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CHAPTER I.

THANK A BLIND HORSE FOR GOOD LUCK.

LIFE looks beautiful from both extremities. Prospect and retrospect shine alike in a light so divine as to suggest that the first catches some radiance from the gates, not yet closed, by which the soul has entered, and that the last is illuminated from the opening realm into which it is soon to pass.

Now that they are all gone, I wrap myself in dreams of them, and live over the old days with them. Even the feeblest memory, that cannot hold for a moment the events of to-day, keeps a firm grasp upon the things of youth, and rejoices in its treasures. It is a curious process—this of feeling one's way back to childhood, and clothing one's self again with the little frame—the buoyant, healthy, restless bundle of muscles and nerves—and the old relations of careless infancy. The growing port of later years and the ampler vestments are laid aside; and one stands in his slender young manhood. Then backward still the fancy goes, making the frame smaller, and casting aside each year the changing garments that marked the eras of early growth, until, at last, one holds himself upon his own knee—a ruddy-faced, wondering, questioning, uneasy youngster, in his first trousers and roundabout, and dandles and kisses the dear little fellow that he was!

They were all here then—father, mother, brothers and sisters; and the family life was at its fullest. Now they are all

gone, and I am alone. All the present relations of my life are those which have originated since. I have wife and children, and troops of friends, yet still I am alone. No one of all the number can go back with me into these reminiscences of my earliest life, or give me sympathy in them.

My father was a plain, ingenious, industrious craftsman, and a modest and thoroughly earnest Christian. I have always supposed that the neighbors held him in contempt or pity for his lack of shrewdness in business, although they knew that he was in all respects their superior in education and culture. He was an omnivorous reader, and was so intelligent in matters of history and poetry that the village doctor, a man of literary tastes, found in him almost his only sympathetic companion. The misfortunes of our family brought them only too frequently together; and my first real thinking was excited by their conversations, to which I was always an eager listener.

My father was an affectionate man. His life seemed bound up in that of my mother, yet he never gave a direct expression to his affection. I knew he could not live without her, yet I never saw him kiss her, or give her one caress. Indeed, I do not remember that he ever kissed me, or my sisters. We all grew up hungry, missing something, and he, poor man, was hungriest of all; but his Puritan training held him through life in slavery to notions of propriety which forbade all impulses to expression. He would have been ashamed to kiss his wife in the presence of his children!

I suppose it is this peculiarity of my father which makes me remember so vividly and so gratefully a little incident of my boyhood. It was an early summer evening; and the yellow moon was at its full. I stood out in the middle of the lawn before the house alone, looking up to the golden-orbed wonder, which—so high were the hills piled around our little valley—seemed very near to me. I felt rather than saw my father approaching me. There was no one looking, and he half knelt and put his arm around me. There was something in the clasp of that strong, warm arm that I have never forgot-

ten. It thrilled me through with the consciousness that I was most tenderly beloved. Then he told me what the moon was, and by the simplest illustrations tried to bring to my mind a comprehension of its magnitude and its relations to the earth. I only remember that I could not grasp the thought at all, and that it all ended in his taking me in his arms and carrying me to my bed.

The seclusion in which we lived among the far New Hampshire hills was like that in which a family of squirrels lives in the forest; and as, at ten years of age, I had never been ten miles from home, the stories that came to my ears of the great world that lay beyond my vision were like stories of fairy-land. Fifty years ago the echoes of the Revolution and the War of 1812 had not died away, and soldiers who had served in both wars were plenty. My imagination had been many times excited by the stories that had been told at my father's fireside; and those awful people, "the British," were to me the embodiment of cruelty and terror. One evening, I remember, my father came in, and remarked that he had just heard the report of a cannon. The phrase was new, and sounded very large and significant to me, and I attributed it at once to the approach of "the British." My father laughed, but I watched the converging roads for the appearance of the red-coats for many days. The incident is of no value except to show how closely between those green hills my life had been bound, and how entirely my world was one of imagination. I was obliged to build the world that held alike my facts and my fancies.

