The Adventures of a Country Boy at a Country Fair

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In an instant Sam was off at full speed, crying, "Stop thief!" at the full strength of his lungs.

CHAPTER I. A YOUNG FAKIR.

"I'm going to try it. Deacon Jones says I can have the right to run both things for ten dollars, and Uncle Nathan is going to lend me money enough to get the stock."

"What scheme have you got in your head now, Teddy Hargreaves?" and Mrs. Fernald looked over her spectacles at the son of her widowed sister, who was literally breathless in his excitement.

"I'm going to run a cane an' knife board at the Peach Bottom fair, and try to make money enough to pay the debt mother owes on the place."

"You're crazy—mad as a March hare! The idea of a child like you setting yourself up to earn three or four hundred dollars, when your father worked all his life and couldn't get so much together."

Mrs. Fernald really appeared to be angry, and she really believed there was good cause why she should lose her temper. The thought that little Teddy—a "whiflet" she called him—should set up his opinion in such matters against his elders, and attempt to earn in one season an amount which Seth Hargreaves had never been able to repay during his thirty-six years of life, was so preposterous that the good lady looked upon the boy's assertion as positive proof that he was not only ready but willing to "fly in the face of Providence."

"I shall try it all the same," Teddy replied in a most provokingly matter-of-fact tone, "an' I'm going down to see Uncle Nathan this very minute."

"Very well, and I consider it my bounden duty to advise your mother to keep you in the house until the fair is ended," Aunt Sarah said, as she took from its peg the well-worn gingham sun-bonnet.

Teddy had no desire to prolong the conversation, which had been begun simply because his aunt insisted on

knowing where he had been, but hurried away from the gate on which he had been swinging while Mrs. Fernald questioned him, as if fearful lest she might try to detain him until the matter could be settled according to her own ideas of propriety.

"I can have the right to run what I want to, every day the fair lasts, for ten dollars, an' now, if you lend me fifteen, I'll be all right," the boy cried as he burst into Nathan Hargreaves' store, just as the old gentleman was adding a trifle more sand to the sugar, in order to compensate for what might possibly have been spilled by the careless clerk.

"Oh, it's fixed, eh? And you're really goin' to turn fakir?" Uncle Nathan asked, wrinkling his face into the semblance of a laugh, but remaining silent, as if fearing to waste even such a cheap thing as mirth.

"What's a fakir?"

"A man, or a boy, for that matter, who goes out to sell things as you count on doin', if I'm fool enough to let you throw away fifteen good dollars of mine."

"But you promised to lend me the money."

"An' I'm going to do it; but that don't make me any less a fool jest because I'm holdin' to my word. Tell me what you count on doin', an' then we'll come down to the business end of the scheme."

"I'll pay the ten dollars I've got to Deacon Jones for the right to run the games, an' with what you lend me I'm goin' to Waterville an' buy a whole lot of knives an' canes. There's a storekeeper over there who promises to sell that kind of goods for less than they cost him."

"An' he's lyin' when he says it. People don't do business for the fun of it; but that's neither here nor there so far as our trade is concerned. I'm goin' to give you the fifteen dollars now—it's a power of money for a boy of your size, Teddy—, an' if you make anything, as I allow you will, I'm to have eighteen dollars back; don't forget that part of the trade."

"I'll stand to what I agreed, Uncle Nathan, and you shall be paid the very day the fair closes."

"Here it is," and with a sigh which was almost a groan Uncle Nathan took from a fat calfskin wallet three five-dollar bills, adding, as he handed them to Teddy: "Be careful of it, my boy, for I'm puttin' almost too much confidence in a child of your size, an' nobody knows how distressed I'd be if anything happened to prevent your paying it back."

Teddy placed the money carefully in the inside pocket of his vest, and, after promising for at least the hundredth time that it should be repaid by the close of the following week, hurried home confident in the belief that he was on an extremely short road to wealth.

Mrs. Hargreaves was by no means as sanguine as her son concerning the success of the scheme, and actually appeared frightened when Teddy showed her the money he had received from his Uncle Nathan, who was reputed to be the "closest-fisted" merchant to be found within a day's ride of Peach Bottom Run.

