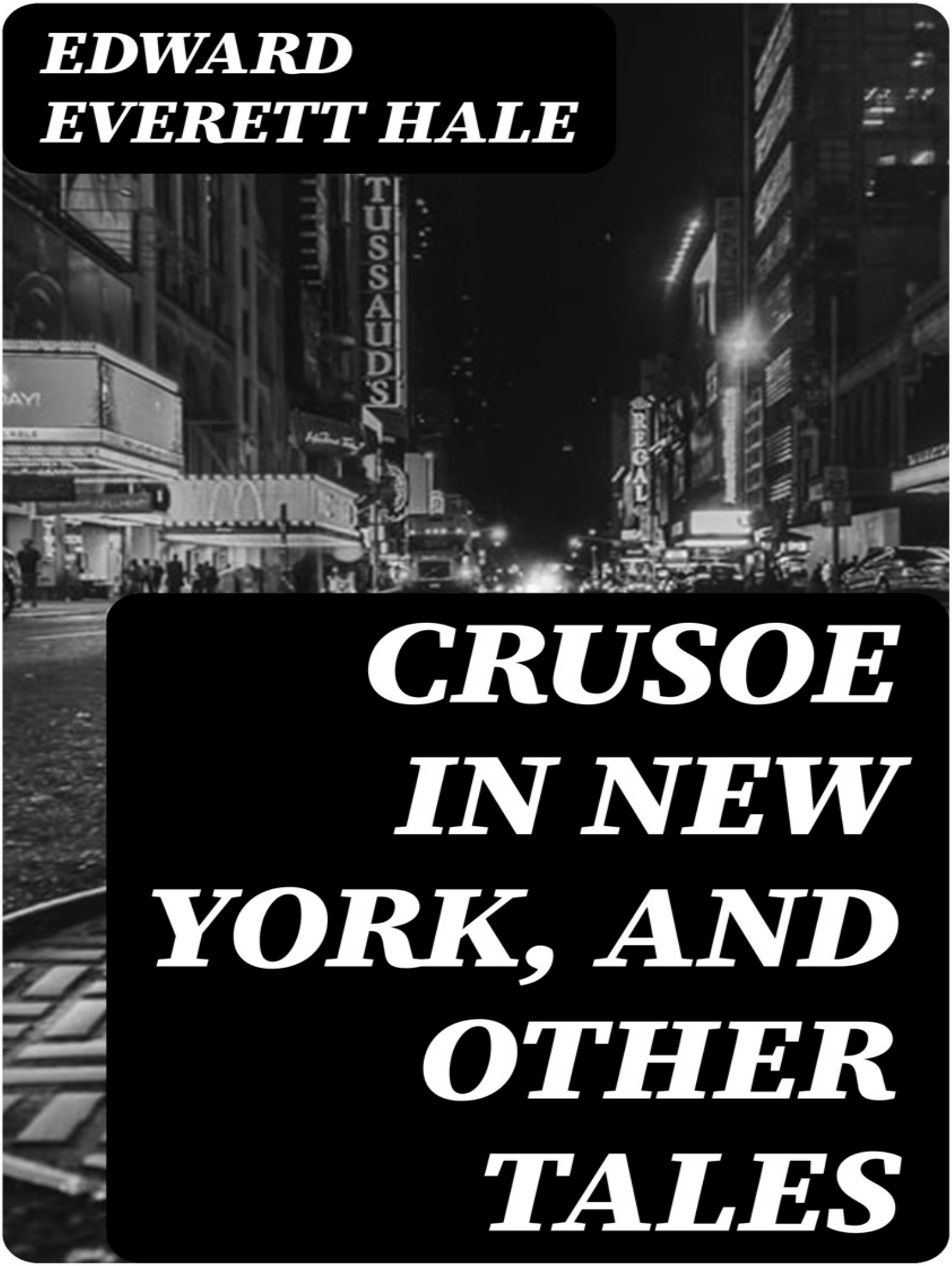
EDWARD EVERETT HALE



CRUSOE IN NEW YORK, AND OTHER TALES

Edward Everett Hale

Crusoe in New York, and other tales

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

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PREFACE.

