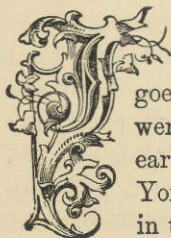


CHAPTER II.

OUR HERO, MOVED BY A SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE, BEGS HIS FATHER TO GRANT HIM PERMISSION TO MAKE A VOYAGE—HE IS REFUSED—REPINES AT WHAT HE CONSIDERS HIS HARD FATE—MAKES THE ACQUAINTANCE OF THE SON OF A SEA-CAPTAIN—RENEWES HIS REQUEST TO HIS FATHER, AND IS AGAIN REFUSED—VISITS HIS FRIEND, AND RUNS AWAY BY ACCIDENT



I WAS born, not of "poor but respectable parents," as the phrase goes, but of respectable parents who were well-to-do in the world. At an early age, my father settled in New York. He was an Englishman, born in the town of Sheffield. Soon after his arrival in this country, he established himself in New York, in the business for which Sheffield is famed, and very soon afterwards he married the lady who was the mother of our hero—myself. Not many years after that event, my poor mother died. Not so early, however, that I have not a distinct recollection of her; but early enough for me to lose,

at a tender age, the affection and cherished counsel which exercise so great an influence over the life of every one who has been so fortunate as to possess them.

My father intended me for his own business, but having a thorough appreciation of the value of a good education for every one, no matter what course of life may be pursued, he placed me at an excellent school in the city, intending to keep me there until I should be at least seventeen years of age. Without having any distaste for business generally, or for my father's business in particular, I grew up with that indefinable longing that is common to many boys—a desire to roam. A vague feeling constantly beset me that I must ramble somewhere in the world. I persuaded myself that if my wish were gratified, my propensity might be overcome. It was not long before I imparted these feelings to my father, and begged him to let me go upon a voyage of some sort; but I found him opposed to it, and I thought him obdurate. He represented to me, that my wish was nothing but a senseless craving for excitement, and that if it were manfully resisted, it could be subdued, and that it was my duty to conquer it. All this he said to me, talking as many a father has done to his son, and will do fruitlessly to the

end of time. My arguments were based, as I have intimated, upon the very reverse reasoning. I contended that the gratification of my wish would serve the purpose of allaying my desire, and that deprivation would only serve to increase it. We could come to no satisfactory conclusion, as we were so diametrically opposed, and time passed, and, after a while, the subject was not resumed between us. I saw that he was fixed in his determination not to give his consent to my wish, and when, after many unavailing attempts to shake his purpose, I came to this conclusion, I was silent in reference to the matter.

Meanwhile, I continued to go to school, and to fulfil my duties, but I also continued to brood over the hard fate, as I thought it, which prevented me from seeing something of the world, and which would probably sentence me to a life spent without ever visiting those scenes which I delighted to picture in my mind. Whether it was that I had a natural propensity for rambling, or whether the obstinacy of my nature had been aroused by the opposition with which the first expression of my wishes had been met, or whether both these causes conspired to render me impatient of control, and doubly desirous of escape from it, I do not know; but certain it is, that my longing to

travel somewhere became daily more intense.

→ However, I pursued my studies with some relish, for books have always been to me sources of interest and enjoyment. But the undercurrent of my existence was the vain, ill-defined desire which I have expressed to you. Possessed with this constant longing, which seemed immeasurably removed from the possibility of gratification, it gradually became my habit to frequent a certain tier of wharves which were situated at a convenient distance from our house. In my uneasy condition of mind, I felt that if I could not travel, there was some solace in being near the instruments with which man has learned to conquer space, and transport the arts and treasures of other lands to his own door. These wharves of which I speak, were chiefly frequented by a class of small vessels which brought fruit from the West Indies to the New York market. Laden with fragrant oranges, bananas, and other tropical fruits, which, heaped up in fabulous profusion, seemed to me to have brought with them the very atmosphere of the sunny climes in which they grew, these tiny vessels possessed to my youthful eyes the beauty of gondolas. And yet they were sorry-looking vessels, the largest not more than a hundred tons burthen.

Of course, it was not long before I formed

William Sitnik
Fred Ransom

OR FRED RANSOM.

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the acquaintance of some of the people who sailed in them, and, naturally enough, too, I first made the acquaintance of a boy who was about my own age, and who turned out to be the son of the captain of one of the largest of the vessels. From that time forward, my desire to go to sea became more uncontrollable than ever. I sometimes passed the whole of my leisure in the cabin of his schooner, and often diverted myself by imagining that we were at sea. Boy-like, I soon frankly confided to him my wishes, and the ill-success that they had met when I expressed them to my father. He consoled me by saying that the "old man" would come around after awhile," but he observed that, for his part, he could not see why I was so anxious to go wandering about, especially to leave such a city as New York, where there were lots of fun going on all the time. He only wished that he could change with me, for that then we would both be suited, for he would give me his place, and welcome. "Where was the fun," said he, "in pitching around at sea, between New York and the West Indies, when a fellow could live all the time in a city, and go to the theatre, and have a regular jolly time." I replied, that it was all very well for him to talk in that way, when he, although so young, had seen something of the world, in touching

along the coasts of Mexico, South America, and the West Indies; but I felt that I had, in comparison, seen nothing. My visits generally ended by our spending the evening together at some entertainment, which he declared to be better fun than going to sea, and joked me about asking our fathers whether they would not swap sons.

