Last of the Flatboats* had been stripped of her unsightly swaddling-cloth, the tarpaulin. Phil tied her up at the landing near the historic town as proudly as if she had not run away, and misbehaved as she had done.

"She has only been showing us some of the wonders of the Wonderful River, that we should never otherwise have known anything about," he said.

But this is going far ahead of my story. The boys and their boat were still in the Yazoo, nearly a week's journey above Vicksburg. So let us return to them.

CHAPTER XXX

A YAZOO AFTERNOON

THERE were no difficulties of any consequence to contend with after *The Last of the Flatboats* entered the Yazoo. The boys' guests were well now, and joined them in their long talks on deck. These talks covered every conceivable subject, and the planter, who proved himself to be an unusually well-informed man, added not a little to their interest.

"I say, Ed," said Phil one day, holding up one of his newspapers, "you were all wrong about the crops."

"How do you mean, Phil?"

"Why, you put corn first, as the most valuable crop produced in this country."

"Well, isn't it?"

"Not if this newspaper writer knows his business and tells the truth."

"Why, what does he say?" asked Ed, with an interest he had not at first shown in Phil's criticism.

"He says that in Missouri, which I take to be one of the great corn-growing states—"

"It is all that," answered Ed. "What about it?"

"Why, he says that in Missouri the eggs and spring chickens produced by what he calls 'the great American hen' sell every year for more money than all the corn, wheat, oats, and hay raised in the state, twice over. And he gives the figures for it too."

"That is surprising," said Ed, "but it is very probably true. The trouble is that we have no trustworthy statistics on the subject. No ordinary farmer keeps any account of his crops of that kind. Not one farmer in a hundred could tell you at the end of a year how many dozens of eggs or how many pairs of chickens he had sold. Still less could he tell you how many of either his family had eaten. So it must all be guess-work about such crops, while practically every bushel of wheat, corn, and oats and every bale of cotton or hay, and every pound of tobacco is carefully set down in official records."

"That reminds me," said Irv, "of the remark a farmer once made to me, when

deploring the poverty of himself and his class."

"What was it?" asked Will.

"Why, he said that lots of men in the cities got two or three thousand dollars a year for their work, while he never yet had got over five hundred dollars for his. I questioned him a little, and found that he didn't take any account of his house rent and fuel free, or of all the farm produce that his family ate. He thought the few hundred dollars he had to the good at the end of the year, after paying for his groceries and dry goods, was all he got for his labor."

"Speaking of these unconsidered crops," said the planter, "I fancy it would astonish us if we could have the figures on them. It is said, for example, that more than a million turkeys are eaten in New York City alone every winter. Now, if we count all the other great cities and all the little ones, and all the towns and all the country homes where turkeys are eaten, it will be very hard to guess how many millions of these fowls are raised and sold and eaten in this country every year."

"It's hard on the turkeys," moralized Will Moreraud.

"Well, I don't know," answered Phil. "I remember reading a story by James K. Paulding called 'A Reverie in the Woods.' He tells how he fell half asleep and heard all the animals and birds and fishes holding a sort of congress to denounce man for his cruelties to them. After a while the earth-worm got so excited over the matter that he wriggled himself into the brook. There-upon the trout, who had also been one of the complainants against man's cruelty, snapped up the worm, and swallowed him. Seeing this, the cat grabbed the trout, and the fox caught the cat, and the eagle caught the fox, and the hawk made luncheon on the dove, and so on through the whole list. I imagine that that is nature's way. Everything that lives, lives at the expense of something else that lives. It is all a struggle for existence, with the survival of the fittest as the outcome. And as a man, or even a commonplace boy like me, is fitter to live than a turkey, I think the slaughter of those innocents is all right enough."

"You are entirely right, Phil," said Ed. "A pound of boy is certainly worth fifty or fifty thousand pounds of turkey, because one boy can do more for the world than all

the turkeys that were ever hatched. And when a boy eats turkey he converts it into boy, and it helps him to grow into a man."

"Precisely!" said Irv Strong. "It cost the worthless lives of many pigs, turkeys, chickens, sheep, and cattle to make George Washington. But surely one George Washington was worth more than all the pigs, turkeys, chickens, sheep, and beef-cattle that were killed in all this country between the day he was born and the day of his death. But pardon us," added Irv, turning to the planter, "you were going to say something more when we interrupted."

"It was nothing of any consequence," answered their guest, "and your little discussion has interested me more than anything I had thought of saying. But I was going to say that according to a New York newspaper's careful calculation, that city pays more than a million dollars every spring for white flowers for Easter decorations alone, while its expenditures for flowers during the rest of the year is estimated at not less than five millions more. Then there is the peanut crop. Who ever thinks of it? Who thinks of peanuts in any serious way? Yet it was the peanut crop that saved the people

of tidewater Virginia and North Carolina from actual starvation during the first few years after the Civil War. And every year that crop amounts to more than two and a half million bushels!"

"What luck for the circuses!" exclaimed Will Moreraud.

"But the circuses do not furnish the chief market for peanuts," said Irv, who was somewhat "up" on these things.

"Where are they consumed, then?" asked Will.

"Well, the greater part of them are used in the manufacture of 'pure' Italian or French olive oil—most of it 'warranted sublime,'" said Irv.

"Are we a nation of swindlers, then?" asked Phil, whose courage was always offended by any suggestion of untruth or hypocrisy or dishonesty.

"I don't know," said Irv, "how to draw the line there. The men who make olive oil out of peanuts stoutly contend that their olive oil is really better, more wholesome, and more palatable than that made from olives."

"Why don't they call it peanut oil, then, and advertise it as better than olive oil,

and take the consequences?" asked upright, downright, bravely honest Phil.

"Men in trade are not always so scrupulous about honesty and truthfulness as you are, Phil," said Ed. "But sometimes — they excuse their falsehoods on the ground —"

"There isn't any excuse possible for not telling the truth," said Phil. "Men who tell lies in their business are swindlers, and that's the end of the matter. If they are making a better article than the imported one, they ought to say so, and people would find it out quickly enough. When they offer their goods as something quite different from what they really are, they are telling lies, I say, and I, for one, have no respect for a liar."

"You are right, Phil, of course," said Ed. "But there is a world of that sort of thing done. The potteries in New Jersey, I am told, mark their finer wares with European brands, and they contend that if they did not do it they could not sell their goods."

"A more interesting illustration," said the planter, "is found in the matter of cheeses. Cheese, as at first produced, is the same the world over. But cheese that is set to 'ripen' in the caves of Roquefort is one

thing, cheese ripened at Camembert is another, and so on through the list. Now of late years it has been discovered that the differences between these several kinds of cheese are due solely to microbes. There is one sort of microbe at Roquefort, another at Brie, and so on. Now American cheese-makers found this out some years ago, and decided that they could make any sort of cheese they pleased in this country. So they took the several kinds of imported cheeses, selected the best samples of each, and set to work to cultivate their microbes. By introducing the microbes of Roquefort into their cheeses they made Roquefort cheeses of them. By inoculating them with the Brie microbe, or the Camembert microbe, or the Stilton or Gruyère microbe, they converted their simple American cheeses into all these choice varieties. And it is asserted by experts that these American imitations, or some of them at any rate, are actually superior to the imported cheeses, besides being much more uniform in quality."

"That's all right," said Phil. "But why not tell the truth about it? Surely, if their cheeses are better than those made abroad, they can trust the good judges of cheese

to find out the fact and declare it. And when that fact became known they could sell their cheese for a higher price than that of the imported article, on the simple ground of its superiority. How I do hate shams and frauds and lies — and especially liars !”

“What bothers me,” drawled Irv, “is that I’ve been eating microbes all my life without knowing it. I here and now register a solemn vow that I’ll never again eat a piece of cheese — unless I want to.”

“Oh, the microbes are all right,” said Ed, “provided they are of the right sort. There are some microbes that kill us, and others that we couldn’t live without. There are still others, like those in cheese, that do us neither good nor harm, except that they make our food more palatable. For that matter the yeast germ is a microbe, and it is that alone that makes our bread light. Surely we can’t quit eating light bread and take to heavy baked dough instead, because light bread is made light by the presence of some hundreds of millions of living germs in every loaf of it while it is in the dough state.”

“Coming back to the question of crops,” said the planter, “does it occur to you that there would be no possibility of prosperity

in this country but for the absolute freedom of traffic between the states?"

"Would you kindly explain?" said Ed.

"Certainly. The farmers of New York and New Jersey used to grow all the wheat, and all the beef, mutton, and pork that were eaten in the great city, and they made a good living by doing it. But the time came when the western states could raise wheat and beef and all the rest of it much more cheaply than any eastern farmer could. This threatened to drive the New York and New Jersey farmers out of business, and naturally, if they could, they would have made their legislators pass laws to exclude this western wheat and meat from competition with their crops. This would have hurt the western farmer; for what would in that case have happened in New York would have happened in all the other eastern states. But it would have hurt the people of the great cities—and indeed all the people in the country still more. It would have made the city people's food cost them two or three times as much as before. That would have compelled them to charge more for their manufactured products and for their work in carrying on the foreign

commerce of the country. That would have crippled commerce, — which lives upon exceedingly small margins of profit, — and the prosperity of the country would have been ruined. It was to prevent that sort of thing that our national government was formed, with a constitution which forbade any state to interfere with commerce between the states.”

“What became of the New York farmer, then?” asked Irv.

“When he found that he couldn’t raise wheat, corn, etc., as cheaply as the western farmer could sell them in New York, he quit raising those things and produced things that paid him instead.”

“What sort of things?”