"If you should lose it, Teddy, and be unable to pay him back at the exact time you promised, it would be the undoing of us, for we could never expect to get another dollar. I know he is not generous, but have always believed that if we should be in yet more straitened circumstances he would give us some assistance. He has neither charity nor mercy for any one who does not pay a little more than his just debts—"

"But I shall give back every cent of this, mother, so don't look as if you were in such distress. I want to go to Waterville to buy my stock in the morning, an' am counting on walking. It's only seven miles, an' I'll save fifty cents by traveling on shanks' mare."

"I will have breakfast ready by four o'clock; but you must come back on the stage, Teddy."

"Yes, if I feel very tired; but I don't know of any easier way to earn a dollar than by walking both ways."

The young "fakir" believed he knew exactly what kind and amount of stock he wished to purchase on the following day, therefore he had no preparations to make for the journey save to get his limbs in the best possible condition for the tramp by retiring very early, in order to "scoop in" plenty of sleep.

The thought of the success which should attend him in his new venture kept his eyes open a long while after getting into bed, and when he finally succeeded in crossing over to the land of Nod, dreams of the fortune to be made during the coming week visited his brain, and remained there until his mother's voice summoned him to breakfast.

The sun had not yet come up from behind the hills when he was trudging sturdily along over the dusty road, carrying a generous luncheon tied in a snowy-white napkin, and with his money secured by many pins in the lining of his cap.

"Be careful not to lose it, for your Uncle Nathan would never forgive you," his mother had said, and he cried cheerily, as he walked swiftly down the lane to the highway:

"There's no fear of anything like that happening; the bills can't get away without my knowing it so long as they stay here," and Teddy pulled his cap yet more closely down on his head.

In a trifle more than two hours he was at Waterville, wondering why the stores were not open, no matter how early it was, when such an important customer as himself came to town.

Since the merchants were evidently ignorant of his arrival, as was evidenced by the fact that their places of business yet remained closed, there was no more profitable occupation for him than to eat a second breakfast, which he proceeded to do, using a hand-truck on the depot-platform as a seat.

The train which left New York on the evening before had arrived some time previous, and the station was temporarily

deserted by all save a boy of about Teddy's age, who was walking to and fro in an aimless manner.

By the time the young "fakir" had finished his second biscuit he noticed that the stranger was watching him narrowly, and, holding forth the napkin with its generous store, he asked:

"Have one?"

"I don't care if I do," said the boy, carelessly, and he continued:

"I reckon you live 'round here?"

"No, I jest come up from Peach Bottom Run, an' am waiting for the stores to be opened."

"Why, you're from the same place where the fair is goin' to be held."

"No; I live at the Run, an' the fair is over to Peach Bottom, most five miles from my house. Are you goin' there?"

"I should reckon I was. Why, I'm goin' to help run it."

"You are?" and Teddy's mouth opened wide in astonishment.

"Yes, sir-ree, an' you fellers will be jest about crazy when I tell you what I've come to do."

"Don't flash it upon us too quick, for we wanter kind of keep our wits about us till the fun is over."

The tone of sarcasm in Teddy's voice appeared to nettle the stranger.

"I've come down here to give away a steamboat what's worth five hundred dollars."

"Then there ain't any need for you to go any farther, 'cause I'm willin' to take it now."

"If you won't be so smart I'll tell you about it," was the dignified reply. "There's a firm out in Detroit what's goin' to do that very thing to the feller that can guess how much she weighs, an' I've been hired to help the man who is comin' down to Peach Bottom to show off a lot of boats."

"What are you goin' to do?" and now Teddy was interested.

"Row around in the creek while he looks out for the stuff in the fair. It won't be any more'n fun, an' if you'll come over I'll take you out."

"I don't s'pose you could help me guess how much the steamer weighs, could you?"

"There ain't anybody as can do that, 'cause you see she ain't built yet; but you can find out all about it by lookin' on the fair grounds for the circulars what the Davis Boat and Oar Company of Detroit will throw around, an' if there's somethin' else you wanter know jest ask for Sam Balderston; all the folks will know me before I've been there very long."

