

THE YOUNG WRECKER.

OR

FRED RANSOM.

CHAPTER I.

AN OLD BACHELOR INTRODUCES HIMSELF TO THE YOUNG READER—DESCRIBES HIS PRESENT APPEARANCE AND FEELINGS—TELLS THE STORY OF THE ADVENTURES OF HIS BOYHOOD.



I AM an old bachelor. I have reached that time of life at which we old fellows are generally supposed to be fat, and to wear gold spectacles and very easy shoes. If you will picture me thus, the result will be a sufficiently accurate portrait of my personal appearance and identity.

Although I am about to write some of my own adventures, I do not purpose writing about my present self, but of myself when I was very different from the sketch which I have made.

Every old bachelor was once a young one, and every young one was once still younger, when, although a bachelor, he was known only as a boy. It is the story of the boy, who is now an old bachelor, that I am about to narrate.

As you may perchance wish to know something of the character and feelings of the person who addresses you, and how he came to do so, I will indulge your curiosity.

We old fellows have not all those cares of family which fill the hours of others with pleasurable duty, and time often hangs heavily on our hands. Many of us try to do our duty. Heaven forbid that we should be blind to the need that this world has of earnest workers! But, after all, a man may minister to the needs of others, and yet there come vacant hours, when he must return to himself, and require ministering to his own. If he lacks not plenty of the goods of this world, he may have heart-yearnings that are quite as pitiable as hunger, thirst, and want of shelter. Would that every one could be spared the sharp pang that I have sometimes experienced when fondling the joy and pride of some household,—the chubby boy who tossed his arms with glee, and twined his little hands in my shaggy beard!

Sometimes, especially at night, when I return to my lonely chambers, and feel the influence

of a home where there is no presence of a life closely allied to mine, a vague, aching sense of void bends over my nature. But these are feelings which you are now too young to comprehend, and which I trust that you may never experience.

I read, walk, go where my services are needed, I force myself to accomplish set tasks; but yet, with all this, I am not contented. Of friends I am not destitute. One may possess friends, and still be very lonely; for one cannot live forever at their houses. So it happens that I generally dine at my club, but now and then I accept a friend's hospitality. But I am not sufficiently engaged, for regular employment is necessary to happiness. I will write, thought I. If I have no boys of my own to listen to the story of their father's life, the family of boys in the world is large enough to gratify my wish for hearers. I had often thought of writing it, but my intentions came to nought, until a trivial incident, occurring a few days ago, fixed my resolution to carry out the project.

I will now tell you the circumstance which determined me to write, to show you upon what trifles great undertakings sometimes hinge,—for it is no small undertaking to write a book,—and then I shall enter upon the story of my adventures.

The other day, I returned home after a lonely dinner, and throwing myself back in an easy chair, I went off into an after-dinner reverie. It was a warm afternoon,—one of those when the atmosphere seems to hum with heat. At such a time, one's senses seem to be peculiarly alive to the impression of sounds, the faintest murmur being articulate, and yet a part of one grand chorus. A big fly kept droning around the room, except when it inserted itself in a crevice, and extricated itself with a whiz and dash against the nearest obstruction. Lulled by the intense heat and the buzz of the insect, my mind rambled away to the places in which I had spent some of my earlier years. I vividly recalled the tropical scenes, among which I had once passed my days. They came to me like a story of adventure, and passed in review as if a diorama unrolled before me. Suddenly the big fly struck violently against my face. I started, and made a switch at it with my pocket-handkerchief. "Too bad," I thought, "to miss the rest." I laughed aloud, as I exclaimed with delight,—“Why it is my own story. If it could be so interesting as a reminiscence, why would it not prove interesting to those who have never heard it? My mind is made up, I will write it for the entertainment of others, and for my own.”