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So far as these little stories have met the public eye, they have called forth criticism from two points of view. It is said, on the one hand, that the moral protrudes too obviously; that if a preacher wants to preach, he had better preach and be done with it; that, in the nineteenth century, which is given to realism, nobody wants "invented example," or stories written to enforce certain theories of right. It is said, on the other hand, that the stories have no right to be, because they have no purpose; that nobody can tell what the author is driving at—perhaps he cannot tell himself; and that, in the nineteenth century, nobody has any right to thrust upon an exhausted world stories which are not true unless they teach a lesson.

It was early settled for me by the critics, in my little experience as a story-writer, that it is wrong for an author to make his stories probable—that he who does this is "a forger and a counterfeiter." There is, however, high authority for teaching by parable—and that parable which has a very great air of probability.

My limited experience as an editor has taught me, that, whatever else people will read or will not read, they do read short stories, on the whole, more than they read anything else—nineteenth century to the contrary notwithstanding.

Whether these little tales have any right to be or not, they exist. To those who think they should have been cast in the

shape of sermons, I have only to say that there also exist already, in that form of instructions, one thousand and ninety-six short essays by the same author, to which number every week of his strength and health makes an addition. These are open to the perusal or the hearing of any person who is not "partial to stories," to use an expressive national dialect. Some few even are for sale in print by the publishers of these tales.

The little book is dedicated, with the author's thanks, to those kind readers who have followed his earlier stories, and have been so tolerant that they were willing to ask for more.

MATUNUCK ON THE HILL, RHODE ISLAND,
July 15, 1880.

CRUSOE IN NEW YORK.

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PART I.

I was born in the year 1842, in the city of New York, of a good family, though not of that country, my father being a foreigner of Bremen, who settled first in England. He got a good estate by merchandise, and afterward lived at New York. But first he had married my mother, whose relations were named Robinson—a very good family in her country—and from them I was named.

My father died before I can remember—at least, I believe so. For, although I sometimes figure to myself a grave, elderly man, thickset and wearing a broad-brimmed hat, holding

me between his knees and advising me seriously, I cannot say really whether this were my father or no; or, rather, whether this is really some one I remember or no. For my mother, with whom I have lived alone much of my life, as the reader will see, has talked to me of my father so much, and has described him to me so faithfully, that I cannot tell but it is her description of him that I recollect so easily. And so, as I say, I cannot tell whether I remember him or no.

He never lost his German notions, and perhaps they gained in England some new force as to the way in which boys should be bred. At least, for myself, I know that he left to my mother strict charge that I should be bound 'prentice to a carpenter as soon as I was turned of fourteen. I have often heard her say that this was the last thing he spoke to her of when he was dying; and, with the tears in her eyes, she promised him it should be so. And though it cost her a world of trouble—so changed were times and customs—to find an old-fashioned master who would take me for an apprentice, she was as good as her word.

I should like to tell the story of my apprenticeship, if I supposed the reader cared as much about it as I do; but I must rather come to that part of my life which is remarkable, than hold to that which is more like the life of many other boys. My father's property was lost or was wasted, I know not how, so that my poor mother had but a hard time of it; and when I was just turned of twenty-one and was free of my apprenticeship, she had but little to live upon but what I could bring home, and what she could earn by her needle. This was no grief to me, for I was fond of my trade, and I had learned it well. My old master was fond of me, and would trust me with work of a good deal of responsibility. I neither drank nor smoked, nor was I overfond of the amusements which took up a good deal of the time of my fellow-workmen. I was most pleased when,

on pay-day, I could carry home to my mother ten, fifteen, or even twenty dollars—could throw it into her lap, and kiss her and make her kiss me.

"Here is the oil for the lamp, my darling," I would say; or, "Here is the grease for the wheels"; or, "Now you must give me white sugar twice a day." She was a good manager, and she made both ends meet very well.

I had no thought of leaving my master when my apprenticeship was over, nor had he any thought of letting me go. We understood each other well, he liked me and I liked him. He knew that he had in me one man who was not afraid of work, as he would say, and who would not shirk it. And so, indeed, he would often put me in charge of parties of workmen who were much older than I was.