"I'm going to work at the fair myself," Teddy replied, and then, in response to his new friend's questions, he gave him all the particulars of his proposed venture.

"I reckon you'll get along all right, an' come out way ahead, if some of these smart fakirs don't try to get the best of you. Say, why can't I go to your house, an' stay till it's time to go over to the fair? I'll pay my way."

"If mother's willin', I'd like to have you, an' I don't believe she'll care. Now, I've got to buy my stuff. Where'll I meet you afterward?"

"I'm goin' with you," Sam said, in a matter-of-fact tone. "I know a good deal about such things, an' won't see you cheated."

Teddy hardly thought he was in need of any assistance; but since he did not want to offend this fellow who was concerned in giving away a steamboat, he could not well refuse, therefore the two started up the street together.

CHAPTER II. AN OLD FAKIR.

Sam had very much advice to give during the short walk, and while the greater portion of it was worthless, there were bits which might be of value to the young "fakir."

"Don't buy anything till you have seen all there is in town, an' then you'll know which is the cheapest," Sam repeated several times, with an air of wisdom, and Teddy believed this to be a good idea.

With this object in view the two boys walked from store to store, examining that particular quality of canes and knives which Teddy thought would be best suited to his purpose, and Sam had no hesitation in criticising the goods boldly, until more than one of the clerks lost his temper entirely and refused to show the full stock.

"If you go on this way, Sam, we won't get the business done to day, an' I want to send the stuff down in the stage, which leaves here at three o'clock."

"There'll be plenty of time for that; I know what I'm about. Now, if you had sent your money to me, I'd got you a dandy lot in New York for almost nothing."

"Seein's how I didn't even know your name till a couple of hours ago, there wasn't much chance for me to do that, an' I guess I'll make out well enough here if you don't keep on raisin' a fuss with the clerks."

"I won't so much as yip ag'in, if that's the way you look at it. The question is, which store you're goin' to buy from?"

"There's a place near the depot that wasn't open when we came past. Let's go there, an' then I'll make up my mind."

Sam, feeling a trifle injured because his advice had not been fully appreciated, said nothing more until they were near the station, and then, seeing a train approaching, he proposed that they stop for a few minutes.

"Jest as likely as not there'll be people on it whom I know goin' to the fair, an' you want to get acquainted with all the fakirs, so's they'll help you along now an' then."

"The stage goes at three."

"An' it ain't more'n ten now. Come on!" Sam cried, triumphantly, as he motioned for Teddy to come nearer.

Sam had already quickened his pace, and Teddy was forced to follow, or injure the feelings of one whom he believed held a responsible position in the Peach Bottom exhibition. Among the passengers alighting from the train as the boys arrived was a man who carried a large package enveloped in green cloth, and Sam whispered, excitedly:

"I'll bet that's an old fakir, and if he is we want to let him know who we are."

Teddy failed to understand exactly why this was necessary; but his companion seemed so positive on the point that he remained silent.

This particular passenger appeared to have plenty of time at his disposal. He placed his package at one end of the platform, lighted a pipe, and then walked to and fro as the remainder of the travelers dispersed.

"You foller me, an' we'll find out who he is," Sam whispered, when he thought a fitting opportunity had come, and then advanced boldly toward the stranger. "Goin' to the fair?" he asked.

"Yes; what of it?"

"Nothin', only I s'pose you know you've got to take another train here."

