CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH FRANK BURDOCK CATCHES A BIG FISH AND MAKES THE ACQUAINTANCE OF THE HAUGHTY OWNER OF A YACHT.

AMONG the happy days at St. Maure's that still remain "beautiful pictures on memory's wall," I count the ensuing months of May and June the happiest. May, the month of Mary; June, the month of the Sacred Heart. The glory of heaven seemed to us students to blend with the earthly splendors of spring; and though, boylike, we all looked forward eagerly to the days of vacation, still, by the sweet practices associated with May and June our natural eagerness was, as it were, spiritualized.

And so when vacation came we were prepared for it; prepared to enjoy it, because we had done our duty in the matter of studies; prepared to enjoy it rightly, because we had entered fully into the beautiful St. Maure's traditions with regard to these latter months.

My father, who came on to attend the annual college commencement, could scarcely believe his eyes on seeing me.

He had counted on finding me healthier and stronger, but, as he said, "I was not prepared, Harry, to find you an athlete."

Tom, Frank Burdock, and Percy made it a point to win their way into my father's favor. They were, at my instance, engaged in a conspiracy; and I am glad to say that they succeeded. These three intriguers won over my father at a single sitting; in such wise that when they asked the burning question he said:

"Harry couldn't be in better company: of course he may go!"

Then we exchanged such hand-shakings, such glances of joy; and though we took our leave of dear old St. Maure's with sadness, yet the prospects before us and their discussion soon made us the happiest of lads on the eastward-bound train.

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It is mid-summer. From the western rim of the heavens, where lies enisled an archipelago of glorified clouds, the sun is giving his parting benediction to the upper world. In the zenith are here and there gauzy bits of fleece, reflecting faintly, yet so beautifully, something of that blaze of glory which the sun has conferred upon their western sisters, and moving onward like stately, dainty ships of the air over an infinite sea of blue. Lightly they hover over the tranquil, well-nigh slumbering waters of a romantic lake upon whose quivering bosom the changing colors of the heavens reproduce themselves in mirrored splendor.

But the scene is not without its human element. At anchor within a hundred feet of a steep, grassy bank four lads are seated in a fishing-boat. Each is holding a rod in his hands, but their hearts seem to be otherwhere. The vision of the glory above has caught their eyes, and as they silently follow its changing splendors, they forget the object of their expedition and allow their lines to lie neglected in the water.

"Isn't it beautiful?" murmured Tom.

"Yes," answered Percy softly, "the beautiful day is most beautiful in its death."

"I hope we'll be that way, too," resumed Tom.

"There's a quotation from Shakespeare that would fit in here, but somehow I can't work it in; I'm no good at quotations."

"Something to the effect that nothing should so become us in our life as our leaving it?" suggested Percy.

"You have spoken," answered Tom.

"If Paradise were any prettier than this scene," I observed after a pause, "what a wonderful place it must have been!"

"I wish Eve had minded her business," put in Frank Burdock tartly. "She ought to have kept her husband steady instead of putting crazy notions into his head. If I marry at all," continued this wiseacre, "I'll find a girl who will keep me from getting cranky."

The twilight meanwhile had come upon us, and the clouds in the west were softening in color; a classic beauty succeeded the oriental splendor which had melted away with the sunset. A golden sheen now palpitated over the face of the waters, while a light breeze springing up carried its perfumed message of nightfall from shore to shore.

"I wish I were Joshua," said Frank.

"Yes? What would you do?" inquired Percy.

"I'd make the sun stand still. I ain't no poet like you, Percy, but I guess I know when I like a thing—and I like this."

Further observations were cut short by the sudden click of Frank's reel as his line spun out into the water. He put his hand to the reel, gave his line a jerk, and—

"I've got him!" he cried. "Just get the landing-net ready."

"Play him carefully; don't get excited," said Tom.

"Who's excited?" asked Frank disdainfully. "I'm not afraid of the biggest pike in the biggest lake in Wisconsin—ow!"

This exclamation was provoked by the apparition of a very large fish, which sprang furiously out of the water in a vigorous struggle to rid itself of Frank's hook.

So startled was our little friend that the reel escaped from his nerveless clasp, and away went his line, paying out at a rate which indicated that his fish was in a hurry.

"You've a curious way of showing your bravery," said Tom, as Frank recovered his control of the reel. "Here, you'd better let me play your fish for you."

"You just sit right where you are," snapped Frank. "When I want your help I'll ask you."

