

charge into the creature which put an end to his ineffectual struggles.

"It weighs, I should judge, nearly fifty pounds," said Donnel.

"It's a great catch," added Keenan. "But snapping-turtles are no use for eating."

"Where's Percy?" cried Tom, looking around as he rose with the freed hook.

Percy was nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH PERCY TAKES HIS FIRST LESSONS IN SWIMMING AND ROWING.

"PERCY! Percy!" cried all.

"Here I am, boys," came a tremulous voice from above.

On raising their eyes, they were startled to discover Master Percy full fifteen feet from the ground, straddling the branch of a tree.

"How in the world did you get up there?" cried Harry.

"Really, I don't know; I wasn't aware I could climb a tree at all. But the fact is, when that horrid turtle touched land—the nasty thing!—I found I could do almost anything."

The boys, who had been thus far gazing in astonishment upon Percy, now broke into a round, hearty laugh. Percy's confession was charmingly candid.

"It's all very well to laugh," said Percy, quite gravely, "but really my position is not at all comic. How am I going to get down? Oh, if my mamma were to see me, she'd faint!"

"One way would be to climb down," suggested Tom, dryly, and with the air of imparting valuable information.

"If you could wait for a while," Quip put in, "I'll go and borrow an axe and bring you and tree and everything safe to the ground."

Percy's face gave no evidence of gratification at these wise proposals.

"Don't you think you could procure a ladder?" he asked anxiously.

This novel plan evoked a fresh burst of laughter.

"Oh dear, dear!" he groaned, "I was never in such an awkward plight in all my life." And his expressive lips begin to quiver, and his eyes to grow dim.

John Donnel could not see a fellow-creature in pain. The pathetic little face, now looking down upon him in deep dismay, was too much for the big-hearted champion of the small yard.

"You're all right, Percy," he said. "Just do what I tell you, and you'll be with us on solid ground without any more trouble than it would take you to walk down a flight of steps. Simply place your feet on that branch below, and I'll attend to the rest."

Percy brightened at once—he had great confidence in John—and obeyed with alacrity.

"Now put your hands where your feet are, and let your feet drop. There, you're right as a trivet." And John, as he spoke, caught Percy around the ankles, and brought him gently to the ground.

"I'm not much of a boy," said Percy, humbly, "but I'll do better next time I see a snapping-turtle—I'll run away."

Fishing was now resumed in good earnest. Within an hour the party had caught a dozen large catfish, varying in weight from twelve ounces

to a pound and a half. To the general mess Percy contributed eight small perch.

"Well," said Tom, looking at his watch, "it's about time for a swim."

"You don't mean to think of swimming *here*!" Percy exclaimed.

"Why not?" asked Tom.

"The turtles might snap at your legs. Ugh!" And Percy shivered.

"No danger of that at all, Percy," remarked Keenan. "Turtles don't go in much for boys' legs. They act on the principle, 'Live and let live.'"

"You're coming in too, Percy," added Tom, as though there were no choice in the matter.

"I! no, indeedy,—no, I won't!"

"But look," said Tom, impressively, and he produced from one of the baskets a pair of swimming-tights. "Here's a little present for you, Percy."

Instead of receiving it, Percy put his hands behind him, and backed away from the gift with a countenance expressive of anything but gratification.

"Well," said Tom, in disgust, "is that the way you receive a present?"

Upon this, Percy, with whom politeness was almost an instinct, brought his face with a strong effort into a smile of gratitude. He advanced, and with a slight bow accepted the gift.

"Oh, thank you, Tom; they're ever so nice. Really," he continued, holding them up, and examining them with an approving eye, "they are quite beautiful. The stripes are nicer than a zebra's.

"I'll keep them in my desk at the college, Tom, and whenever I look at them I'll think of you."

This novel method of proposing to use a pair of swimming-tights did not suit Tom at all.

"Nonsense, Percy! they're not my photograph I want you to *use* them. Swimming isn't so hard. It's much easier to swim than to climb a tree."