“Fruits, poultry, milk, butter, eggs, cheese, vegetables, buckwheat, honey, etc., and in producing these the New York farmer grew richer than ever. Since New York quit raising on any considerable scale the things that we commonly think of as farm products, that state has become the richest in the country in the value of its agricultural production, simply because the New York farmer raises only those things for which there is a market almost at his front gate.”

"That is very interesting," said Will. 'But how is it that the far West can furnish New York and Philadelphia and the rest of the eastern cities with bread and meat cheaper than the farmers near those cities can sell the same things?'"

"The value of land," said the planter, "has much to do with it. The value of a farmer's land is his investment, and first of all, he must earn interest on that."

"Pardon me," said Ed, "but that, it seems to me, is a very small factor. The value of good farming lands in the East is not very different from that of similar lands in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and the other great farming states of the West."

"What is the key to the mystery, then?" asked Irv.

"Transportation," answered Ed. "The western farm lands, with an equal amount of labor, produce more wheat, corn, pork, and the like, than eastern lands do, and it costs next to nothing to carry their wheat, corn, pork, etc., to the East."

"What does it cost?" asked Will.

"Well, I see that the rate is now less than three mills per ton per mile. At three mills per ton per mile, ten barrels, or a ton, of flour

could be carried from Chicago to New York for three dollars, or thirty cents a barrel. Even at half a cent per ton per mile it would cost only fifty cents."

"While the railroads are engaged in transporting that flour to the hungry New Yorkers at that exceedingly reasonable rate," said Irv, slowly rising to his feet, "it is my duty to go below and convert a few insignificant pounds of the flour on board into a pan of biscuit, while you, Ed, fry some salt pork, the only meat we have left, and heat up a can or two of tomatoes."

This ended the long chat, for besides the preparation of supper there was much else to do. There were the lights to be hung in their places, and more occupying still, there was the difficult task of tying up the boat for the night. For experience had taught Phil caution, and he had decided that until *The Last of the Flatboats* should again float upon the broad reaches of the Mississippi, she should be securely moored to two trees during the hours of darkness. With the Yazoo ten feet above its banks, it would have been very easy indeed for the flatboat to drift out of the river into the fields and woodlands. And Phil had had all the experience he wanted of such wanderings.

CHAPTER XXXI

AN OFFER OF HELP

ON the day before they reached Vicksburg, the planter whose family had been rescued was able to have a long conversation with Phil. His first disposition had been to recognize Irv as the master spirit of the crew, because of his controlling activity in the matter of restoring the starved party to life and health, but he was quickly instructed otherwise by Irving himself.

He explained to Phil just who and what he was.

“I have lost a great deal, of course, by this overflow, but fortunately the bulk of my cotton crop was already shipped before the flood came, so that that is safe. Moreover, I am not altogether dependent upon my planting operations. In short,—you will understand that I say this by way of explanation and not otherwise,—I am a fairly well-to-do man,—I may even say a

very well-to-do man, — independently of my planting operations.”

“I am glad to hear that,” said Phil, “because it has troubled me a good deal, especially as I have looked at Baby and the other children. I have wondered what was to become of them, and in what way we boys might best help you and them over the bridge.”

“I am glad you said that,” the planter responded. “That gives me the opportunity I am seeking. In the same spirit in which you have been thinking of helping me, I want you to let me help you and your comrades. I don’t know anything of the circumstances of the young men who compose this crew, yourself or the others; but I assume that if your circumstances were particularly comfortable, you would hardly be engaged in the not very profitable business of running a flatboat. At your ages, you would more probably be in school.”

“So we are,” said Phil; “we are none of us particularly well-to-do, but we are able to stay at home and go to school. This trip is a kind of a lark — or partly that and partly a thing done to restore my brother’s health; but we are obliged to make it pay its own

way, anyhow, because we could not afford the trip otherwise. Of course, we are out of school for the time being, that is to say, for a few months, but we all expect to make that up. As to college, I don't know. Probably not many of us will ever be able to afford that."

"That, then, is exactly what I want to come to," said the gentleman. "You are obviously boys of good parentage. I cannot offer to pay you for the great service you have done to me and mine—no, no; don't interrupt me now; let me say this out. I should not think of insulting you in any such way as that; but why should you not let me contribute out of the abundance that I still possess to the expense of a college course for all five of you very bright young fellows? Believe me, nothing in the world could give me a greater gratification than to do this. You have rescued me and mine from a fate so terrible that I shudder to think of it even now. Let me in my turn help a little to advance your interests in life."

Phil thought for a considerable time before he replied. Not that he had any notion of accepting the offer thus made,

but that he did not want, in rejecting it, to hurt the feelings of a man so generous, and one who had made the offer with so much delicacy. At last the boy said:—

“ Believe me, sir, I appreciate, and all my comrades will when I tell them of it, the good feeling and the generosity that have dictated your offer, but we could not on any account accept it. I am sure that in this I speak for all. I believe that any boy in this country who really wants an education can get it, if he chooses to work hard enough and live plainly enough. My brother has not been able to go to school much at any time in his life, because of his ill-health, and yet he is much the best educated one among us, and if he lives, he will be reckoned a well-educated man, even among men who are college graduates. As for the rest of us, we can get a college education, as I said, if we choose to work hard enough and live hard enough. If we don't choose to do that, why, we must go without. But we thank you all the same, and I want you to know that we recognize the generosity of your offer, though we cannot accept it. Now, please don't let's talk of that any more, because it isn't pleasant to refuse a

request such as yours ; for I take it from your manner and tone that you mean it as a request rather than as an offer of aid."

With that, Phil walked away, and there was naturally no more to be said. But an hour later the gentleman, who was still feeble from his late exposure and suffering, asked Phil again to sit down by him. Then he said : —

"I am not going to reopen the question that we discussed a while ago, because I understand and honor your decision with regard to it. But there is another little service that I am in position to render you, and that I might render to anybody with whom I came into pleasant contact. My name counts for a good deal with my commission merchant in New Orleans ; for how much it counts, it would not be quite modest for me to say ; but, at any rate, I want to give you a letter to him, if you will allow me. When you get there, you will wish to sell your cargo, and of course you will be surrounded by buyers, but most of them will be disposed to take advantage of your youth and of your inexperience in the market. I cannot imagine how, in their

hands, you can escape the loss of a considerable part of the value of what you have to sell. Now the commission merchant to whom I wish to give you a letter is a man of the very highest integrity, besides being my personal friend and my agent in business. I suggest that you place the whole matter of the sale of your boat and cargo in his hands, and I am confident that the difference in the results will be many hundreds of dollars in your favor. This is, as I said, a service that I might render even to a casual acquaintance. Surely, you will not deny me the privilege of rendering it to a group of young men who have done for me what you boys have."

Phil rose and stood before him embarrassed.

"I suppose," he said, "I ought to consult my comrades before accepting even this favor at your hands, but I shan't do anything of the kind. I understand what you feel and what you mean, and if you won't ask anything of your commission merchant except that he shall sell us out on his usual terms, I shall frankly be very much obliged to you for the letter you offer; for it has really been a source of a good deal of anxi-

ety to me, this thing of how to sell out when we get there."

It was so arranged; and as the gentleman and his family were to quit the boat at Vicksburg, the letter was written that day.

At Vicksburg the boys offered the hospitality of their boat to their guests until such time as proper clothing could be provided for them, their condition of destitution being one in which it was impossible for them to think of going ashore. This offer was frankly accepted, and as the boys were themselves in sad need of supplies, the delay of two or three days was not only of no consequence to them, but it introduced a new element of life on board *The Last of the Flatboats*. The lady sent into the town for dressmakers and seamstresses in such numbers as might enable her quickly to equip herself and the children for a reappearance among civilized human beings. The cabin became a work-room, and two sewing-machines were installed even upon the deck. It looked a little odd, but, as Irv Strong put it, "it's only another incident in a voyage that began with Jim Hughes and promises to end we do not know with what. Anyhow, we've had good luck on the whole, and if we

don't come out ahead now, it'll probably be our own fault."

This was the feeling of all the boys. They had the open Mississippi before them for the brief remainder of their journey. The river was still enormously full, of course, but it was falling now, and below Vicksburg it had been kept well within the levees, so that there was no further probability of any cross-country excursions on the part of *The Last of the Flatboats*. They had nothing to do, apparently, but to cast the boat loose and let her float the rest of the way upon placid waters. But this again is getting ahead of my story. The boat is still tied to the bank at Vicksburg. Let us return to her.

CHAPTER XXXII

PUBLICITY

As soon as the first necessities of their business were provided for at Vicksburg, Phil wandered off in search of newspapers. He had become interested in many things through his newspaper reading in connection with Jim Hughes, and concerning many matters he was curious to know the outcome. So he sought not only for the latest newspapers, and not chiefly for them, but rather for back numbers covering the period during which *The Last of the Flatboats* had been wandering in the woods. He secured a lot of them, some of them from New York, some from Chicago, some from St. Louis, and some from other cities.

To his astonishment, when he opened the earliest of them, — those that had been published soon after the affair at Memphis, — he found them filled with portraits of himself and of his companions, with pictures of *The Last of the Flatboats*, and even with

interviews, of which neither he nor Irv Strong, who was the other one chiefly quoted, had any recollection. Yet when they read the words quoted from their lips, they remembered that these things were substantially what they had said to innocent-looking persons not at all known to them as newspaper reporters, who had quite casually conversed with them at Memphis. Neither had either of them posed for a portrait, and yet here were pictures of them, ranging all the way from perfect likenesses to absolute caricatures, freely exploited.