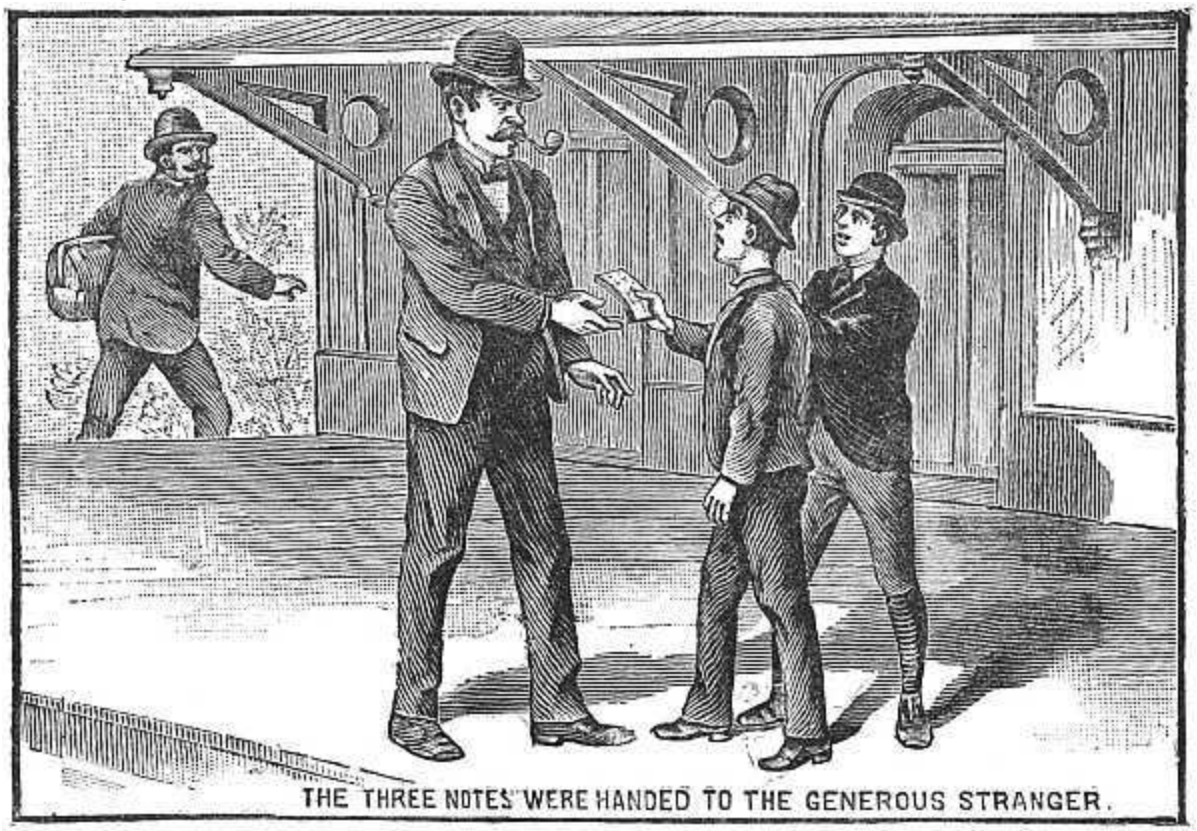
"If I didn't why would I be loafin' around this dead place?"

"I jest spoke of it 'cause this feller an' I are goin' there, too," and Sam waved his hand in the direction where Teddy was standing.

"I s'pose there'll be other boys besides you at the fair, eh?"

"But we belong to it. I'm to give a steamboat away, an' he's goin' to run a cane an' knife board. We're waiting here

to buy the stock."



THE THREE NOTES WERE HANDED TO THE GENEROUS STRANGER.

"Oh, you are, eh?" and now the man appeared to be interested. "I reckon you're goin' to spend as much as a dollar?"

"One? Why, he's got fifteen, an' the whole of it will be spent before the stage leaves. We know something about the business an' don't count on gettin' an outfit for nothing."

"I thought you was a fakir," the man said, in a more friendly tone, as, unobserved by the worldly-wise Sam, he made a peculiar gesture to a stranger immediately in the rear.

"That's what I am," was the proud reply, "an' I'll make things hum over at Peach Bottom before I leave the town. You see I thought I'd speak to you, 'cause all of us fellers should know each other."

"You're right, an' it's mighty lucky you did strike up an acquaintance, for I can give you a big lift. I've helped many a boy into the business when they had money enough to help themselves."

The last dozen words were spoken in a loud tone, as if for the benefit of the stranger in the rear; but instead of waiting to hear more the latter turned abruptly and walked toward the package with a green covering at the end of the platform.