When I was about ten years old, I became conscious that something was passing between my father and my mother of an unusual character. They held long conferences from which their children were excluded. Then a rich man of the neighborhood rode into the yard, and tied his horse, and walked about the farm. From a long tour he returned and entered the stable, where he was joined by my father. Both came into the house together, and went all over it, even down to the cellar, where they held a long conversation. Then they were closeted

for an hour in the room which held my father's writing-desk. At last, my mother was called into the room. The children, myself among them, were huddled together in a corner of the large kitchen, filled with wonder at the strange proceedings; and when all came out, the stranger smiling and my father and mother looking very serious, my curiosity was at a painful height; and no sooner had the intruder vanished from the room—pocketing a long paper as he went—than I demanded an explanation.

My sisters were older than I, and to them the explanation was addressed. My father simply said at first: "I have sold the place." Tears sprang into all our eyes, as if a great calamity had befallen us. Were we to be wanderers? Were we to have no home? Where were we to go?

Then my father, who was as simple as a child, undertook the justification of himself to his children. He did not know why he had consented to live in such a place for a year. He told the story of the fallacious promises and hopes that had induced him to buy the farm at first; of his long social deprivations; of his hard and often unsuccessful efforts to make the year's income meet the year's constantly increasing expenses; and then he dwelt particularly on the fact that his duty to his children compelled him to seek a home where they could secure a better education, and have a chance, at least, to make their way in the world. I saw then, just as clearly as I see to-day, that the motives of removal all lay in the last consideration. He saw possibilities in his children which demanded other circumstances and surroundings. He knew that in his secluded home among the mountains they could not have a fair chance at life, and he would not be responsible for holding them to associations that had been simply starvation and torment to him.

The first shock over, I turned to the future with the most charming anticipations. My life was to be led out beyond the hills into an unknown world! I learned the road by which we were to go; and beyond the woods in which it terminated to

my vision my imagination pushed through splendid towns, across sweeping rivers, over vast plains and meadows, on and on to the wide sea. There were castles, there were ships, there were chariots and horses, there was a noble mansion swept and garnished, waiting to receive us all, and, more than all, there was a life of great deeds which should make my father proud of his boy, and in which I remember that "the British" were to be very severely handled.

The actual removal hardly justified the picture. There were two overloaded three-horse teams, and a high, old-fashioned wagon, drawn by a single horse, in which were bestowed the family, the family satchels, and the machinery of an eight-day clock—a pet of my father, who had had it all in pieces for repairs every year since I was born. I did not burden the wagon with my presence, but found a seat, when I was not running by the way-side, with the driver of one of the teams. He had attracted me to his company by various sly nods and winks, and by a funny way of talking to his horses. He was an old teamster, and knew not only every inch of the road that led to the distant market-town to which we were going, but every landlord, groom, and bar-keeper on the way. A man of such vast geographical knowledge, and such extensive and interesting acquaintance with men, became to me a most important personage. When he had amused himself long enough with stories told to excite my imagination, he turned to me sharply and said:

"Boy, do you ever tell lies?"

"Yes, sir," I answered, without hesitation.

"You do? Then why didn't you lie when I asked you the question?"

"Because I never lie except to please people," I replied.

"Oh! you are one of the story-tellers, are you?" he said, in a tone of severity.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, then, you ought to be flogged. If I had a story-telling boy I would flog it out of him. Truth, boy—always

stand by the truth! It was only this time last year that I was carrying a load of goods down the mountain for a family the same as yours, and there was a little boy who went with me the same as you are going now. I was sure I smelt tobacco. Said I, 'I smell tobacco.' He grew red in the face, and I charged him with having some in his pocket. He declared he had none, and I said, 'We shall see what will come to liars.' I pitied him, for I knew something terrible would happen. A strap broke, and the horses started on a run, and off went the boy. I stopped them as soon as I could, ran back and picked him up insensible, with as handsome a plug of tobacco in his pocket as you ever saw; and the rascal had stolen it from his grandmother! Always speak the truth, my boy, always speak the truth!"

"And did you steal the tobacco from him?" I asked.

"No, lad, I took it and used it, because I knew it would hurt him, and I couldn't bear the thought of exposing him to his grandmother."

"Do you think lying is worse than stealing?" I asked.