Phil and Irv were so curious about this matter that they asked everybody who came on board for an explanation. Finally, one young man, who had come to them with an inquiry as to the price at which they would be willing to sell out the boat and cargo at Vicksburg instead of going on to New Orleans, smiled gently and said, in reply to Phil's questions:—

“Well, perhaps you don't always recognize a reporter when you see him. Sometimes he may come to you to talk about quite other things than those that he really wants you to tell him about. Sometimes your talk will prove to be exactly what he

wants to interest his readers with, and as a reporter usually has a pretty accurate memory, he is able to reproduce all that you say so nearly as you said it, that you can't yourself afterward discover any flaw in his report. Sometimes, too, the reporter happens to be an artist sent to get a picture of you. He may have a kodak concealed under his vest, but usually that does not work. It is clumsy, you know, and generally unsatisfactory. It is a good deal easier for a newspaper artist who knows his business to talk to you about turnips, or Grover Cleveland, or Christian Science, or the tariff, or any of those things that people always talk about, and while you think him interested in the expression of your views, make a sketch of you on his thumb nail or on his cuff, which he can reproduce at the office for purposes of print. By the way, have you talked with any reporters since you arrived at Vicksburg?"

"No," answered Phil; "none of them have come aboard."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Well, yes; I haven't seen a single man from the press."

"Well, if any of the papers should happen

to 'get on' to the fact that you are here, and print something about it, I will send you copies in the morning."

The next morning the promised copies came. One of them contained not only a very excellent portrait of Phil and a group picture of the crew, but also an almost exact reproduction of the conversation given above.

A new light dawned upon Phil's mind.

"After all, that fellow was a reporter and a very clever one. He didn't want to buy the boat or its cargo or anything else. But I wonder if he was an artist also. If not, who made those pictures?"

"Well," said Irv, "you remember there was a young woman who came on board about the same time that he did. She was very much interested in Baby, but I noticed that she went all over the boat, and when you and that young fellow were talking, she sat down on the anchor, there, and seemed to be writing a letter on a pad. Just then, as I remember, we fellows were gathered around the new lantern you had just bought and examining it—and, by the way, here's the lantern in the group picture."

All this was a revelation to Phil, and it interested him mightily. As for Irv Strong,

he was so interested that he made up his mind to beard the lion in his den. He went to the office of one of the newspapers and asked to see its editor. But out of him he got no satisfaction whatever. The editor hadn't the slightest idea where the interviews or the pictures had come from.

"All that," he said, "is managed by our news department. I never know what they are going to do. I judge them only by results. But I do not mind saying to you that there would have been several peremptory discharges in this office if this paper had not had a good picture of *The Last of the Flatboats*, a portrait of your interesting young captain and other pictures of human interest tending to illustrate the arrival of this boat at our landing, although we rarely print pictures of any kind in our paper. This is an exceptional case. And I think that the chief of our news department would have had an uncomfortable quarter of an hour if he and his subordinates had failed to secure a talk with persons so interesting as those who captured Jim Hughes, as he is called, and secured the arrest of the others of that bank burglar's gang, and afterward rescued one of the most distinguished citi-

zens of Mississippi and his family from death by starvation. Really, you must excuse me from undertaking the task of telling you how our boys do these things. It is not my business to know, and I have a great many other things to do. It is their business to get the news. For that they are responsible, and to that end they have control of adequate means. Oh, by the way, that suggests to me a good editorial that ought to be written right now. Perhaps you will be interested to read it in to-morrow morning's paper. I am just going to write it."

As it was now midnight, Irv was bewildered. How in the world was he to read in the next morning's paper an editorial that had, at this hour, just occurred to the man who was yet to write it? How was it to be written, set up in type, and printed before that early hour when the newspaper must be on sale?

The editor knew, if Irv did not. He knew that the hour of midnight sees the birth of many of the ablest and most influential newspaper utterances of our time. Irv's curious questions had suggested to him a little essay upon the value of Publicity, and

it was upon that theme that he wrote. He showed, with what Irv and Phil regarded as an extraordinary insight into things that they had supposed to be known only to themselves, how their very irregular reading of the newspapers, from time to time, as they received them, had first awakened their interest in a vague and general way in the bank burglary case; how, as their interest became intenser, and the descriptions of the fleeing criminal became more and more detailed, they had at last so far coupled one thing with another as to reach a correct conclusion at the critical moment. He showed how, but for this persistent and minute Publicity, they would never have dreamed of arresting the fugitive who was posing as their pilot — how, but for this, the criminals would probably never have been caught at all; how their escape would have operated as an encouragement to crime everywhere by relieving it of the fear of detection, — and much else to the like effect. It was a very interesting article, and it was one which set the boys thinking.

“After all,” said Ed, “we owe a great deal more to the newspapers than I had ever thought. And the more we think of it, the

more we see that we owe it to them. I don't know whether they are always sincere in their antagonism to wrong or not, but at any rate in their rivalry with each other to get the earliest news and to stand best with the public, they manage pretty generally to expose about all the wrongs there are, and to rouse public opinion against them. I suppose that, but for the newspapers, we should not have a very good country to live in, especially so far as big cities are concerned."

"As to those sentiments," said Irv, "I'm afraid one Thomas Jefferson got ahead of you, Ed. I remember reading that he said somewhere, that he would rather have a free press without a free government than a free government without a free press. I imagine his meaning to have been that we could not long have a free government without a free press, and that if we have a free press it must pretty soon compel the setting up of a free government."

"But the newspapers do publish such dreadful things," said Constant. "They make so many sensations that their moral influence, I suppose, is pretty bad."

"Well, is it?" asked Irv. "If there is a pest-hole in any city, where typhus or small-

pox is breeding, and a newspaper exposes it, it is not pleasant reading, of course, but it arouses public attention and brings public opinion to bear to compel a remedy. If there is a health board, the newspapers all want to know what the health board is doing; if there isn't a health board, the newspapers all cry out, 'Why isn't there a health board?' and presently one is organized. Now I suppose it is very much the same way about moral plague spots. If vice or crime prevail in any part of the city, the newspapers print the news of it and call upon the police to suppress it. This arouses public attention and brings pressure to bear upon public officials until the bad thing is done away with, or at least reduced to small proportions."

"Yes," said Ed, thinking and speaking slowly, "and there is another thing. Even when the newspapers print the details about scandals, and we say it would be better not to publish such things, it may be that the newspapers are right; because every rascal that is inclined to do scandalous things knows by experience or observation that the newspapers, if they get hold of the facts, will print them and hold him up to the execration of mankind. If the newspapers did

not print the news of such things, every scoundrel would know that he could do what he pleased without fear of being made the subject of scandal. The first thought of every rascal seems to be to keep his affairs out of the newspapers. Now perhaps it is better that he cannot keep them out; as he certainly cannot. In very many cases, without doubt or question, men are restrained from doing outrageous things merely by the fear that their conduct will be exploited with pictures of themselves and fac-similes of their letters and everything of the kind, in so-called sensational newspapers."

"Well, all that is so, I suppose," said Will, "though I hadn't thought of it quite to the extent that you have, Ed. I have always been told that the newspapers were horribly sensational and immoral, but, now that I think of it, when they publish a story of immorality, it is because somebody has been doing the immoral thing that they report; and as you say, the fact that the newspapers are pretty sure to get hold of the truth and publish it in every case is often a check on men's tendency to do immoral things."

Before parting with their rescued friends

at Vicksburg, the boys had to go ashore and be photographed, at the planter's solicitation.

"I want my children always to think of you young men as their friends," he said,—"friends to whom they owe more than they can ever repay. I don't want 'Baby' to forget you as she might—she is so young still—if she did not have your portraits to remind her as she grows older. As for myself and my wife—I cannot say how much of gratitude we feel. There are some things that one can't even try to say. But be sure—" He broke down here, but the boys understood.

Irv Strong, whose objection to anything like a "scene" is a familiar fact to the reader, diverted the conversation by saying:—

"It would be a pity to perpetuate the memory of these clothes of ours, or to let the little ones learn as they grow up what a ragamuffin crew it was with whom an unfortunate accident once compelled them to associate for a time. So suppose we have only our faces photographed now, and send you pictures of our best clothes when we get back home."

The triviality served its purpose, and the party went to the photographer's.

When the time of leave taking came there were tears on the part of the mother and the children, while "Baby" stoutly insisted upon remaining on the flatboat with "my big boys," as she called her rescuers. She was especially in love with Phil, who, in spite of his absorbing duties, had found time to play with her and tell her wonderful stories. During the clothes-making wait at Vicksburg, indeed, Phil had done little else than entertain the beautiful big-eyed child. He repeated to her all the nursery rhymes and jingles he had ever heard in his infancy or since, and to the astonishment of his companions, he made up many jingles of his own for her amusement. He made up funny stories for her too, — stories that were funny only because he illustrated them with comical faces and grotesque gestures.

So when the time of parting came the child clung to him, and had to be torn away in tears. I suppose I ought not to tell it on Phil, but he too had to turn aside from the others and use his handkerchief on his eyes before he could give the command to "cast off" in a husky and not very steady voice.

CHAPTER XXXIII

DOWN "THE COAST"

THE moon was gibbous in its approach to the full when the boat left Vicksburg. So all the way to their journey's end the boys had moonlight of evenings except when fog obscured it briefly, and that was not often.

As they floated down the river, with sub-tropical scenery on either hand, with palms and live-oaks and other perennial trees giving greenery of the greenest possible kind at a season of the year when at their home not a leaf remained alive and all the trees were gaunt skeletons, the boys lived in something like a dream. And at night the moonlight, immeasurably more brilliant than any they had ever seen, additionally stimulated their imaginations and captivated their fancy.

"That is Baton Rouge," said Ed, as they came within sight of a city on the left side of the river. "It means 'red stick.'"