So it was that it happened, perhaps some months after I had become a journeyman, that he told me to take a gang of men, whom he named, and to go quite up-town in the city, to put a close wooden fence around a vacant lot of land there. One of his regular employers had come to him, to say that this lot of land was to be enclosed, and the work was to be done by him. He had sent round the lumber, and he told me that I would find it on the ground. He gave me, in writing, the general directions by which the fence was ordered, and told me to use my best judgment in carrying them out. "Only take care," said he, "that you do it as well as if I was there myself. Do not be in a hurry, and be sure your work stands."

I was well pleased to be left thus to my own judgment. I had no fear of failing to do the job well, or of displeasing my old master or his employer. If I had any doubts, they were about the men who were to work under my lead, whom I did not rate at all equally; and, if I could have had my pick, I should

have thrown out some of the more sulky and lazy of them, and should have chosen from the other hands. But youngsters must not be choosers when they are on their first commissions.

I had my party well at work, with some laborers whom we had hired to dig our post-holes, when a white-haired old man, with gold spectacles and a broad-brimmed hat, alighted from a cab upon the sidewalk, watched the men for a minute at their work, and then accosted me. I knew him perfectly, though of course he did not remember me. He was, in fact, my employer in this very job, for he was old Mark Henry, a Quaker gentleman of Philadelphia, who was guardian of the infant heirs who owned this block of land which we were enclosing. My master did all the carpenter's work in the New York houses which Mark Henry or any of his wards owned, and I had often seen him at the shop in consultation. I turned to him and explained to him the plans for the work. We had already some of the joists cut, which were to make the posts to our fence. The old man measured them with his cane, and said he thought they would not be long enough.

I explained to him that the fence was to be eight feet high, and that these were quite long enough for that.

"I know," he said, "I know, my young friend, that my order was for a fence eight feet high, but I do not think that will do."

With some surprise I showed him, by a "ten-foot pole," how high the fence would come.

"Yes, my young friend, I see, I see. But I tell thee, every beggar's brat in the ward will be over thy fence before it has been built a week, and there will be I know not what devices

of Satan carried on in the inside. All the junk from the North River will be hidden there, and I shall be in luck if some stolen trunk, nay, some dead man's body, is not stowed away there. Ah, my young friend, if thee is ever unhappy enough to own a vacant lot in the city, thee will know much that thee does not know now of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Thee will know of trials of the spirit and of the temper that thee has never yet experienced."

I said I thought this was probable, but I thought inwardly that I would gladly be tried that way. The old man went on: —

"I said eight feet to friend Silas, but thee may say to him that I have thought better of it, and that I have ordered thee to make the fence ten feet high. Thee may say that I am now going to Philadelphia, but that I will write to him my order when I arrive. Meanwhile thee will go on with the fence as I bid thee."

And so the old man entered his cab again, and rode away.

I amused myself at his notion, for I knew very well that the street-boys and other loafers would storm his ten-foot wall as readily as they would have stormed the Malakoff or the Redan, had they supposed there was anything to gain by doing it. I had, of course, to condemn some of my posts, which were already cut, or to work them in to other parts of the fence. My order for spruce boards was to be enlarged by twenty per cent by the old man's direction, and this, as it happened, led to a new arrangement of my piles of lumber on my vacant land.

And all this it was which set me to thinking that night, as I looked on the work, that I might attempt another enterprise,

which, as it proved, lasted me for years, and which I am now going to describe.

I had worked diligently with the men to set up some fifty feet of the fence where it parted us from an alley-way, for I wanted a chance to dry some of the boards, which had just been hauled from a raft in the North River. The truckmen had delivered them helter-skelter, and they lay, still soaking, above each other on our vacant lot.

We turned all our force on this first piece of fence, and had so much of it done that, by calling off the men just before sundown, I was able to set up all the wet boards, each with one end resting on the fence and the other on the ground, so that they took the air on both sides, and would dry more quickly. Of course this left a long, dark tunnel underneath.

As the other hands gathered up their tools and made ready to go, a fellow named McLoughlin, who had gone out with one of the three months' regiments not long before, said:—

"I would not be sorry to sleep there. I have slept in many a worse place than that in Dixie"; and on that he went away, leaving me to make some measurements which I needed the next day. But what he said rested in my mind, and, as it happened, directed the next twelve years of my life.