"I knew we oughter talk with you."

"Did you count on buying your stuff in this one-horse town?" the man asked as Teddy approached, and the latter replied:

"There wasn't any other place I could go to, 'cause it costs too much for a ticket to New York."

"How big a stock do you want?"

"All I can get for fifteen dollars. Don't you think that will be enough?"

"It depends," the stranger replied, reflectively. "If you buy the goods here you'll have to pay such a big price that it won't be much of a pile. Now, if—I've got the very thing in mind! You'll remember the day you saw me if my plan works. I know a fakir here who has a fine layout that he wants to sell. You can get fifty dollars' worth of stuff for—well, he asks twenty; but I'll say you are friends of mine, an' the chances are you can make a trade."

"That would be a regular snap!" Sam cried, and Teddy's eyes glistened at the thought of thus procuring a full outfit so cheaply.

"I'll do what I can for you," the man said, in a patronizing tone. "At any rate, I'll make him come down in his price, and if there's any balance it can be paid after the fair has been opened long enough for you to take in some money."

"If business is good, I'm willing to do what is right," Teddy replied; "but I must pay Uncle Nathan first."

"How much do you owe him?"

"Fifteen dollars."

"Why, bless my soul, it'll be a pretty poor fair if you can't make five times that amount in the first two days."

"Where can we see the man?" Sam asked, eager that his wonderfully good trade should be consummated at the earliest possible opportunity.

"I don't know; but he's somewhere in the town. Give me your cash, an' I'll hunt him up inside of half an hour. The stuff is right here in the baggage-room, and you can ship it on the stage without any trouble."

Just for an instant Teddy hesitated to part with what seemed to him like an enormous amount of money; but then came the thought that an old fakir would not wrong a young one—and he considered himself such. After some little difficulty he succeeded in extracting all the pins, and the three notes were handed to the generous stranger almost at the same moment that the green-covered package disappeared from the edge of the platform simultaneously with the departure of the second stranger.

"Wait right here for me," the man said, as he put the money in his pocket. "I've got too much work to do to spend any very great amount of time hunting you fellows up in case you don't stay in one place."

After thus cautioning them, the old fakir walked slowly away, and Sam said:

"It was lucky you fell in with me, Teddy, for I know how these things are worked, an' can give you a good many pointers before the fair is over. Why, you'll have a first-class outfit for about half what it's worth."

"Yes, it's a good chance; but I can't see why he didn't take us with him if he was in a hurry, an' then he wouldn't have had to come back."

"He's got to do that anyway, for his stuff is here," Sam replied, pointing toward where he had last seen the man's package; but it was no longer there. "I guess the baggage-

master has taken it in," he added; "but you needn't be afraid of losin' your money while I'm with you."

Then Sam occupied his companion's attention by telling of his many alleged wonderful exploits, and an hour passed before his story was concluded.

In the meantime one train had arrived and departed; another was on the point of leaving the depot, bound for Peach Bottom, when Teddy cried as he leaped to his feet:

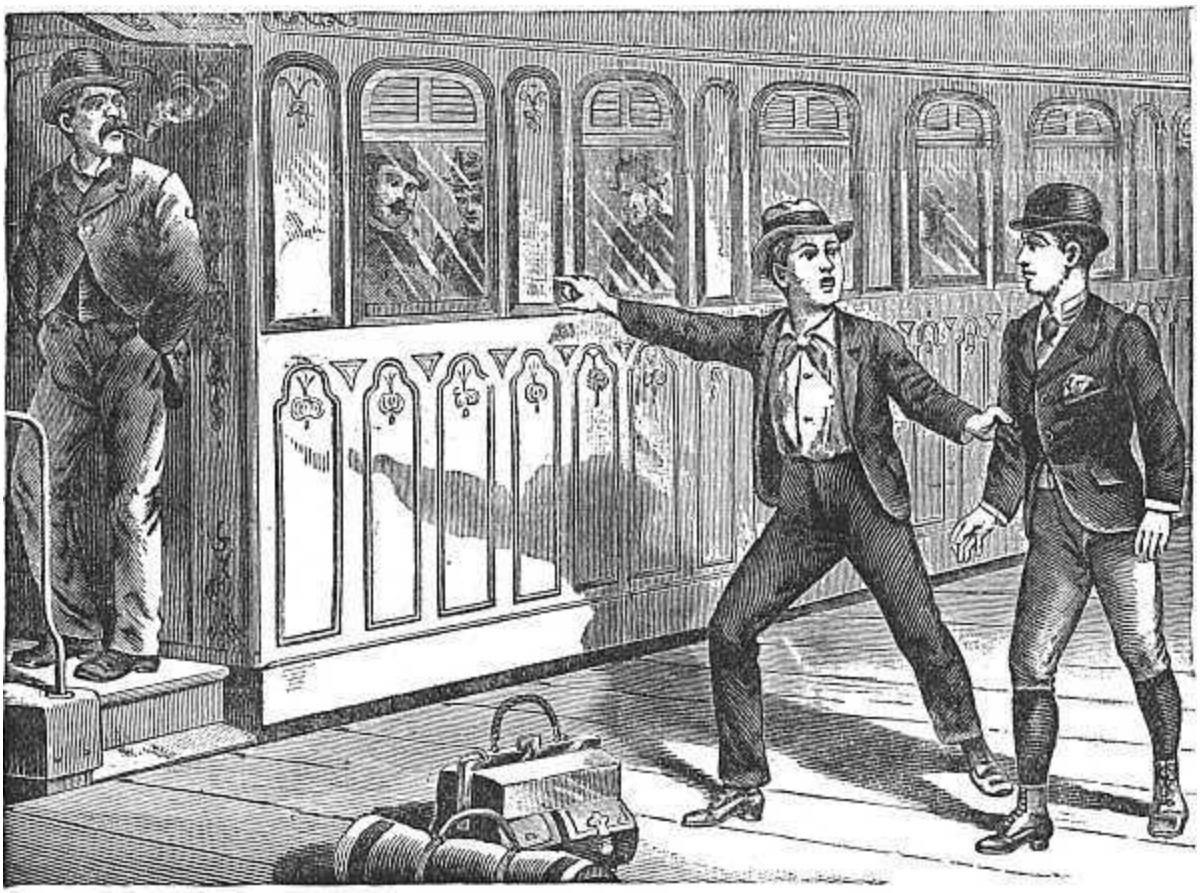
"See! I'm certain that's the man who has got my money!"

"Where?"

"On the platform of the front car!"

Before he could say anything more the train steamed out, leaving the would-be young fakir staring at it in distress and consternation.

"Of course it wasn't him," Sam said, confidently, when the last car had disappeared from view. "The stuff he was goin'to buy for you is here in the baggage-room, 'cause he said so, an' we'll see him before long."



"See! I'm certain that's the man who has got my money."

Teddy's suspicions had been aroused, and he was not easily quieted. The thought that it was possible he might have lost the money loaned him by Uncle Nathan was sufficient to cause the liveliest fear, and he said, decidedly:

"I'm going to know where that man's baggage went to."

"How'll you find out?"

"Ask the baggage-master."

"Don't make a fool of yourself. It would be nice for an old fakir like that man to know you thought he'd steal your money."

"I don't care what he knows, so long as I get my fifteen dollars back."

Teddy, trembling with apprehension and excitement, went into the baggage-room and asked there if a green-

covered package had been taken in by any of the attendants.

No one had seen such an article, and all were positive there was nothing of the kind remaining in their charge.

Then he asked if a bundle of canes had been left there, and to this question there was a most decided negative.

"The hangers-on at the fairs haven't begun to come yet," the baggage-master said, "and when they do come, we sha'n't have any of their stuff to handle, for it will all be transferred across the platform without being brought in here. What is the matter? Anything gone wrong?"

The lump which had been rising in Teddy's throat was now so large that it was with difficulty he could say:

"A man has run off with fifteen dollars of mine, an' Uncle Nathan will jest about kill me!"

CHAPTER III. A FRIEND.