"Why in the world did anybody ever name a town 'red stick'?" asked Irv.

"Why, because when Tecumseh came down this way to persuade all the Indians to join in a war upon the whites, as I told you up in New Madrid Bend, he offered red sticks to the warriors. All that accepted them were thereby pledged to join in the war. It was here that the first red sticks were distributed, and so this spot was called 'Baton Rouge.'"

"But why didn't they call it 'Red Sticks' and have done with it?" asked Will. "Why did they translate it into French?"

"The Indians didn't know English," answered Ed. "The French first explored the Mississippi, and they not only gave French names to everything, but they taught a rude sort of French to the Indians. There is a town on the upper Mississippi called 'Prairie du Chien.' That means 'the prairie of the dog.' Then there is 'Marquette' in Wisconsin, named after a great French missionary and explorer. And there is Dubuque, and there are half a dozen other places with old French names. In Arkansas there is a river called the 'St. François.' And the name Arkansas itself was originally a

French effort to spell the Indian word 'Arkansaw.' By the way, the Legislature of that state has passed a law declaring that the proper pronounciation of the state's name is 'Arkansaw.' It is said that when James K. Polk, afterward President, was speaker of the House of Representatives, there were two congressmen there from Arkansas. One of them always pronounced his state's name 'Arkansas,' as if it were English, and with the accent on the second syllable, while the other always called it 'Arkansaw.' Polk was so excessively polite that when either of the two arose to speak, he recognized him as 'the gentleman from Arkansas' or as 'the gentleman from Arkansaw,' accordingly as the gentleman recognized was in the habit of pronouncing the word."

"That's interesting," said Phil. "And I suppose the same thing is true about the 'Tensaw' country in Alabama. I see that it is spelled on most maps 'Tensas,' but on some it is spelled 'Tensaw,' and I suppose that is the right pronounciation."

"It is," said Ed. "And then there is the Ouachita River. Its name is pronounced 'Washitaw,' but spelled in the French way. I once heard of a man who stayed in New

Orleans for six weeks, looking every day for the advertisement of some steamboat going up that river. He saw announcements of boats for the Ouachita River, of course, but none for the 'Washitaw.' Finally, somebody enlightened him. You see these French names were bestowed when French was the only language of this region, and they have survived."

The boys were studying the map by the almost superfluous light of a lantern. Presently one of them said:—

"A little way down the river, on the western bank, is a place called Plaquemine. That also is French, I suppose?"

"Certainly," answered Ed, "and it is a region with an interesting history. It was there that the Acadians went when they were driven out of their home in British America. Longfellow tells all about it in the poem 'Evangeline.' I'll read some of it," he added, rising to go below for the book.

"No, don't," pleaded Irv. "That poem gives me 'that tired feeling.' Its story is beautiful. Its sentiment is all that could be desired. But its metre makes me feel as if I were stumbling over stones in the dark."

"I'll bet your favorite wager, a brass button, Irv, that you can't quote a single line of the poem you are so ready to criticise," said Will Moreraud, who was Longfellow mad, as his comrades said.

"Well, I'll take that bet," said Irv. "And I'll give you odds. I'll bet seven brass buttons to your one that I can, off hand, repeat the worst and clumsiest four lines in the whole poem."

"Go ahead," said Will. "I'll buy a glittering brass button in New Orleans, 'scaloped all the way round and halfway back,' as the boy said of his ginger cakes, and pay the bet if I lose."

"All right," said Irv. "Here goes:—

'Every house was an inn, where all were welcomed
and feasted ;

For with this simple people, who lived like brothers
together,

All things were held in common, and what one had was
another's.

Yet under Benedict's roof hospitality seemed more abundant.' "

"It really doesn't sound like poetry," said Phil. "But then, I'm no judge. All the same, Irv wins the bet, and I'll exercise my authority as commander of this craft and

company to compel you, Will, to buy and deliver that brass button."

"But how do you know that those four lines are the worst in the poem?" asked Will.

"Because there simply couldn't be worse ones," said Phil, "and unless you produce some others equally bad, I shall hold these to be the worst."

"Now," said Ed, "you fellows are very free with your criticisms. But perhaps you don't know as much as you might. Longfellow undertook to write in hexameters. We all know what hexameters are, because we have all read some Latin poetry. But there is this difficulty: a hexameter line must end in a spondee—or a foot of two long or equally accented syllables. Now there is only here and there a word in the whole English language that is a spondee. The only spondees available in English are made up of two long, or two equally accented monosyllables. That is why the metre of *Evangeline* is so hard to read with ease, or at any rate it is one of the reasons. Longfellow uses trochees—that is to say, feet composed of one long and one short syllable, instead. In one case he uses the word

'baptism' as a spondee, but in fact it is a dactyl, consisting of one long and two short syllables. Edgar Allan Poe pointed that out."

"Why did he write in that metre, then," asked Will, "if it is impossible in English?"

"Because he was a Greek and Latin scholar, and was so enamored of the hexameter verse that he tried to reproduce it in English. He didn't accomplish the purpose, but he wrote some mighty good things in trying to do it."

"But tell us, Ed," said Constant, "why did Evangeline's people come all the way down here?"

"They were French, and they naturally sought for a country where the French constituted the greater part of the population. This wasn't English territory then. By the way, that reminds me of a good Vevay story. When I was a very little boy, I used to go occasionally to pay my respects to the oldest lady in town — 'Grandmother Grisard,' as we all reverently called her. She was a lovely old lady, and she once told me how she came to Vevay. She set out from Switzerland very early in this century, being then a young girl, to come to this

French-settled Red River country, where her people had friends. But there are two Red Rivers in America, this one and the Red River of the North, which runs from Minnesota northward into Manitoba. Europeans were rather weak on American geography in those days, so instead of bringing this young girl to the Red River of Louisiana, the transportation people took her to the Red River of the North. That region was then entirely wild. Indians and Canadian half-breeds were practically its only inhabitants, and so the young Swiss girl was in the greatest peril.

"She learned, after a while, that some Swiss people had settled at Vevay, in what was then the wild, uninhabited Northwest Territory. So she set out to find Vevay, and to find people that could talk her own mother tongue. It was an awful journey across the wild, savage-haunted prairie region that now constitutes Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Indiana, but she made it. It required months of time. It involved terrible hardships and fearful dangers from the Indians. But after the long struggle the young Swiss girl reached Vevay and was again among people of her own race, who spoke her own

language. She soon after married the most prosperous man in the village, Mr. Grisard, and, as you all know, her sons and her grandsons have ever since been men of mark in the town.”¹

“Good for you, Ed!” said Will Moreaud. “We fellows of Swiss descent thank you. We are all more or less akin to Grandmother Grisard, after two or three generations of intermarriages, and now that we know her story we shall cherish it as a family legend of our own. In fact, I suspect that our Swiss forefathers and foremothers made a pretty good place out of Vevay before the Virginians and Yankees and Scotch-Irish from whom you fellows sprang ever thought of settling there.”

“Of course they did,” said Ed; “that’s why our people settled there. The Swiss settlers must have been people of the highest character, or their descendants wouldn’t be the foremost citizens of the town, as they are to-day. It is a curious fact, by the way, that when they settled at Vevay they tried to do precisely what they and their ancestors had always done in their own country,—they planted vineyards, and set out to make

¹ This story is true in every particular. — *Author.*

wine. My father, before he died, told me that in his boyhood four-fifths of the lands cultivated by the Swiss were planted in vineyards. Henry Clay was greatly interested in their work, and tried hard to introduce Vevay wine in Washington, and to secure tariff protection for it."

"What became of the vineyards?" asked Constant.

"Why, the temperance wave destroyed them. It came to be thought wrong, and even disreputable, to make or sell wine, or anything else that had alcohol in it. So, little by little, the Swiss people, who were always, above all things, reputable and moral, dug up their vineyards, and planted corn instead."

"Yes," said Will Moreraud. "I remember hearing a rather pretty story on that subject concerning a kinsman of my own. He had his dear old grandmother — or great-grandmother, I forget which — as an inmate of his house, and when the movement to convert the vineyards into cornfields was at its height, the old lady strenuously objected. She said that she had been born in a vineyard, and had all her life looked out upon vineyards through every window.

My kinsman was very tender of his grandmother's feelings. But at the same time he was resolved to change his vineyards into cornfields. He knew that the old lady could never leave the house, owing to her great age and infirmities. So he went to every window in every story of the house and studied the landscape. Having ascertained precisely how far it was possible for the old lady to see from the windows of the house, he ordered all the vineyards beyond her line of vision destroyed, and all within it preserved."

"Beautiful!" cried Phil. "There ought to be more men like that one, if only to make the dear old grandmothers happy in the evening of their lives."

"Perhaps there are more of them than you think," said Constant. "It's my impression that men generally are pretty good fellows, if you really find out about them."

"Of course they are," said Ed. "Does it occur to you that when we fellows undertook this flatboat enterprise, every man in Vevay stood generously ready to help? It is always so. Men are usually kindly and generous if they have a chance to be. As for women —"

"God bless them!" cried Irv, rising to his six feet of height.

"*So-say-we-all-of-us!*" chanted Phil, to the familiar tune, while the rest joined in.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A TALK ON DECK

THE latter end of the voyage was uneventful in outward ways at least, but it led to some things, as we shall see later on, that were of more consequence in the lives of the five boys than all the strenuous happenings which had gone before.