"That is something we can't settle. Tobacco is very preserving and cleansing to the teeth, and I am obliged to use it. Do you see that little building we are coming to? That is Snow's store: and now, if you are a boy that has any heart—any *real* heart—and if you have saved up a few pennies, you will go in there and get a stick of candy for yourself and a plug of tobacco for me. That would be the square thing for a boy to do who stands by the truth, and wants to do a good turn to a man that helps him along;" and he looked me in the eye so steadily and persuasively that resistance was impossible, and my poor little purse went back into my pocket painfully empty of that which had seemed like wealth.

We rode along quietly after this until my companion asked me if I knew how tall I was. Of course I did not know anything about it, and wished to learn the reason of the question. He had a little boy of his own at home—a very smart little fellow—who could exactly reach the check-rein of his leading

horse. He had been wondering if I could do the same. He should think we were about the same height, and as it would be a tiptoe stretch, the performance would be a matter of spring and skill. At that moment it happened that we came to a watering-trough, which gave me the opportunity to satisfy his curiosity; and he sat smiling appreciatively upon my frantic and at last successful efforts to release the leader's head, and lift it again to its check.

We came to a steep acclivity, and, under the stimulating influence of the teamster's flattery, I carried a stone as large as my head from the bottom to the top, to stay the wheels when the horses paused for breath.

I recall the lazy rascal's practice upon my boyish credulity and vanity more for my interest in my own childishness than for any interest I still have in him; though I cannot think that the jolly old joker was long ago dust, without a sigh. He was a great man to me then, and he stirred me with appeals to my ambition as few have stirred me since. And "standing by the truth," as he so feelingly adjured me to stand, I may confess that his appeals were not the basest to which my life has responded.

The forenoon was long, hot and wearisome, but at its close we emerged upon a beautiful valley, and saw before us a characteristic New England village, with its white houses, large and little, and its two homely wooden spires. I was walking as I came in sight of the village, and I stopped, touched with the poetry of the peaceful scene. Just then the noon-bell pealed forth from one of the little churches—the first church-bell I had ever heard. I did not know what it was, and was obliged to inquire. I have stood under the belfry of Bruges since, and heard, amid the dull jargon of the decaying city, the chimes from its silver-sounding bells with far less of emotion than I experienced that day, as I drank my first draught of the wonderful music. O sweet first time of everything good in life!

Thank heaven that, with an eternity of duration before us,

there is also infinity of resources, with ever-varying supply and ministry, and ever-recurring first times!

My father and the rest of the family had preceded us, and we found them waiting at the village tavern for our arrival. Dinner was ready, and I was quite ready for it, though I was not so much absorbed that I cannot recall to-day the fat old woman with flying cap-strings who waited at the table. Indeed, were I an artist, I could reproduce the pictures on the walls of the low, long dining-room where we ate, so strongly did they impress themselves upon my memory. We made but a short stay, and then in our slow way pressed on. My friend of the team had evidently found something more exhilarating at the tavern than tobacco, and was confidential and affectionate, not only toward me but toward all he met upon the road, of whom he told me long and marvelous histories. But he grew dull and even ill-tempered at last, and I had a quiet cry behind a projecting bedstead, for very weariness and homesickness.

I was too weary when at dusk we arrived at the end of our day's progress to note, or care, for anything. My supper was quickly eaten, and I was at once in the oblivion of sleep. The next day's journey was unlike the first, in that it was crowded with life. The villages grew larger, so as quite to excite my astonishment. I saw, indeed, the horses and the chariots. There were signs of wealth that I had never seen before,—beautifully kept lawns, fine, stately mansions, and gayly-dressed ladies, who humiliated me by regarding me with a sort of stately curiosity; and I realized as I had never done before that there were grades of life far above that to which I had been accustomed, and that my father was comparatively a poor, plain man.

Toward the close of the second afternoon we came in sight of Bradford, which, somewhere within its limits, contained our future home. There were a dozen stately spires, there were tall chimneys waving their plumes of pearly smoke, there were long rows of windows red in the rays of the declining sun, there was a river winding away into the distance between its

borders of elm and willow, and there were white-winged craft that glided hither and thither in the far silence.