Why should not I live here? How often my mother had said that, if she had only a house of her own, she should be perfectly happy! Why should not we have a house of our own here, just as comfortable as if we had gone a thousand miles out on the prairie to build it, and a great deal nearer to the book-stores, to the good music, to her old friends, and to my good wages? We had talked a thousand times of moving together to Kansas, where I was to build a little hut for her, and we were to be very happy together. But why not

do as the minister had bidden us only the last Sunday—seize on to-day, and take what Providence offered now?

I must acknowledge that the thought of paying any ground rent to old Mr. Henry did not occur to me then—no, nor for years afterward. On the other hand, all that I thought of was this—that here was as good a chance as there was in Kansas to live without rent, and that rent had been, was still, and was likely to be my bugbear, unless I hit on some such scheme as this for abating it.

The plan, to be short, filled my mind. There was nothing in the way of house-building which I shrank from now, for, in learning my trade, I had won my Aladdin's lamp, and I could build my mother a palace, if she had needed one. Pleased with my fancy, before it was dark I had explored my principality from every corner, and learned all its capabilities.

The lot was an oblong, nearly three times as long as it was wide. On the west side, which was one of the short sides, it faced what I will call the Ninety-ninth Avenue, and on the south side, what I will call Fernando Street, though really it was one of the cross-streets with numbers. Running to the east it came to a narrow passage-way which had been reserved for the accommodation of the rear of a church which fronted on the street just north of us. Our back line was also the back line of the yards of the houses on the same street, but on our northeast corner the church ran back as far as the back line of both houses and yards, and its high brick wall—nearly fifty feet high—took the place there of the ten-foot brick wall, surmounted by bottle-glass, which made their rear defence.

The moment my mind was turned to the matter, I saw that in the rear of the church there was a corner, which lay

warmly and pleasantly to the southern and western sun, which was still out of eye-shot from the street, pleasantly removed from the avenue passing, and only liable to inspection, indeed, from the dwelling-houses on the opposite side of our street—houses which, at this moment, were not quite finished, though they would be occupied soon.

If, therefore, I could hit on some way of screening my mother's castle from them—for a castle I called it from the first moment, though it was to be much more like a cottage—I need fear no observation from other quarters; for the avenue was broad, and on the other side from us there was a range of low, rambling buildings—an engine-house and a long liquor-saloon were two—which had but one story. Most of them had been built, I suppose, only to earn something for the land while it was growing valuable. The church had no windows in the rear, and that protected my castle—which was, indeed, still in the air—from all observation on that side.

I told my mother nothing of all this when I went home. But I did tell her that I had some calculations to make for my work, and that was enough. She went on, sweet soul! without speaking a word, with her knitting and her sewing, at her end of the table, only getting up to throw a cloth over her parrot's cage when he was noisy; and I sat at my end of the table, at work over my figures, as silent as if I had been on a desert island.

Before bedtime I had quite satisfied myself with the plan of a very pretty little house which would come quite within our space, our means, and our shelter. There was a little passage which ran quite across from east to west. On the church side of this there was my mother's kitchen, which was to be what I fondly marked the "common-room." This

was quite long from east to west, and not more than half as long the other way. But on the east side, where I could have no windows, I cut off, on its whole width, a deep closet; and this proved a very fortunate thing afterward, as you shall see. On the west side I made one large square window, and there was, of course, a door into the passage.

On the south side of the passage I made three rooms, each narrow and long. The two outside rooms I meant to light from the top. Whether I would put any skylight into the room between them, I was not quite so certain; I did not expect visitors in my new house, so I did not mark it a "guest-room" in the plan. But I thought of it as a storeroom, and as such, indeed, for many years we used it; though at last I found it more convenient to cut a sky-light in the roof there also. But I am getting before my story.

Before I had gone to bed that night I had made a careful estimate as to how much lumber I should need, of different kinds, for my little house; for I had, of course, no right to use my master's lumber nor Mr. Henry's; nor had I any thought of doing so. I made out an estimate that would be quite full, for shingles, for clapboards, white pine for my floors and finish—for I meant to make good a job of it if I made any—and for laths for the inside work. I made another list of the locks, hinges, window furniture and other hardware I should need; but for this I cared less, as I need not order them so soon. I could scarcely refrain from showing my plan to my mother, so snug and comfortable did it look already; but I had already determined that the "city house" should be a present to her on her next birthday, and that till then I would keep it a secret from her, as from all the world; so I refrained.