The boat no longer leaked. A few minutes' pumping once in every two or three hours was sufficient to keep her bilge free from water. The river, though falling rapidly, was still full, but the levees were keeping it within bounds, and there were no crevasses to avoid. There were fogs now and then, but the flatboat floated through them without any apparent disposition to run away again. There were the three meals a day to cook, and the lanterns to keep in order, but beyond that and the washing of clothes, sheets, and the like, there was literally nothing to do but talk.

And how they did talk! And of how

many different things! We have heard one of their conversations. Suppose we listen to some more of them.

"I say, Ed," said Irv, "with this wonderful river bringing the products of a score of states to New Orleans for a market, how is it that New Orleans isn't the greatest port in the country?"

"It came near being so once. It was New York's chief rival, and some day it may be again. So long as there were no railroads New Orleans was the chief outlet, and inlet as well, for all this great western and southern country. Not only did most of the western produce and southern cotton come to it for sale at home or shipment abroad, but most of the foreign goods imported for the use of the West and South came in through New Orleans, and so did most of the passengers who wanted to reach any point west of the Alleghanies."

"Why didn't it go on in that way?" asked Constant.

"In the first place, a wise governor of New York, De Witt Clinton, persuaded the people of that state to make some artificial geography. They dug canals to connect the Great Lakes with the Hudson River.

This enabled them to carry western produce to New York all the way by water, and as cheaply as it could be carried down the river — more cheaply, in fact, so far as that part of it grown far away from the rivers was concerned. This gave New York a very great advantage. For New York is a thousand miles or more nearer to Europe than New Orleans is, and so if grain could be landed in New York at smaller expense than in New Orleans, that was the cheapest as well as the shortest route to Europe.

“Then again New Orleans lies in a much hotter climate than New York, and so do the seas over which freight from New Orleans must be carried. In a hot climate grain is apt to sprout and spoil, or it was so until comparatively recent years, when means of preventing that were discovered.”

Ed stopped, as if he had finished. Will wanted more and asked for it.

“Go on,” he said. “Tell us all about it.”

“Yes, do,” echoed the others.

“I am not sure that I know ‘all about it,’” answered Ed, “but I have been reading some articles concerning it since our trip awakened my interest, and if you want me

to do so, I'll tell you what I have learned from them."

"Do!" cried Irv. "This party of young Hoosiers has often been hungrier for corned beef and cabbage, with all that those terms imply, than for intellectual pabulum of any kind whatever. But at present our physical systems are abundantly fed. What we want now is intellectual refreshment, all of which, being interpreted, means 'Go on, Ed; we're interested.'"

Ed laughed, and continued:—

"Well, the war damaged New Orleans, of course, not only by shutting up the port for some years, but by impoverishing the southern states which New Orleans supplied with provisions and goods and from which it drew cotton. Then, again, New York had and still has most of the free money there is in this country, the money that is hunting for something to do. You know that money is like a man in this respect. It always wants to earn wages. Now, when the western farmer sells his grain and the like to a country merchant, he wants money for it. As a great many farmers sell at the same time, the country merchant naturally hasn't enough money of his own to satisfy them

all. So he ships the grain, etc., as fast as he receives it, and makes drafts upon the commission merchants to whom he is sending it. That is to say, he makes them pay in advance for produce shipped in order that he may have the money with which to buy more when it is offered. The commission merchants in their turn borrow the money from the banks in their cities, giving liens on the grain for security. This is a very rough explanation, of course, but you can see from it how the city that has the largest amount of money 'hunting for a job' must draw to itself, when other things are anywhere near equal, the greater part of all the produce that can go at about the same cost to that or some other city."

"That's clear enough," said Phil. "But what about the railroads? Why do they all seem to run to New York?"

"That's an interesting point," answered Ed. "I'm glad you reminded me of it. When the railroads were built, each little road was independent of all the rest. But each of them wanted to reach New York, because the artificial geography created by New York's canals had made that the country's greatest port, and because New York

had more money to lend on produce, as I have explained, than any other city. So as the numberless little railroad lines consolidated themselves into great trunk lines, they all made for New York as eagerly as flies make for an open sugar barrel. Even the Baltimore and Ohio road, which was built by Baltimore people to make Baltimore a rival of New York, spent money in lavish millions to secure a New York terminus and make Baltimore a way station. To sum it all up, the farmer wants to sell to the local merchant who will pay him in cash; the local merchant ships his purchases to Chicago or any other intermediate city whose commission merchants will make the biggest and quickest advances of money on the grain, etc., before it arrives; the merchants in the intermediate cities ship to the port whose commission merchants will make them the largest advances in their turn and thus enable them to go on buying while the opportunity lasts. That city is New York. Of course this is only a general statement. There is often plenty of money to lend in Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, and lately those cities and Newport News in Virginia have taken a good deal of New

York's grain trade. But what I have said will explain to you one of the reasons why New Orleans 'isn't in it,' in this matter."

"Then our wonderful river no longer renders a service to the country?" said Constant, interrogatively.

"Oh, yes, it does," answered Ed, eagerly. "It still carries vast quantities of goods to New Orleans, not only for consumption in the South, but for shipment abroad. And even if it carried nothing, it would still be rendering a service of incalculable value to the country."

"How?" asked all the boys, in a breath.

"By compelling the railroads to carry freight at reasonable rates. Let me tell you some facts in illustration. Somewhere about the year 1870—a little before, I think it was—the railroads were charging extortionate prices for carrying freight to eastern cities. Some great merchants and steamboat owners put their heads together to stop the extortion. They organized the Mississippi Valley Transportation Company, to carry freight down the river to the sea. They built great stern-wheel steamboats, and set them to push vast fleets of barges loaded

with freight to New Orleans. This so enormously cheapened freight rates that the railroads were threatened with ruin, and New Orleans seemed likely to take New York's place as the country's great grain-exporting city. The railroads began at once to reduce their rates in self-defence, and from that day to this they have had to reduce them more and more, lest the water routes, and chiefly the Mississippi River, should take their trade away from them. So you see that even if not one ton of freight were carried over our wonderful river, which, in fact, carries hundreds of millions of tons, it would still be rendering an enormous service to the country by keeping railroad freight rates down."

The boys pondered these things awhile. Then Irv said:—

"But you said awhile ago that New Orleans might some day again become New York's rival as a shipping port. Would you mind telling us just what you meant by that?"

"Why, no," said Ed, hesitating. "I suppose I was thinking of the time, which is surely coming, when this great, rich Mississippi Valley of ours will be as densely

populated as other and less productive parts of the earth are."

"For instance?" said Will, interrogatively.

"Well, I suppose," said Ed, "that the great Mississippi Valley fairly represents our whole country as to population. We have in this country, according to a statistical book that I have here, about 20 people, big and little, to the square mile, or somewhat less. Now the Netherlands, according to the same book, have about 351, Belgium about 529, and England about 540 people to the square mile. In other words, we must multiply ourselves by 26 or 27 before we shall have as dense a population as England now has. When we have 27 times as many people in the Mississippi Valley as we now have, I don't think there is much doubt that New Orleans will be just as important a port and just as big a city as her most ambitious citizen would like her to be."

The boys sat silent for a while. Then Irv took out a pencil and paper, and figured for a few minutes. Finally he broke silence.

"Do I understand that this country of ours is capable — taking it by and large —

of supporting a population as great to the square mile as that of England, or anything like as great?"

"I don't see why not," said Ed. "Our agriculture is in its infancy, we are merely scratching the surface, and not a very large part of the surface at that. We have arid and desert regions, of course, but on the other hand, we have a richer soil and an immeasurably more fruitful climate than England has. England can't grow a single bushel of corn, for example, while we grow more than two billion bushels every year. It seems to me clear that our country, taken as a whole, and this rich Mississippi Valley especially, can support a much larger population to the square mile than England can."

"Well, if it ever does," said Irv, referring to his figures, "we shall have a population of about two billion people, or very many times more than the greatest nations in all history ever had."

"Why not?" asked Phil. "Isn't ours the greatest nation in all history in the way it has stood for liberty and right and progress? Why shouldn't it be immeasurably the greatest in population and wealth and

everything else? Why shouldn't we multiply our seventy millions or so of people into the billions?"

"Well, yes, why not?" asked Irv. "It would only mean that twenty or thirty times as many men as ever before would enjoy the blessing of liberty."

"It would mean vastly more than that," said Ed.

"What?" asked Irv.

"It would mean that twenty or thirty times as many men *stood* for liberty throughout all the earth; it would mean that twenty or thirty times as many men as ever before were ready to fight for liberty and human right. It would mean even more than that. It would mean that the Great Republic, planted upon the theory of absolute and equal liberty, would so enormously outweigh all other nations combined, in numbers and in physical and moral force, that no nation and no coalition of nations would ever dare dispute our country's decisions or balk her will. We should in that case dominate the world by our numbers, our wealth, and our productiveness. For in the very nature of things, countries that already have from twenty to twenty-five times our population to the

square mile cannot hope to grow as we inevitably shall."

"But what if we don't continue to stand for liberty and human right?" asked Phil. "What if we forget our national mission, and use our vast power not for freedom, but for conquest; not for the right, but for the wrong?"

"That is what every American citizen owes it to his country to guard against by his vote," answered Ed.

"In other words," said Irv "that's what we are here for."

"Precisely," said Ed. "But it is time to get supper, and I, for one, am hungry."

"So am I," responded Irv, as he went below to bear his share in the supper getting.

CHAPTER XXXV

LOOKING FORWARD

IT was on the last night of the voyage that Phil broached the thought that he had been turning over in his mind ever since his talk with the rescued Mississippi planter. The journey was practically finished. *The Last of the Flatboats* would reach New Orleans about ten o'clock the next morning. The big round moon illuminated the broad, placid river. Supper was ended. The lights were in their places. There was no water in the bilge. The day's work was done, and the hardy young fellows were lolling about the deck, talking all sorts of trivial things, when Phil introduced the subject.