"What do you think of that, boy?" inquired my friend the teamster.

"Isn't it pretty!" I responded. "Isn't it a grand place to live in?"

"That depends upon whether one lives or starves," he said. "If I were going to starve, I would rather do it where there isn't anything to eat."

"But we are not going to starve," I said. "Father never will let us starve."

"Not if he can help it, boy; but your father is a lamb—a great, innocent lamb."

"What do you mean by calling my father a lamb? He is as good a man as there is in Bradford, any way," I responded, somewhat indignantly.

The man gave a new roll to the enormous quid in his mouth, a solace that had been purchased by my scanty pennies, and said, with a contemptuous smile, "Oh! he's too good. Some time when you think of it, suppose you look and see if he has ever cut his eye-teeth."

"You are making fun of my father, and I don't like it. How should you like to have a man make fun of you to your little boy?"

At this he gave a great laugh, and I knew at once that he had no little boy, and that he had been playing off a fiction upon me throughout the whole journey. It was my first encounter with a false and selfish world. To find in my hero of the three horses and the large acquaintance only a vulgar rascal who could practice upon the credulity of a little boy was one of the keenest disappointments I had ever experienced.

"If I could hurt you, I would strike you," I said in a rage.

"Well, boy," he replied almost affectionately, and quite admiringly, "you will make *your* way, if you have that sort of thing in you. I wouldn't have believed it. Upon my word, I wouldn't have believed it. I take it all back. Your father is a

first-rate man for heaven, if he isn't for Bradford; and he's sure to go there when he moves next, and I should like to be the one to move him, but I'm afraid they wouldn't let me in to unload the goods."

There was an awful humor in this strange speech which I fully comprehended, but my reverence for even the name of heaven was so profound that I did not dare to laugh. I simply said: "I don't like to hear you talk so, and I wish you wouldn't."

"Well, then, I won't, my lad. They say the lame and the lazy are always provided for, and I don't know why the lambs are not just as deserving. You'll all get through, I suppose; and a hundred years hence there will be no difference."

"Who provides for the lame and the lazy?" I inquired.

"Well, now you have me tight," said the fellow with a sigh. "Somebody up there, I s'pose;" and he pointed his whip upward with a little toss.

"Don't you know?" I inquired, with ingenuous and undisguised wonder.

"Not a bit of it. I never saw him. I've been lazy all my life, and I was lame once for a year, falling from this very wagon, and a mighty rough time I had of it, too; and so far as I am concerned it has been a business of looking out for number one. Nobody ever let down a silver spoon full of honey to me; and what is more, I don't expect it. If you have that sort of thing in your head, the best way is to keep it. You'll be happier, I reckon, in the long run if you do; but I didn't get it in early, and it is too late now."

"Then your father was a goat, wasn't he?" I said, with a quick impulse.

"Yes," he replied with a loud laugh. "Yes indeed; he was a goat with the biggest and wickedest pair of horns you ever saw. Boy, remember what I tell you. Goodness in this world is a thing of fathers and mothers. I haven't any children, and I shouldn't have any right to them if I had. People who bring children into the world that they are not fit to take care of, and who teach them nothing but drinking and fighting and swearing,

ought to be shot. If I had had your start, I should be all right to-day."

So I had another lesson,—two lessons, indeed,—one in the practical infidelity of the world, and one in social and family influence. They haunted me for many days, and brought to me a deeper and a more intelligent respect for my father and his goodness and wisdom than I had ever entertained.

"I wish I were well down that hill," said my teamster at last, after we had jolted along for half a mile without a word. As he said this he looked uneasily around upon his load, which, with the long transportation, had become loose. He stopped his horses, and gave another turn to the pole with which he had strained the rope that, passing lengthwise and crosswise the load, held it together. Then he started on again. I watched him closely, for I saw real apprehension on his face. His horses were tired, and one of them was blind. The latter fact gave me no apprehension, as the driver had taken much pains to impress upon me the fact that the best horses were always blind. He only regretted that he could not secure them for his whole team, principally on account of the fact that not having any idea how far they had traveled, they never knew when to be tired. The reason seemed sound, and I had accepted it in good faith.