Anxious to redeem himself, Frank now gave evidence of coolness and skill. In and out he played his fish until he had brought it, thoroughly exhausted, to the side of the boat, where it was easily landed by Percy.

"A wall-eyed pike and a beauty!" exclaimed Tom.

"It's at least six pounds," added Percy.

"You don't say!" piped Frank. "Oh, won't I write a letter to papa to-night. It beats any catch he ever made—and I'll tell him so, too."

Having killed our fish at once—a merciful act, by the way—we applied ourselves in earnest to our sport. Fresh minnows were supplied, skilful casts made, and each of us set about reeling in our lines

and throwing them again, according to the current style of fishing which obtained among the approved anglers of the region. Suddenly our attention was distracted by a novel sight, a new element added to the serene loveliness of early twilight. Around an arm of land to the east of us there swept, in all the poetry of bird-like motion, a milky-sailed yacht, gorgeous in flags and fresh bright colors, upon whose deck stood a boy and a girl. The girl was at the tiller—a pretty little child of seven or eight, every detail of her dress betokening the taste and care of a refined home; her unbound golden hair falling free upon her white dress, and reaching almost to her sash of blue, tossed alternately by her quick movement and the gentle breeze. Beside her was a boy of fourteen or fifteen. One glance at him would satisfy an observer that in gazing upon the boy he was gazing upon the owner of the yacht, and a proud owner he was! His pretty face—somewhat feminine; so feminine, in fact, that it could not with propriety be styled handsome—was marred by a disdainful curve in the lines of his mouth and play of his lips, while his head thrown haughtily back added to his appearance of superciliousness.

The little miss smiled at us in all the sweet ingenuousness of childhood. With that mobility of feature which is one of the pretty graces of innocent years, she conveyed in unspoken words the message of her own happiness in the possession of the graceful yacht and radiated her joy upon us. Not so the real owner of the *Aurora*. His brows took an additional turn upward as he surveyed us from the dizzy heights of his ownership.

"You'd think that fellow had a lien on the lake,"

whispered Tom. "But hold! his haughty majesty is about to address us."

"Any luck, boys?" inquired his "haughty majesty."

"Look!" exclaimed Frank vivaciously, holding up his fish.

"Ah!" exclaimed his "haughty majesty," passing his hand through his hair with an æsthetic flourish, whereupon Tom ducked under the seats to conceal his laughter.

"Ah! what a be-you-ti-ful fish!" cried the girl. "Did you catch it, sir?"

"Yes, ma'am, all myself," answered Frank, much flattered by the "sir," and putting into the "ma'am" an intonation which sent Percy's head down on a level with Tom's.

"I—ah—I'll buy your fish if you have no objection," continued his "haughty majesty."

Percy was now under the seats. Frank was about to return an indignant answer, when Tom came to the rescue.

"Me lud," he said, with much impressiveness and doffing his cap as he spoke, "your ludship's humble servants have not put up their stall for selling fish yet, but, me lud, when we have, me lud, we will be most gratified to secure your ludship's distinguished custom."

From the bottom of the boat came a silvery laugh which there was no resisting; I broke into a roar, and even serious Frank chuckled audibly.

As for the little girl, she joined in our merriment through sheer sympathy, whereupon his "ludship," who had changed color, turned his wrath upon her.

"Rose, if you don't behave yourself you'll never come out in my boat again."

Rose blanched at the very thought. "Me lud," having thus disposed of her, cast a cold eye upon us.

"You're vulgar," he observed.

"Yes, me lud," answered Tom, respectfully but cheerfully; "for mark you, me lud, we have not had the pleasure, me lud"—here Tom gave a bow which would have won the approval of Chesterfield—"of your very improving company."

"I'm no lord."

"Oh, I beg pardon, most noble dook," continued Tom gravely. "We really——"

"Now, you stop!" cried the "duke" plaintively.

"Tom, Tom," giggled Percy, "do give his grace an opportunity to say a word or two."

His grace was not slow to speak.

"I'm neither a lord nor a duke," he said gravely, as though he expected to excite surprise by the announcement. "Are you boys staying around here?"

"Your majesty, we are. Yonder 'neath the shade of a wide-spreading beech tree—it isn't a beech tree, but that is no matter," Tom added in parentheses—"stands a little cabin, wherein, your majesty, we have, so to speak, pitched our tents. Furthermore, your majesty, be it known to you that our board is paid by our parents with regularity, for though not poor they are honest."