"I say, boys, does it occur to you that we fellows have a splendid opportunity before us if we choose to accept it?"

"Are you meditating a jump overboard?" asked Irv, "or did you just now remember the great truth that fills my mind, namely,

that there's enough of that beef pie left to make a good midnight supper all round?'

"No, for once I'm serious, Irv," said Phil, whose new habit of seriousness had grown upon him with increasing responsibility, until all the boys observed the change in him with wonder, not unmixed with amusement.

"All right, then," said Irv; "go ahead. We're 'at attention.'"

"What is it, Phil?" asked Will Moreraud, seeing that Irv's light chatter annoyed the boy, or at the least distracted his attention. "You've something worth while to say. So we'll listen."

Phil broke into the middle of his subject.

"Why shouldn't we fellows all get a college education?" he asked.

"Our parents aren't able to give it to us," answered Constant.

"No, but we are able to get it for ourselves," answered Phil. "That gentleman up there in Mississippi wanted to help us do it, but I refused that offer for the whole party."

Then he reported the conversation he had had with the planter, and his comrades heartily approved his course in refusing assistance.

"But we can do the thing ourselves," Phil continued. "Let me explain. After we built this flatboat and equipped her and made up a purse for our running expenses, we each had about a hundred dollars of our pig-iron money left. Since then we have made one thousand dollars apiece out of the Jim Hughes affair. So when we get back home we shall have eleven hundred dollars apiece to the good, besides whatever we make clear out of the trip. That ought to be considerably more, but we won't count it because it's a chicken that isn't hatched yet. At any rate, it will more than pay our fares back to Vevay, so when we get home we shall have eleven or twelve hundred dollars apiece. Now that is plenty to take us through college."

"Well, I don't know," said Irv. "I hear of young college men who spend from one thousand to five thousand dollars a year."

"Yes," replied Phil, "and I read in a newspaper the other day of a man who paid five hundred dollars for a bouquet to give to the girl he was about to marry. But we aren't young men with 'liberal allowances' and we aren't bouquet buyers. Listen to

me. I have figured it all out carefully. At many colleges there is no charge at all for tuition. At others there are scholarships that can be made to cover tuition. At most of the colleges in the West and South the tuition fees are very small, even if we must pay them. The principal things we've got to look out for are board, clothes, and books. We can wear the same clothes at college that we should wear at home, and our parents will provide them, or if they can't, we can earn them during vacations. Our necessary books for the whole course won't cost us more than fifty or sixty dollars apiece if we work together as I'm going to suggest. That leaves only the question of board."

"Well, board will cost us five dollars a week apiece or two hundred a year, at any decent boarding-house," said Irv.

"Of course," answered Phil. "But I propose that we shan't live at any decent boarding-house."

"How, then?"

"Why, you see we're an exceptional lot of young fellows in some respects. Our classmates in college, when we go there, may know a great deal more than we do about many things, and probably they will. But

we know some very valuable things that they do not. We know how to take care of ourselves. For a good many weeks now we have bought and cooked our own food and washed our own dishes, and even our own clothes. At college we could hire the laundry work done, but why shouldn't we do all the rest for ourselves?"

"Go on," cried Irv when Phil paused. "I for one am interested, and it's obvious you've thought out the whole thing, Phil. Tell us all about your plan."

Phil hesitated a little, abashed by the approval and admiration which he easily detected in Irv's eager tone and in the faces of his comrades. At last he resumed: —

"Well, you see, we five fellows not only know how to cook and all that sort of thing, but we know how to live together without quarrelling, and how to work together for a common purpose. Why shouldn't we go to some college where there are no tuition fees, or very small ones, hire two rooms, one to cook and eat in, and the other to sleep in, buy the ten or twenty dollars' worth of plain furniture necessary, and board ourselves just as we are doing now?"

The other boys paused, interested in the idea. Presently Constant asked : —

“How much apiece do you reckon the cost of board to be?”

“I haven’t figured it out in detail,” said Phil. “I’ve left that for Ed to do. You remember he made a calculation away up the river as to how much it costs to feed a man for a year.”

“Yes,” said Ed, speaking the word slowly as if thinking ; “but that calculation hardly fits the case. It related to a single person, and we are five persons. We can live more cheaply together than five persons could live separately. Besides, that calculation up the river was made on a guess-work basis. It is very much better to base the calculation on facts, and fortunately I have the facts.”

“What?” “Where did you get them?” These and like exclamations greeted Ed’s announcement.

“Well, you see,” said Ed, “I have been keeping accounts in order to find out what it has cost us just to live on this voyage. I’ve set down the exact cost of everything we started with and everything we have bought since, including the two cords of

wood we bought for the cooking-stove, and which we haven't used up yet. I'll figure the thing up and tell you exactly what it will cost us to board ourselves at college, provided we are willing to live as plainly there as we do on this boat."

"Why not?" called out Irv. "We've lived like fighting cocks all the way down the river—except that we've run out of milk pretty often."

"Do fighting cocks consume large quantities of milk, Irv?" asked Phil.

"No, of course not. You know what I mean. I'm satisfied to live in college precisely as we have lived on the flatboat, and if I drink more milk, I suppose I shall make it up by eating just so much less of other things."

"Do you hear that, boys?" called out Constant. "Irv agrees that if we go to college together he'll eat one pancake less for every extra glass of milk he drinks. Remember that. We shall hold him rigidly to his bargain."

By this time Ed, who had gone to the forward lantern to do his figuring,—for one really cannot "see to read" by even the brightest moonlight, as people often say and

think they can, — was ready to report results. He said : —

“Counting in everything we have bought to eat, and everything that the Cincinnati banker gave us at Memphis, and the cost of our fuel, I find that it has cost us for our table, precisely \$3.98 per week, as an average, since the day we left Vevay to drop down to Craig’s Landing. Let us say \$4.00. That’s 80 cents apiece per week, for we won’t reckon Jim Hughes’s board. The college year is forty weeks, or a little less. At 80 cents a week apiece, we can feed ourselves on \$32 a year each, or only \$128 each for the whole four years’ course.”

“Good,” said Phil, “now let’s figure a little.” With that he went to the light and made some calculations. On his return he said, “I reckon it this way : —

Rent \$10 a year for each, or for the course . . .	\$40
Board for each, \$32 a year, or for the course . . .	128
Fuel, lights, and incidentals — say for each . . .	40
Tuition, if we have to pay it, for each . . .	100

or a grand total of \$308 apiece for the whole course. For safety, and to cover miscalculations and accidents and illness and all the rest of it, let’s just double the figures.

That gives us a total possible expense of \$616, or just about one-half the money that each of us has in hand, and that we ought to be ready to spend to make the best men we can out of ourselves."

"Boys!" said Will Moreraud, rising in his enthusiasm, "I move this resolution right here and now:—

"Resolved, that Phil Lowry is a brick! Resolved, that we five fellows shall go together to a college of Phil Lowry's selection, live in the economical way he suggests, and so diligently do our work as to take all the honors there are going in that college, and astonish the fellows whose education has not included a flatboat experience in the art of taking care of oneself.'"

The resolution was adopted without dissent. Then Phil had something more to say:—

"Now, fellows, I'm a good way behind the rest of you in some of my studies. I'm younger than you—but that's no matter. I'll not 'plead the baby act,' anyhow. All of you can easily prepare yourselves for college between now and next fall. You probably don't believe it, but so can I, and so I will. I have never set myself

to study in earnest. I'm going to do it now. When we get home, I'll bring to bear all that 'obstinate pertinacity' that you and Mrs. Dupont credit me with or blame me for — whichever way you choose to put it. If I don't pass entrance examinations next fall with the best of you, you can count my share of the money as a voluntary contribution to the expenses of the mess. But you'd better not count on it in that way, I warn you."

"Of course we hadn't," said Irv Strong, as Phil went below to look after things. "I've got a great, big, rosy-cheeked, candy apple at home, and I'll wager it against the insignificant head of any fellow in the party — yours included, Ed — that when we five fellows present ourselves for our entrance examinations next fall, Phil Lowry will knock the spots out of every one of us."

"You expect too much of him, Irv," said Ed. "It isn't fair. He's from a year to two years behind us, and he is the youngest and most immature in the party."

"Is he?" asked Irv, with challenge in his voice. "He may have been so when we left Vevay, but he isn't now. He's the oldest of us now and the most mature

among us. You saw how he managed things in the woods, and how he handled Jim Hughes, and how he managed the difficult problem of the tarpaulin, and all the rest of it. I tell you, Ed, that, while Phil Lowry was much the youngest boy in this company when we made him 'It' for this voyage, he is several years older to-day than any of us. He may be a class behind some of you fellows in mere book work, but he won't stay so long. I'll tell you what, Ed, you'll have to stir all your stumps to keep up with that fellow in college. He has got his mettle up now."

"I believe that is so," said Ed, thinking, and speaking slowly. "I hadn't thought of it, Irv, but Phil has developed in his mind surprisingly during this voyage."

"So much so," replied Irv, "that nobody in this crew is his equal when it comes to real, hard, clear-headed thinking."

"That is so," said Ed, reflectively; "but in book study he is behind all of us because he is younger. He says he'll catch up and —"

"And we now know him too well to doubt that he will do all that he says," broke in Will Moreraud, whose admiration

for Phil had grown day by day until now it scarcely knew any bounds. "But I say, fellows," continued Will, "we've got to help Phil catch up. For that matter, there isn't one of us that hasn't a lame duck of some sort. Even you, Ed —"

"Don't say 'even' me," said Ed. "I'm in fact the worst of the lot. I've gone ahead of you fellows, — in my irregular fashion, of course, — but I've skipped a lot of things, and I've got to bring them up before I can pass my examinations for college."