The next morning I told my master what the old Quaker had directed about the fence, and I took his order for the new

lumber we should need to raise the height as was proposed. At the same time I told him that we were all annoyed at the need of carrying our tools back and forth, and because we could only take the nails for one day's use; and that, if he were willing, I had a mind to risk an old chest I had with the nails in it and a few tools, which I thought I could so hide that the wharf-rats and other loafers should not discover it. He told me to do as I pleased, that he would risk the nails if I would risk my tools; and so, by borrowing what we call a hand-cart for a few days, I was able to take up my own little things to the lot without his asking any other questions, or without exciting the curiosity of McLoughlin or any other of the men. Of course, he would have sent up in the shop-wagon anything we needed; but it was far out of the way, and nobody wanted to drive the team back at night if we could do without. And so, as night came on, I left the men at their work, and having loaded my hand-cart with a small chest I had, I took that into the alley-way of which I told you before, carried my box of tools into the corner between the church and our fence, under the boards which we had set up to-day, and covered it heavily, with McLoughlin's help, with joists and boards, so that no light work would remove them, if, indeed, any wanderer of the night suspected that the box was there. I took the hand-cart out into the alley-way and chained it, first by the wheel and then by the handle, in two staples which I drove there. I had another purpose in this, as you shall see; but most of all, I wanted to test both the police and the knavishness of the neighborhood, by seeing if the hand-cart were there in the morning.

To my great joy it was, and to my greater joy it remained there unmolested all the rest of the week in which we worked there. For my master, who never came near us himself, increased our force for us on the third day, so that at the end of the week, or Saturday night, the job was nearly done, and well done, too.

On the third day I had taken the precaution to throw out in the inside of our inclosure a sort of open fence, on which I could put the wet boards to dry, which at first I had placed on our side fence. I told McLoughlin, what was true enough, that the south sun was better for them than the sun from the west. So I ran out what I may call a screen thirty-five feet from the church, and parallel with it, on which I set up these boards to dry, and to my great joy I saw that they would wholly protect the roof of my little house from any observation from the houses the other side of the way while the workmen were at work, or even after they were inhabited.

There was not one of the workmen with me who had forethought enough or care for our master's interest to ask whose boards those were which we left there, or why we left them there. Indeed, they knew the next Monday that I went up with Fergus, the Swede, to bring back such lumber as we did not use, and none of them knew or cared how much we left there.

For me, I was only eager to get to work, and that day seemed very long to me. But that Monday afternoon I asked my master if I might have the team again for my own use for an hour or so, to move some stuff of mine and my mother's, and he gave it to me readily.

I had then only to drive up-town to a friendly lumberman's, where my own stuff was already lying waiting for me to load up, with the assistance of the workmen there, and to drive as quickly as I could into the church alley. Here I looked around, and seeing a German who looked as if he were only a day from Bremen, I made signs to him that if he would help me I would give him a piece of scrip which I showed him. The man had been long enough in the country to know that the scrip was good for lager. He took hold manfully with

me, and carried my timbers and boards into the inclosure through a gap I made in the fence for the purpose. I gave him his money, and he went away. As he went to Minnesota the next day, he never mentioned to anybody the business he had been engaged in.

Meanwhile, I had bought my hand-cart of the man who owned it. I left a little pile of heavy cedar logs on the outside, spiking them to each other, indeed, that they should not be easily moved. And to them and to my posts I padlocked the hand-cart; nor was it ever disturbed during my reign in those regions. So I had easy method enough when I wanted a bundle or two of laths, or a bunch of shingles, or anything else for my castle, to bring them up in the cool of the evening, and to discharge my load without special observation. My pile of logs, indeed, grew eventually into a blind or screen, which quite protected that corner of the church alley from the view of any passer-by in Fernando Street.

Of that whole summer, happy and bright as it all was, I look back most often on the first morning when I got fairly to work on my new home. I told my mother that for some weeks I should have to start early, and that she must not think of getting up for my breakfast. I told her that there was extra work on a job up-town, and that I had promised to be there at five every day while the summer lasted. She left for me a pot of coffee, which I promised her I would warm when the time for breakfast and dinner came; and for the rest, she always had my dinner ready in my tin dinner-pail. Little did she know then, sweet saint! that I was often at Fernando Street by half-past three in the first sweet gray of those summer days.