This acquaintance was not particularly congenial, except from his being associated with my chief desire. Soon after meeting him, his father's vessel made two or three voyages, and I saw him only at intervals of several months. During the absence of the vessel, I committed all sorts of vagaries. I used to go down to the wharf and take a look at the berth in which she usually lay, and every thing connected with voyaging had now become so dear to me, that I kept in one of my pockets a piece of tarred rope, such as sailors call old junk, and this I would sometimes furtively withdraw and smell, as if it exhaled the most delicate perfume.

The vessel had been absent for three or four months, after I made the acquaintance of the captain's son, when she came into port about the middle of September. It was in the year 1839. As usual, many hours had not elapsed before I heard of her arrival, and paid a visit to the wharf. For several days, I made my

customary visits to the place. One day as I parted from my friend, who was called Charley Edson, I mentioned that I should probably be unable to see him on the morrow, as it would be my fifteenth birthday, and my father had intimated that we would spend it together as a holiday. He answered that I must be sure to come on the following day, for that they had sold their cargo, and intended to sail as soon as some other business was transacted.

The next day my father proposed that we should make an excursion to a certain place—one of the numerous beautiful spots by which New York is surrounded. I eagerly acceded to his proposition, and we started off together.

It is not necessary to my story to enlarge upon the events of this trip, for I cannot even now recall my father's kindness, and his solicitude for my enjoyment, without pain at the recollection of the sequel. Perceiving that he was in an unusually pleasant mood, I judged that a favorable opportunity had arrived, to resume the subject upon which I had been so long silent. I therefore commenced by reminding him that I was now fifteen years of age, and represented to him, that I had lately shown my discretion, by not urging him to grant my wishes; but that now, as they were as strong as ever, and I had, for some time, zeal-

ously pursued my studies, I hoped that he would permit me to indulge in at least one voyage. At this discourse his countenance fell, and I saw, subsequently, that his pleasure for the day had gone. However, he replied, kindly, that he wished me, as he had already said, to continue my studies until I was at least seventeen years of age. He remarked, that he had hoped I had given up my whim, and seen how foolish it was. It was best, he continued, that I should remain at school for two or three years longer, and then settle down into a business man, and aid him in his affairs, the burden of which was daily increasing.

It was my turn now to be disappointed, and the rest of our holiday passed uncomfortably enough. I had not a thought that was not loving and filial, or else I would not have been so sad.

Late in the afternoon we returned to the city. My father parted from me kindly, saying, as I went towards my room, "You will think better of this, my son, and one of these days, you will know that I am right." I was sorrowful and vexed—sorrowful that my scheme had again miscarried, and vexed with myself, because I had caused my dear father unhappiness on a day when he had sought to contribute to my pleasure.

In this uneasy frame of mind, I wandered out of the house, about dusk, and mechanically bent my steps towards the wharves which I frequented. The shades of evening deepened as I walked along, and lamp after lamp was lighted along the streets through which I passed. By the time that I had reached the river, night had fallen, and the badly illuminated docks looked gloomier than usual, owing to my emerging from the brilliant streets of the city. Here and there one could discern the tracery of rigging defined against the sky. An occasional glimmer of a smoky lamp, a hoarse voice, the fall of a plank, or something of the sort, now and then indicated that the vessels at the wharves were not wholly deserted. The night was very sultry, and I sauntered leisurely along, until I reached the place where the schooner lay.

The only person about seemed to be the cook, who was stirring around his galley, making preparations for his next day's duties. I hailed him, and asked where all the people were. He told me that the men had gone to town for a while, and that the captain and his son had gone there too, on business, as the schooner was to sail early in the morning, so as to take advantage of the first of the ebb, for the tide would turn to run out about daylight. I an-

swered that I would wait, and seated myself on the taffrail, and watched the lights of the shipping which lay at anchor in the harbor. The tide was running out then, so there would be one intervening tide before the one which was to serve the schooner. As the stream flowed swiftly by the vessel, as she lay bow foremost in one of the wharf-slips, the laving, gently plashing sound was most agreeable on an evening so hot. I became impatient of waiting, however, and after I had amused myself with seeing all that could be seen on deck, I resorted to the cabin, and took a seat on a cushioned locker.

I felt sure that my friend would not return before ten o'clock, but as I had determined to wait, I lay down on the locker and thought over my day's excursion, my father's disappointment and mine. At last I fell into a doze. When I awakened, I thought, from my feelings, that I must have been sleeping soundly. I awoke giddy; every thing seemed to reel around me. With a strong effort I fully aroused myself, jumped up, and staggered across to the other side of the cabin. Sick at the stomach, I clambered with difficulty up the companion-way, and plunged into the arms of a man at the helm. I was at sea!