The yacht-owner was in two minds about us. It would have pleased him to swear at us, but he feared to compromise himself. The fact of the matter was that he doubted whether Tom was serious or in fun. So he adopted a middle course by scowling.

"Are you fellows Catholics?"

"And it please your majesty, we are."

"I don't like Catholics."

"Most of us can't help it, your royal highness; we were born that way. But it isn't catching."

The yacht was now almost beyond speaking distance, and as Tom uttered his last remark the haughty owner, yielding to his rage, stamped his foot, shook his fist at us, and spat into the water.

As if to make amends for her brother's conduct, Rose waved her handkerchief and sent a silvery "good-evening, sirs," across the dividing water; and as the boat went beyond the limit of distinct vision we saw, or rather inferred, that his lordship was scolding her bitterly, for the little lady bent her head and covered her face with her hands.

"Boys," said Tom, "I'm sorry I chaffed that fellow, not on his account, but on account of that little girl. The fact that he was her brother should have made me behave myself. Do you know, I've often wished of late that God had given me a sister. I'm sure I'd be a better fellow. She would have toned down a good deal of my roughness."

Percy laughed.

"If there's any roughness about you, Tom, I wouldn't have it removed for the world. But I think what you say is reasonable and natural. A good sister is a treasure to a boy—I ought to know, for I've just the best lot of sisters in the world. I don't know what I'd have been were it not for them."

"I have heard it said," I remarked, "that there is no earthly love so pure and elevating as the love between brother and sister."

"I believe it's quite true," said Tom. "It's a great pity—isn't it?—that many big brothers make

it a point to tease their sisters, to be cross and ugly toward them. Lots of 'em are good boys, too; but what is good in them is kept for outsiders, and their poor sisters get the benefit of what's worst in them. There, now, take his 'ludship,' for instance: he doesn't seem to care two cents for the happiness of his little sister as long as there's the least question of his own dignity. It's a pity!"

"By the way," said Percy, "that puts me in mind of a strange remark Mr. Middleton made to me one day. He was speaking of a boy who had been at St. Maure's the year before you came, Tom. The boy, it seems, was but a little over eleven years old, extremely polite, amiable, and obliging. He gained favor with all and soon rose high in the esteem of the entire faculty. Yet before the spring had come he was dismissed from the college as a student too dangerous to be allowed to associate with the small boys. Now, here's the remark of Mr. Middleton's that surprised me. 'For weeks and weeks,' he said, 'I could discover nothing out of the way in this boy. But one day, in speaking with me, he said that he was the only child, that he had no brother or sister, and that he hoped he never would. From that day I felt that there was a serious flaw in his character.'"

"Why did he feel that?" asked Frank.

"I suppose," answered Percy, "because it showed a cold, unloving disposition."

"One of that kind," observed Tom, "could become cruel and wicked. I've heard it said that all the great saints were very warm-hearted."

Our philosophical discussion was brought to an end by an injudicious fish which made a bold attempt to run away with Percy's fishing outfit. Percy was an expert, and with little trouble succeeded in landing a lusty four-pound black bass. Before he had it fairly in the boat Tom was playing another, and before Tom could announce the fact Frank was reeling in vigorously.

As for myself, I was kept busy with the landing-net.

Tom's fish proved to be a three-pound pickerel, Frank's a two-pound black bass.

"Hurrah!" cried Frank; "we've about twenty pounds of fish. I guess we can start for home. It will be dark in half an hour—I'll row."

"No, no, Frank," said Tom, pulling up the anchor. "Why, just look at the sky; I shouldn't be surprised if we had to face a storm. Sometimes there are ugly squalls on this lake."

"That's an awful cloud in the west," cried Percy; "it's growing larger and blacker. Yes, we'd better hurry or we'll get a drenching."

There were two sets of oars in the boat. The seat in the middle was sufficiently wide to allow two rowers to sit together: on this seat were Tom and I, each using one oar. Percy was behind us wielding the other pair, while Frank, with the tiller-ropes in his hand, sat in the stern. We had not taken a dozen strokes when a low, dull, distant sound came upon our ears.

"It's coming, boys. The wind is storming among the trees on the western bank," I cried.

"Listen to it," whispered Frank in tones of awe. Momentarily the sound grew in volume; gradually, above the deep groaning and fluttering, arose a shrill shrieking like the exaggerated sounds of a million fifes. Onward swept the wind in its tyrannous