"That's all right," said Will, who was now enthusiastic. "Why shouldn't we fellows form a 'study club' this fall, and work together? Of course the high school won't and can't prepare us for college by next year. But we can and will prepare ourselves; and now that Mrs. Dupont is out of the regular teaching harness, she'll be delighted to help us. She will be in a positive ecstasy when she finds that five of 'her boys' have undertaken a job of this kind. By the way, let us stand up and bow low to Mrs. Dupont — the best and most loving teacher that any set of boys ever had or ever will have in this world!"

The obeisance to their teacher was made,

and Will's idea of a "study club" was resolved upon. The idea, as developed, was to do much more in a year than the school course marked out, especially to help Phil forward to the level of his fellows, and to help Ed repair the deficiencies that lay back of his irregular attainments. For Ed was now so robust that neither he nor any of his comrades thought of him as an invalid. Instead of spending the winter in the South, as he had intended, Ed had made up his mind to go back with the others, to join them in their "study club," and to be one of the five when they should enter college.

It was long past midnight when this conversation was over. And the morning had active duties for the crew of *The Last of the Flatboats* to do.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE LAST LANDING

As *The Last of the Flatboats* passed the upper part of New Orleans, the boys were disposed to gaze at the strangely beautiful city. It was greater in size than any city that they had ever seen; for none of them had visited Cincinnati, though they had lived all their lives within sixty or seventy miles of it. New Orleans was different in architecture, situation, and everything else from Louisville and Memphis, cities at which they had looked up from the river, while at New Orleans they found themselves looking down, and taking almost a bird's-eye view of the city. Then, too, the palm gardens, the evergreen trees, and glimpses every now and then of great parterres of flowers, growing gayly in the open air even in late autumn, filled them with the feeling that somehow they had come into a world quite different from any they had ever dreamed of before.

Finally, there were the miles of levee, thickly bordered with steamships and sailing craft of every kind, all so new to them as to be a show in their eyes. The forests of masts, the towering elevators, the wharves piled high with cotton in bales and sugar in hogsheads and great piles of tropical fruits, appealed strongly to their imaginations. There was a soft languor in the atmosphere, and the red sunlight shone through a sort of Indian summer haze, which made the city look dream-like, or as if seen through a fleecy, pink veil.

Presently Phil put an end to their musings.

"Stand by the sweeps!" he called, himself going to the steering-oar. "We must make a landing, if we ever find a vacant spot at the levee that's big enough to run into."

"I say, Phil," said Irv, presently, "there comes somebody in a skiff to meet us; perhaps it's some wharf-master to tell us where to land."

A few minutes later the skiff, rowed by a stout negro man, reached the boat, and a carefully dressed young man who had sat in the stern dismissed the negro and his skiff, and came aboard.

To Phil he handed his card, introducing himself as one of the freight clerks of the commission merchant to whom the planter had recommended them. It appeared that the planter had not been content with giving them a letter of introduction, but had written by mail from Vicksburg, and this was the result.

"Mr. Kennedy thought you might have some difficulty in finding the proper landing, so he told me to board you and show you the way."

Phil thanked him, and under the man's guidance *The Last of the Flatboats* made the last of her landings.

The young man seemed to know what to do about everything and how to do it. First of all he called an insurance adjuster on board to inspect the cargo. This, he explained, was necessary so that all insurance claims might be adjusted.

"I'm afraid the flour must be pretty wet," said Phil.

"Why? is it in bags?" asked the clerk.

"No, in barrels."

"You can rest easy, then," said the clerk. "You can't wet flour in a barrel. See there!" and he pointed to a ship that was taking on

flour near by. "That's flour for Rio Janeiro, and you observe that the crane souses every barrel of it into the river before hoisting it to the ship's deck."

"So it does," said one of the boys. "But what is that for?"

"To make the flour keep in a hot climate," answered the clerk. "Wetting the barrel closes up all the cracks between the staves, by making a thick paste out of the flour that has sifted into them. That makes the barrel water-tight, insect-tight, and even air-tight."

"But I should think the water would soak into the flour inside," said Will.

"Can't do it. Wouldn't wet an ounce of flour if you left a barrel in the river for a month. Flour is packed too tight for that."

"I say, Phil," said Irv. "Let's go back and get those three barrels we left in the river when we were putting the tarpaulin on."

"Have you a memorandum of your freight, captain?" asked the clerk. "If so, please let me have it, and I'll make out a manifest."

Phil handed him the little book in which he had catalogued the freight as it was

received. Phil had not the slightest idea what a "manifest" might be, but he asked no questions. "I prefer to find out some things through my eyes," he said to himself. So he watched the clerk, who spread out some broad sheets of paper on the little cabin table and proceeded to make out a formal manifest, or detailed statement of the freight on board what the manifest called "the good ship *The Last of the Flatboats*." It was all arranged in columns, and it showed from whom each shipment came, and that each was consigned to the house of Mr. Kennedy. Having finished this, the clerk proceeded to make out a duplicate, which he explained was to be sent to the Exchange, so that an accurate record might be made there for statistical purposes.

"I see," said Phil. "That is the way statistics are got together, showing how much of every kind of product is shipped into and out of each commercial city."

"Certainly," answered the clerk, "but, excuse me, here come the reporters. Here, boys, make your own manifests," and with that he handed one of his copies to the newspaper men. They scribbled rapidly on paper pads for a brief while and then returned the

manifest. Phil wondered, but asked no questions. "What these men wrote is for publication in newspapers, so I'll look in the newspapers to-morrow and see what it is." When he did so, he found under the headline "Manifest," merely a condensed list of the boat's freight with the name of the Kennedy commission house as "consignees." This condensed statement of freights and consignees is published daily with reference to every boat that arrives, for the information not only of the consignees, but also of other merchants and speculators who want to buy, and to that end want to know who has things to sell.

The boys were deeply interested, but their studies in commercial methods were destined to be of brief duration. For the clerk left them almost immediately. Later in the day he came again and said to Phil:—

"You're rather in luck, captain. The market for western produce is up to-day. Apples were particularly high."

"Will they stay up long enough for us to work ours off?" asked Phil.

"Work yours off?" exclaimed the clerk, in astonishment. "Why, you're sold out, bag and baggage, flatboat and all, two hours

ago. I came down to make delivery. The buyer's clerk will be here immediately."

It was all astonishing to the western boys, but the clerk was good-natured, and explained while he waited for the buyer's clerk. He told them how Mr. Kennedy went to a big room called "'change," where all the other merchants were gathered, showed his manifest, and in five minutes had sold out everything.

"But," said Irv, "nobody has been here to look at the goods. How does the buyer know what the things are like?"

"Why, produce is all classified, and we sell by classes. I looked over this cargo and reported quality and condition. We made sales accordingly. When we deliver, the buyer's clerk will look at the things, and if any of them are not up to the grade represented, he'll reject them or take them at a reduction, and so on. If we can't agree, the matter will be referred to a committee of 'change, and their decision is final. Both sides are bound by it."

"But what if either refused?"

"Well —" hesitated the clerk, "that couldn't very well happen; but if it did, the merchant refusing would have to leave

'change, and go out of business. You see, all business of this kind is done on 'change, and if a merchant isn't a member there, he simply can't do any business at all. But pardon me, here comes the buyer's clerk. I must get to work. Oh, by the way, here's the card of a comfortable, inexpensive hotel; Mr. Kennedy told me to give it to you. He'll call to see you there."

"But why can't we stay on the boat till her buyer is ready to take her away?"

"Oh, he'll do that this afternoon. He'll drop her down to his own warehouse, unload her, and by this time to-morrow she'll be nothing but a pile of lumber on shore somewhere."

"It fairly makes my head swim," said Irv, "to see the way these city people go at things."

"Mine too," said Phil. "But I see clearly that that's the way to get things done, and it's the way we ought to manage in our study club when we get home."

"But how? We can't have a big 'change and all that sort of thing."

"I didn't mean as to details," said Phil. "I referred to the spirit of the thing. When these people have anything to do, they do

it at once and with all their might. Then they drop that as something done for, and without an instant's delay they turn to something else. That's the way we must manage."

"All right," said Will Moreraud. "Now that we're done with the flatboat let's go at once to the hotel. First thing is to pack baggage."

So they all set about getting their little belongings together.

"What about our blankets, and the stove, and the cooking-utensils and the remains of our food supplies, and our water filter, and the fire extinguishers, and the tools?" asked Constant Thiebaud, in consternation. "It'll take a day or two to sell them out."

"Not if we set the right man at it," said Phil. "I'll go and see him."

So he went to the merchant's clerk, who instantly said:—

"Pile 'em all out on the levee there, and put a card on top saying, 'For sale—inquire on board the flatboat.' I'll sell 'em and render you an account."

"All right," said Phil, "but you'll accept your commission, of course?"

"Of course. Business is business. We never work for our health on the levee."

CHAPTER XXXVII

RED-LETTER DAYS IN NEW ORLEANS

ONCE comfortably settled at the little hotel near Dryades Street, the boys proceeded to equip themselves for seeing the city. They bought a new suit of clothes and a hat apiece, together with such underclothes, linen, shoes, and socks as they needed. Indeed, they bought more than was necessary for their immediate wants, because they would need the clothes on their return home, and they could buy them much cheaper in New Orleans than in Vevay. Phil decided to indulge himself in an overcoat, the first that he had ever owned, and the others followed his example.