Percy, it has already been observed, was most pleased in pleasing others. He saw that Tom was bent on his making a trial at swimming, and so, despite his fear of snapping-turtles, he submitted with the best grace possible.

Encouraged by Tom, he actually spent half an hour in the water, and was quite brave in his attempts to swim.

Percy had scarcely donned his garments, when, on turning his eyes out upon the lake, a cry of joy broke from his lips. A small row-boat steered by Quip and rowed by Keenan was making straight for the shore.

"Oh, do let me in with you, George!"

"What, go in a boat?" said Tom, banteringly. "Boats are dangerous. They upset so easily, you know."

"La! I'm not afraid," rejoined the reckless Percy. "I want to learn how to row."

"Jump in," said Keenan, as the boat's keel grated on the shore.

Percy took a seat along with George, who was in the middle.

"Now shove her off, Tom," said Quip.

Tom complied, and the boat shot out from the shore.

"Let me take an oar, George; I want to learn."

"I'll let you have both in a minute, Percy," George made answer; "but to begin with, you may try your hand at one. Now the very first thing you've got to learn is to keep stroke."

"Keep stroke? what with?"

"With your little hatchet, of course," remarked the grinning steersman, parenthetically.

"Don't mind that Quip; you keep stroke with your oar. The idea of keeping stroke is to draw back your oar, put it into the water, and pull at exactly the same time as I do it. The next thing you'll learn after that, I suppose, will be to catch a crab."

"Is it easy to catch a crab?" Percy innocently asked, as he made his first stroke.

"Easy as rolling off a log," interposed the irrepressible Quip, "and much in the same style, too."

"How is it done?" Percy continued as he bent back in making his third stroke.

"It comes natural," answered Quip, between bursts of laughter. "You needn't try at all. You'll get there before you know it. You're sure to learn."

In taking his sixth stroke, Percy failed to dip his oar in the water, and suddenly toppled over backwards, his head, luckily for him, being caught by Harry Quip, who had been preparing for such an emergency, and his heels describing a series of rapid and irregular curves in the air.

"You've learnt it! you've learnt it!" shouted Quip, while George rested on his oar to indulge in a laugh. "That's just it; that's catching a crab. Now that you know it, you needn't practise it any more."

"Yes," said Keenan, helping Percy to his former position; "the practical application of knowing how to catch a crab consists in not doing it any more."

Percy, merrily laughing at his mishap, readjusted his cap, threw back his hair, and again set bravely to work with his oar. Considering that this was his first experience in a rowboat, he really acquitted himself with credit, and unconsciously he took his revenge on Harry Quip for his raillery. Like all beginners, Percy splashed the water in every direction; and once when Harry had broken into a most hearty laugh at the beginner's awkwardness, Percy quite accidentally sent a jet of water flying into that young gentleman's wide-open mouth. The laugh was put out as though it had been a small conflagration.

When they sat down for dinner at one o'clock that afternoon, Donnel observed that Percy had developed a very pretty red rose on either cheek.

"It came from exercise," Keenan explained.

"And from becoming a boy," added Tom.

"Yes," cried Percy, "that's just it. I'd rather be a boy than anything I know of. And oh, I'm so hungry! I never had such an appetite as far back as I can remember."

"Swimming always makes one hungry, and good cooking helps," said Harry Quip, who, having prepared the fish with great success, now strutted about bravely in a white apron, and with intense satisfaction watched the eatables disappear.

The afternoon passed happily; fish were caught in abundance. The homeward walk, too, was delightful. Percy kept up his high spirits to the

end, and made the way pleasant with song, while, strange to say, he gave no sign of weariness.

"Well," he said, as they neared the college, "I'll have a grand letter to write to mamma and sister Mary. I'll tell them that I've learned to play leap-frog, to throw straight, to catch fish, to row a boat, to not catch a crab, and to swim on my back."

"They won't believe it all," said Donnel.

"Oh yes, they will," answered Percy. "They always believe whatever I say."

"There's one thing you're leaving out, Percy," said Tom soberly, "and it's the most important thing of the whole lot."

"What's that, Tom?"

"Tell your mamma you've learned how to climb a tree."