When we reached the brow of the hill that descended into the town, I saw that he had some reason for his apprehension, and I should have alighted and taken to my feet if I had not been as tired as the horses. But I had faith in the driver, and faith in the poor brutes he drove, and so remained on my seat. Midway the hill, the blind horse stepped upon a rolling stone; and all I remember of the scene which immediately followed was a confused and violent struggle. The horse fell prone upon the road, and while he was trying in vain to rise, I was conscious that my companion had leaped off. Then something struck me from behind, and I felt myself propelled wildly and resistlessly through the air, down among the struggling horses, after which I knew no more.

When consciousness came back to me it was night, and I was in a strange house. A person who wakes out of healthy sleep recognizes at once his surroundings, and by a process in which volition has no part reunites the thread of his life with that which was dropped when sleep fell upon him. The unconsciousness which follows concussion is of a different sort, and obliterates for a time the memory of a whole life.

I woke upon a little cot on the floor. Though it was summer, a small fire had been kindled on the hearth, my father was chafing my hands, my brothers and sisters were looking on at a distance with apprehension and distress upon their faces, and the room was piled with furniture in great confusion. The whole journey was gone from my memory; and feeling that I would not lift my head or speak, I could only gasp and shut my eyes and wonder. I knew my father's face, and knew the family faces around me, but I had no idea where we were, or what had happened. Something warm and stinging came to my lips, and I swallowed it with a gulp and a strangle. Then I became conscious of a voice that was strange to me. It was deep and musical and strong, yet there was a restraint and a conscious modulation in its tone, as if it were trying to do that to which it was not well used. Its possessor was evidently talking to my mother, who, I knew, was weeping.

"Ah! madam! Ah! madam! This will never do—never do!" I heard him say. "You are tired. Bless me! You have come eighty miles. It would have killed Mrs. Bradford. All you want is rest. I am not a chicken, and such a ride in such a wagon as yours would have finished me up, I'm sure."

"Ah, my poor boy, Mr. Bradford!" my mother moaned.

"The boy will be all right by to-morrow morning," he replied. "He is opening his eyes now. You can't kill such a little piece of stuff as that. He hasn't a broken bone in his body. Let him have the brandy there, and keep his feet warm. Those little chaps are never good for anything until they have had the daylight knocked out of them half-a-dozen times. I wonder what has become of that rascal, Dennis!"

At this he rose and walked to the window, and peered out into the darkness. I saw that he was a tall, plainly dressed man, with a heavy cane in his hand. One thing was certain: he was a type of man I had never seen before. Perfectly self-possessed, entirely at home, superintending all the affairs of the house, commanding, advising, reassuring, inspiring, he was evidently there to do good. In my speechless helplessness, my own heart went out to him in perfect trust. I had the fullest faith in what he said about myself and my recovery, though at the moment I had no idea what I was to recover from, or, rather, what had been the cause of my prostration.

"There the vagabond comes at last!" said the stranger. He threw open the door, and Dennis, a smiling, good-natured looking Irishman, walked in with a hamper of most appetizing drinks and viands. An empty table was ready to receive them, and hot coffee, milk, bread, and various cold meats were placed one after another upon it.

"Set some chairs, Dennis, and be quick about it," said Mr. Bradford.

The chairs were set, and then Mr. Bradford stooped and offered my mother his arm, in as grand a manner as if he were proffering a courtesy to the Queen of England. She rose and took it, and he led her to the table. My father was very much touched, and I saw him look at the stranger with quivering lips. This was a gentleman—a kind of man he had read about in books, but not the kind of man he had ever been brought much in contact with. This tender and stately attention to my mother was an honor which was very grateful to him. It was a touch of ideal life, too,—above the vulgar, graceless habits of those among whom his life had been cast. Puritan though he was, and plain and undemonstrative in his ways, he saw the beauty of this new manner with a thrill that brought a crimson tint to his hollow cheeks. Both he and my mother tried to express their thanks, but Mr. Bradford declared that he was the lucky man in the whole matter. It was so fortunate that he had happened to be near when the accident occurred; and though the service