"Not that we are likely to need overcoats very pressingly in New Orleans at this autumn season," said Irv, "but I for one have a lively recollection of how cold it is in Vevay every winter."

By appointment they called at the office of Mr. Kennedy, the commission merchant,

the next day, for a settlement. He furnished them with carefully detailed accounts, made out by his bookkeepers, and gave them drafts on New York for the money coming to them.

"You'd better send your drafts by mail to your home bank," he said. "If you need any money for your expenses while here, I'll furnish it, and you can remit it from home."

"Thank you!" responded Phil. "We shan't need any money for expenses here. We've enough left of the money we started with, which we call our 'campaign fund,' for that. But how about our passage home? Do you happen to know, sir, about how much that will cost us?"

"Whatever you choose to make it cost you, from nothing at all up," answered the merchant.

A query or two brought out this explanation:—

"You've dropped some hints in our conversations"—for he had talked with them at their hotel the evening before—"concerning your educational plans, and I gather that you want to keep all you can of the money you have made."

"Precisely!" said Phil. "Except that we mean to stay here for a week to see all we can of the city, we don't intend to spend a dollar that we can save."

"So I thought," said the merchant. "I have therefore taken the liberty of making some inquiries for you. It happens that I am freighting a steamboat with cotton, sugar, molasses, coffee, and fruits, for Louisville. The captain is a good friend of mine. As he will have no way-freight, — nothing to put on or off till he gets to Louisville, where the stevedores will unload the boat, — he has very little for deck hands or roustabouts to do. But there will be some 'wooding up' to do now and then, — taking on wood for the furnaces, — and there will be the decks to keep clean, the lanterns to keep in order, and all that sort of thing. Now as you young men are stout fellows and pretty well used by this time to roughing it, he has agreed, if you choose, to take you instead of the roustabouts and deck hands ordinarily carried. There won't be any wages, but you'll have your meals from the cook's galley and your passages to Louisville free. Passage from there to Vevay will be a trifle, of course."

The boys were more pleased with the arrangement than they could explain in words. But Phil tried to thank Mr. Kennedy, ending by saying, "I don't know why you should take so much trouble for us, sir, as we're complete strangers to you."

"You don't know why?" asked the merchant, with smiles rippling over his face. "Well, let me tell you that the man you rescued from a horrible death up there in the Tallahatchie swamp is my brother-in-law, the woman you saved is my sister, and the children my nephew and nieces. Now you will understand that whatever you happen to want in New Orleans is yours, if I know of your wanting it. We should all be more than glad to do vastly more for such good friends as you if we could. But my brother-in-law writes me that he talked with you about that, and concluded that boys of your sort are likely to do much better for themselves than anybody can do for them. Now, not a word more on that subject, please," as Ed, with his big eyes full of tears, arose, intending to say something of his own and his comrades' feelings. "Not a word more. Besides, there's a clerk waiting for me at the door. Go to the

concert to-night, and hear some good music. One of my clerks will leave tickets at the hotel for you. And be ready at noon to-morrow for a drive. I'll call for you, and show you our town. Good-by now, good-by — really, I mustn't talk longer. Good-by."

And so the overwhelmed youngsters found themselves bowed out into Camp Street without a chance to say a word of thanks.

The next day, in two open carriages, Mr. Kennedy drove the boys for hours over the beautiful and picturesque old city — up into the Carrollton district, where are fine residences and broad streets; down through the French Creole region, where the quaintness of the city is something wholly unmatched in any other town in America; and out over a beautiful road to Lake Pontchartrain, with luncheon at the Halfway House.

"This will be enough for to-day," said their host, as they rose from their meal. "To-morrow morning, if you young gentlemen like, we'll drive down to the battlefield, where Jackson won his famous victory and saved the Mississippi River and all the region west of it from British control. We'll drive into the city now, and you would

do well to rest this afternoon, for driving in this crisp autumn air makes one tired and sleepy."

The boys protested that he was unwarrantably taking his time for their entertainment, but he had a way of turning off such things with a laugh which left nothing else to be said.

So the trip to the battlefield was made, but this time they had a second companion in the person of a young professor from Tulane University, whom Mr. Kennedy had pressed into service to explain the battlefield and all the events connected with it.

On the following day Mr. Kennedy took his young friends down the river on a little steamer, on board which they passed a night and two days, seeing the forts and hearing from the professor the story of the part they had played in Farragut's celebrated river fight, and visiting the jetties — those stupendous engineering works by which the government deepened the mouth of the river so as to permit large ships to come up to the city.

On the way back from this two days' trip Mr. Kennedy invited the boys to dine with him at his home on the next evening. With a queer smile upon his lips, he said: —

"I ought to have asked you to my house sooner, perhaps, but I wasn't ready. There were some little details that I wanted to arrange first."

When the dinner evening came, the boys entered the stately mansion with more of embarrassment than they would have cared to confess. It was the finest house they had ever seen,—a stately, old-fashioned structure, with broad galleries running around three of its sides, and with a spacious colonnade in front. It stood in the midst of a garden of palm, ilex, and magnolia trees, occupying an entire city block, and shut in by a high brick wall, pierced by great gateways and little ones.

Inside, the house was luxuriously comfortable, filled with old-fashioned furniture, time-dulled pictures, and here and there a bit of statuary, but with none of that painfully breakable looking bric-a-brac that one finds so often and in such annoying profusion in the houses of the rich or the well-to-do. There was nothing here that meant show, nothing that did not suggest easy use and comfort.

Mr. Kennedy himself followed the servant to the door to receive his young friends.

When he had ushered them into a home-like, "back-parlor" sort of a room, he excused himself for a brief time and left them. About a minute later they heard little feet pattering down the great hall, and, an instant later, "Baby" toddled in. She paused a moment, and then rushing into Phil's arms called aloud : —

"My boys! My big boys!" Then she raised her little voice, and cried : —

"Come, papa! Come, mamma! My boys is come!"

This was the "little detail" that Mr. Kennedy had waited to arrange. He had induced his sister and her husband to bring the children to New Orleans, to await the flood's subsidence; and he had waited for their arrival before inviting the boys to dinner, in order that their welcome might be eager, and their enjoyment of his hospitality free from embarrassment.

In company with their flatboat guests, the lads felt completely at home, and perhaps their shrewdly kind host aided toward this result by having the dinner served in the most homelike and informal way that he could manage.

As the steamboat on which they were to

“work their way” up the river was to sail the next afternoon, this evening at Mr. Kennedy’s was their last in New Orleans.

“And what a delightful finish it has been to all our experiences!” said Irv, when they all got back to their hotel.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

“IT”

THERE is not much more of this story for me to tell. The voyage up the river involved very little of work, and nothing at all of adventure. The steamboat was a slow one. She plodded along, day and night, never landing except when it was necessary to take on fifty cords or so of wood, with which to make steam.

Phil and his comrades took pride in keeping the decks in most scrupulously clean condition, and doing with earnest care the other tasks—mostly very small ones—which fell to their lot.

It took about nine days for the pottering old freight steamer to make the journey to Louisville; for although the great flood had considerably subsided, the Ohio was still sufficiently full for the boat to pass over the falls and land her cargo at the city, instead of discharging it at Portland, four miles below.

Bidding farewell to their captain, the crew of *The Last of the Flatboats* donned their new clothes, and took passage for Vevay on the mail boat.

They landed at their home town late in the afternoon, hired a drayman to haul their small baggage to their several homes, and proudly marched up Ferry Street like the returning adventurers that they were, while all the small boys in town trudged along with them precisely as they would have followed a circus parade.

After briefly visiting their homes and having reunion suppers there with their families, the boys reassembled in their old meeting-place, Will Moreraud's room over a store. There they made out all their accounts, trying hard to make them look like those prepared by Mr. Kennedy's bookkeepers in New Orleans. They were then ready to settle, on the next day, with all the owners of the cargo they had carried.

When all was arranged, Phil figured a while, and then said:—

“Fellows, we've netted a profit of exactly four hundred and fifty dollars clear, by our trip. That's ninety dollars apiece to add to our college fund. The money's in bank to

my credit. I'll draw a check for each fellow's share."

When he had delivered to each of his comrades a check for ninety dollars, he rose and stretched himself and said, with accents of relief:—

"Now I'm not 'It' any longer."

"Oh, yes, you are," said Irv. "We fellows are going to stick together now, you know. There's the study club, you remember. That will need an 'It,' and you'll be the 'It,' won't he, boys?"

"You bet!" said all in a breath.

When Irv and Ed reported the voyage and the study club plan to Mrs. Dupont, she entered enthusiastically into the scheme.

"Don't go to school at all this year," she said. "Come to me instead. When bright boys have made up their minds to study as hard as they can without any forcing, all they need is a tutor to help them when they need help. I'll be the tutor. The old schoolroom in my house, where I taught you boys and your fathers the multiplication table long before graded schools were thought of in this town, is unoccupied. Everything in it is just as it was when you boys were

with me. I'll have the maids dust it up, and it shall be the home of the 'Study Club.'"

When the boys told the wise old lady how Phil had been made "IT" on the voyage, and how splendidly he had risen to his responsibilities, she smiled, but showed no surprise.

"I'm glad you boys had the good sense to choose Phil for your leader," she said. "If you had asked me, I should have told you to do just that. I am older than you by nearly half a century. I have taught several generations of boys, and I think I know boys better than I know anything else in the world. Now let me tell you about Phil. He was born to be 'IT,' he will always be 'IT,' though he will never try to be. He has a gift—if I didn't detest the word for the bad uses it has been put to, I'd say he has a 'mission' to be 'IT' in every endeavor that he may be associated with. Whenever you're in doubt, be very sure that Phil is your best 'IT.'"

Here this story comes to an