The baggage-master immediately displayed the utmost sympathy for the victim of the old fakir's seductive scheme, and Sam was loud in his denunciations of a brother in the craft who would serve them in such a shabby manner.

"You leave him to me, an' I'll show you what can be done," that young gentleman said, and Teddy replied, reproachfully:

"I've left too much to you already. If you hadn't thought it was necessary to make the acquaintance of every fellow who was going to the fair I'd have my fifteen dollars in my cap now."

"I'll get them back for you."

"How?"

"I can't say jest now; but you wait an' see what I can do."

Inasmuch as Teddy must account first to his mother and afterward to Uncle Nathan for that amount, the confident assertion of his friend failed to give him any mental relief, and he said, quite sharply:

"You thought it was all right to give the money to him, an' if you didn't know any more than a country boy who'd never even heard of such fellows, I can't see how you can do much toward helping."

At this point the baggage-master, who had been listening to the conversation, broke in with the sage remark:

"It's no use for you fellows to fight over what has been done. The money is gone; there's no doubt about that; but it may be you can get it back."

"How?" Teddy asked, eagerly.

"By notifying the police, and it is possible that they may find your man long before the fair is ended."

"But even if they should, how can I pay Uncle Nathan the eighteen dollars he wants, after givin' Deacon Jones the ten which I promised?"

"That, of course, is a question I cannot answer," the officer of the company replied, not unkindly; "but it will certainly be better to get some of the money back than to lose the whole."

"Of course it will," Sam said, promptly, after waiting a few seconds without hearing any reply from Teddy. "Tell us what to do, an' I'll see to the whole thing."

"Hello! What kind of a meeting are you holding here?" a cheery voice cried, and, looking up, the disconsolate Teddy saw a merchant whose stock he had been examining a short time previous.

In a few words the baggage-master explained the condition of affairs.

"Can nothing be done?" the merchant asked.

"It is barely possible. The fact of the matter is that the two swindlers left on the last train, and this boy's money has gone with them beyond a doubt."

Then the merchant turned to the would-be fakir and asked for further particulars, which were readily given, the latter saying, as he finished the sad story:

"Uncle Nathan is bound to raise a big row, an' I won't be able to help mother, as I counted on doing; but I s'pose it serves me right."

"I'm not so sure of that, lad, for all of us are liable to be taken in at some time or another. It is possible you may make money at the fair, and I will give you credit to the amount you lost. Go to the store, show this slip, and get what you think may be needed."

While speaking the merchant had been writing on a piece of paper torn from his memorandum book, and when he handed it to Teddy the almost heartbroken boy read the following words:

The bearer, Edward Hargreaves, is entitled to credit, thirty days' time, on all he may need, to the extent of thirty dollars.

John Reaves.

"But I only lost fifteen dollars," Teddy said, as he read the order.

"I so understood; but you may need more, therefore I have made the amount sufficiently large. Don't hesitate to buy what is wanted, and whether you ever find the swindler or not, I feel very positive my bill will be paid."

Teddy tried to thank the merchant, but that lump in his throat was still too near his mouth to admit of many words, and Sam whispered:

"Don't say anything more about it. You've struck the biggest kind of luck, and the safest way is to hold your tongue."

Even had it been possible to speak, Teddy could not have said all that was in his heart, and before Sam had time to give any further advice the merchant boarded a train which was just starting for New York, leaving the young fakir and his newly-made friend to settle matters among themselves.

"You're in big luck," the latter said, consolingly. "What's the difference if you have lost fifteen dollars so long as you know how to get thirty dollars' worth of goods to start in business?"

"But this bill will have to be paid, and Uncle Nathan must have his money; that leaves me forty-five dollars in debt."

"S'pose'n it does? You're bound to make a good deal more'n that, an' I'm here to help you through."

Teddy came very near saying that if Sam had not been there the fifteen dollars would still be reposing beneath the lining of his cap; but he succeeded in checking himself, and the reproachful words remained unspoken.

At this point in the conversation the baggage-master insisted that information of the swindler should be given to the police, and, whether they desired to do so or not, the boys were forced to accompany him to headquarters.