

The purpose of Mr. Sykes, in his mission hither, was to question the boys in a stealthy manner, and if possible to throw them off their guard and gain thereby such information as would satisfy himself either as to their guilt or innocence. But he was loth to enter upon the disagreeable business and endeavored to approach the subject by circumlocution.

In fact, so irreproachable a character had the boys sustained and such had been the superintendent's confidence in them, that he was thus far by no means persuaded of their guilt.

In the midst of his cross examination, a sharp rap upon the door was heard. Stephen opened the later, and two persons immediately entered, the foremost of whom, Mr. Sykes recognized as a sheriff. The latter person saluted the superintendent and then arrested Richard on a charge of theft, and Stephen for complicity. During this process, Johnson wheeled his chair around so that his face was brought into the shade. As the proceeding had occurred so unexpectedly, the astonishment of the boys exceeded, for the time, their indignation. They besought Mr. Sykes to explain the matter.

The superintendent then gravely stated the details of the charges alleged against them and the purpose of his visit that evening. He also expressed a hope that they would be able to exonerate themselves. The boys listened with amazement. They denied emphatically all the accusations and defied any one to prove them.

At this juncture the sheriff's companion, evidently in response to a meaning glance from Johnson, proposed that the cellar be searched. Mr. Sykes assented to this and agreed to do it himself.

You will find a candle in the closet at the head of the cellar stairs," said Richard composedly. "Light it, and examine the cellar wall."

Mr. Sykes found and lighted the candle, and beckoning to Johnson to follow him, descended the stairway. The cellar did not present a very unusual appearance.

The walls were of rough stone, and on one side was a rude door. A mass of what appeared to be only straw was in one corner. Johnson scattered this and thereby disclosed a small printing press and its appurtenances. Among the latter was found a piece of paper, on which was printed the following:

\$20 a day can be made by any one who is up to snuff, and without interfering with his other business. Address,

BUNCLE & Co., MEREDITH, N. H.

"This looks as if they were about to go into a humbug business," remarked Johnson.

Mr. Sykes made no answer, but his countenance grew more serious as he continued his search and found other papers that seemed to strengthen Johnson's remark. The door already mentioned was found to communicate with a small closet, in which the missing watch was discovered as well as other articles, which were identified by the sheriff as stolen in Moultonborough. Sundry articles were also found which seemed to strengthen the evidence that the boys were about to engage in some of the humbugs that are so common at the East.

We have not space to describe the trial which followed. Suffice it to say that everything was against the two brothers; they had but their own, unassisted testimony to oppose overwhelming accusations and the number of witnesses that were brought forward.

Richard was sentenced to hard labor for a term of three years, but Stephen was released from custody for want of sufficient evidence to convict him. His lot was, however, nearly as hard as Richard's, for he was discharged from the employ of Mr. Sykes and shunned by all his former friends.

CHAPTER IV.

THWARTED.

Mr. Bennet did not immediately proceed to Meredith, but spent a week at Easton in the transaction of some business. He was also delayed by stoppages along