On that particular day, it was really scarcely light enough for me to find the nail I drew from the plank which I left for my

entrance. When I was fairly within and the plank was replaced, I felt that I was indeed monarch of all I surveyed. What did I survey? The church wall on the north; on the south, my own screen of spruce boards, now well dry; on the east and west, the ten-foot fence which I had built myself; and over there on the west, God's deep, transparent sky, in which I could still see a planet whose name I did not know. It was a heaven, indeed, which He had said was as much mine as his!

The first thing, of course, was to get out my frame. This was a work of weeks. The next thing was to raise it. And here the first step was the only hard one, nor was this so hard as it would seem. The highest wall of my house was no higher than the ten-foot fence we had already built on the church alley. The western wall, if, indeed, a frame house has any walls, was only eight feet high. For foundations and sills, I dug deep post-holes, in which I set substantial cedar posts which I knew would outlast my day, and I framed my sills into these. I made the frame of the western wall lie out upon the ground in one piece; and I only needed a purchase high enough, and a block with repeating pulleys strong enough, to be able to haul up the whole frame by my own strength, unassisted. The high purchase I got readily enough by making what we called a "three-leg," near twenty feet high, just where my castle was to stand. I had no difficulty in hauling this into its place by a solid staple and ring, which for this purpose I drove high in the church wall. My multiplying pulley did the rest; and after it was done, I took out the staple and mended the hole it had made, so the wall was as good as ever.

You see it was nobody's business what shanty or what tower old Mark Henry or the Fordyce heirs might or might not put on the vacant corner lot. The Fordyce heirs were all in nurseries and kindergartens in Geneva, and indeed would

have known nothing of corner lots, had they been living in their palace in Fourteenth Street. As for Mark Henry, that one great achievement by which he rode up to Fernando Street was one of the rare victories of his life, of which ninety-nine hundredths were spent in counting-houses. Indeed, if he had gone there, all he would have seen was his ten-foot fence, and he would have taken pride to himself that he had it built so high.

When the day of the first raising came, and the frame slipped into the mortises so nicely, as I had foreordained that it should do, I was so happy that I could scarcely keep my secret from my mother. Indeed, that day I did run back to dinner. And when she asked me what pleased me so, I longed to let her know; but I only smoothed her cheeks with my hands, and kissed her on both of them, and told her it was because she was so handsome that I was so pleased. She said she knew I had a secret from her, and I owned that I had, but she said she would not try to guess, but would wait for the time for me to tell her.

And so the summer sped by. Of course I saw my sweetheart, as I then called my mother, less and less. For I worked till it was pitch-dark at the castle; and after it was closed in, so I could work inside, I often worked till ten o'clock by candlelight. I do not know how I lived with so little sleep; I am afraid I slept pretty late on Sundays. But the castle grew and grew, and the common-room, which I was most eager to finish wholly before cold weather, was in complete order three full weeks before my mother's birthday came.

Then came the joy of furnishing it. To this I had looked forward all the summer, and I had measured with my eye many a bit of furniture, and priced, in an unaffected way, many an impossible second-hand finery, so that I knew just what I could do and what I could not do.

My mother had always wanted a Banner stove. I knew this, and it was a great grief to me that she had none, though she would never say anything about it.

To my great joy, I found a second-hand Banner stove, No. 2, at a sort of old junk-shop, which was, in fact, an old curiosity shop, not three blocks away from Ninety-ninth Avenue. Some one had sold this to them while it was really as good as new, and yet the keeper offered it to me at half-price.

I hung round the place a good deal, and when the man found I really had money and meant something, he took me into all sorts of alleys and hiding-places, where he stored his old things away. I made fabulous bargains there, for either the old Jew liked me particularly, or I liked things that nobody else wanted. In the days when his principal customers were wharf-rats, and his principal business the traffic in old cordage and copper, he had hung out as a sign an old tavern-sign of a ship that had come to him. His place still went by the name of "The Ship," though it was really, as I say, a rambling, third-rate old furniture shop of the old-curiosity kind.

But after I had safely carried the Banner to my new house, and was sure the funnel drew well, and that the escape of smoke and sparks was carefully guarded, many a visit did I make to The Ship at early morning or late in the evening, to bring away one or another treasure which I had discovered there.

Under the pretence of new-varnishing some of my mother's most precious tables and her bureau, I got them away from her also. I knocked up, with my own hatchet and saw, a sitting-table which I meant to have permanent in the middle of the room, which was much more convenient than anything I could buy or carry.

And so, on the 12th of October, the eve of my mother's birthday, the common-room was all ready for her. In her own room I had a new carpet and a new set of painted chamber furniture, which I had bought at the maker's, and brought up piece by piece. It cost me nineteen dollars and a half, for which I paid him in cash, which indeed he wanted sadly.

So, on the morning of the 13th of October, I kissed my mother forty times, because that day she was forty years old. I told her that before midnight she should know what the great surprise was, and I asked her if she could hold out till then.

She let me poke as much fun at her as I chose, because she said she was so glad to have me at breakfast; and I stayed long after breakfast, for I had told my mother that it was her birthday, and that I should be late. And such a thing as my asking for an hour or two was so rare that I took it quite of course when I did ask. I came home early at night, too. Then I said—

"Now, sweetheart, the surprise requires that you spend the night away from home with me. Perhaps, if you like the place, we will spend to-morrow there. So I will take Poll in her cage, and you must put up your night-things and take them in your hand."

She was surprised now, for such a thing as an outing over night had never been spoken of before by either of us.

"Why, Rob," she said, "you are taking too much pains for your old sweetheart, and spending too much money for her birthday. Now, don't you think that you should really have as good a time, say, if we went visiting together, and then came back here?"

For, you see, she never thought of herself at all; it was only what I should like most.

"No, sweetheart dear," said I. "It is not for me, this 13th of October, it is all for you. And to-night's outing is not for me, it is for you; and I think you will like it and I think Poll will like it, and I have leave for to-morrow, and we will stay away all to-morrow."

As for Tom-puss, I said, we would leave some milk where he could find it, and I would leave a bone or two for him. But I whistled Rip, my dog, after me. I took Poll's cage, my mother took her bag, and locked and left her door, unconscious that she was never to enter it again.

A Ninety-ninth Avenue car took us up to Fernando Street. It was just the close of twilight when we came there. I took my mother to Church Alley, muttered something about some friends, which she did not understand more than I did, and led her up the alley in her confused surprise. Then I pushed aside my movable board, and, while she was still surprised, led her in after me and slid it back again.

"What is it, dear Rob? Tell me—tell me!"

"This way, sweetheart, this way!" This was all I would say.

I drew her after me through the long passage, led her into the common-room, which was just lighted up by the late evening twilight coming in between the curtains of the great square window. Then I fairly pushed her to the great, roomy easy-chair which I had brought from The Ship, and placed it where she could look out on the evening glow, and I said—

"Mother, dear, this is the surprise; this is your new home; and, mother dear, your own boy has made it with his own hands, all for you."

"But, Rob, I do not understand—I do not understand at all. I am so stupid. I know I am awake. But it is as sudden as a dream!"

So I had to begin and to explain it all—how here was a vacant lot that Mark Henry had the care of, and how I had built this house for her upon it. And long before I had explained it all, it was quite dark. And I lighted up the pretty student's-lamp, and I made the fire in the new Banner with my own hands.

And that night I would not let her lift a kettle, nor so much as cut a loaf of bread. It was my feast, I said, and I had everything ready, round to a loaf of birthday-cake which I had ordered at Taylor's, which I had myself frosted and dressed, and decorated with the initials of my mother's name.

And when the feast was over, I had the best surprise of all. Unknown to my mother, I had begged from my Aunt Betsy my own father's portrait, and I had hung that opposite the window, and now I drew the curtain that hid it, and told my sweetheart that this and the house were her birthday presents for this year!

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And this was the beginning of a happy life, which lasted nearly twelve years. I could make a long story of it, for there was an adventure in everything—in the way we bought our milk, and the way we took in our coals. But there is no room for me to tell all that, and it might not interest other people as it does me. I am sure my mother was never sorry for the bold step she took when we moved there from our tenement. True, she saw little or no society, but she had not seen much before. The conditions of our life were such that