

During the two or two and a half years of my apprenticeship served under many pilots, and had experience of many kinds of steamboatmen and many varieties of steamboats. Brown was always watching for a pretext to find fault; and if he could find no plausible pretext, he would invent one. Then: "Dern sight better stayed there!" By means of a dozen or so of pretty direct questions, he pumped my family history out of me. The leads were going now in the first crossing. This interrupted the inquest. I told him. I gave him the information. I did so. He stepped back, examined the shoe minutely and contemptuously, scratching his head thoughtfully, tilting his high sugarloaf hat well forward to facilitate the operation, then ejaculated, "Well, I'll be dod derned!" Brown was steering; I was "pulling down." My younger brother Henry appeared on the ricane deck, and shouted to Brown to stop at some landing or other, a mile or so below. Brown gave no intimation that he had heard anything. But that was his way: he never condescended to take notice of an underclerk. The wind was blowing; Brown was deaf (although he always pretended he wasn't), and I very much doubted if he had heard the order. If I had had two heads, I would have spoken; but as I had only one, it seemed judicious to take care of it; so I kept still. Presently, sure enough, we went sailing by that plantation. Captain Klinefelter appeared on the deck, and said: "Let her come around, sir, let her come around. He was a middle-aged, long, slim, bony, smooth-shaven, horsefaced, ignorant, stingy, malicious, snarling, fault-hunting, motet magnifying tyrant. He would scold you for shaving a shore, and for not shaving it; for hugging a bar, and for not hugging it; for "pulling down" when not invited, and for not pulling down when not invited; for firing up without orders, and for waiting for orders. In a word, it was his invariable rule to find fault with everything you did and another invariable rule of his was to throw all his remarks (to you) into the form of an insult. One day we were approaching New Madrid, bound down and heavily laden. Brown was at one side of the wheel, steering; I was at the other, standing by to "pull down" or "shove up." The boat had backed out from St. Louis and was "straightening down." I ascended to the pilothouse in high feather, and very proud to be semiofficially a member of the executive family of so fast and famous a boat. Brown was at the wheel. I paused in the middle of the room, all fixed to make my bow, but Brown did not look around. I thought he took a furtive glance at me out of the corner of his eye, but as not even this notice was repeated, I judged I had been mistaken. By this time he was picking his way among some dangerous "breaks" abreast the woodyards; therefore it would not be proper to interrupt him; so I stepped softly to the high bench and took a seat. He could have done his part to admiration in a crossfire of mere vituperation, of course; but he was not equipped for this species of controversy; so he presently laid aside his glass and took the wheel, muttering and shaking his head; and I see him come, for I retired to the bench. I supposed I was booked for the penitentiary sure, and couldn't be booked any surer if I went on and squared my long account with this person while I had the chance; consequently I stuck to him and pounded him with my fists a considerable time. I said to myself, "Now I am done for!" for although, as a rule, he was so fatherly and indulgent toward the boat's family, and so patient of minor shortcomings, he could bethrashing, do you hear? I'll pay the expenses. Now go---and mind you, not a word of this to anybody. Clear out with you! You've been guilty of a great crime, yOu whelp!" When Brown came off watch he went straight to the captain, who was talking with some passengers on the boiler deck, and demanded that I be put ashore in New Orleans---and added: "I'll never turn a wheel on this boat again

while that cub stays." The captain said: "But he needn't come round when you are on watch, Mr. Brown." While we lay at landings I listened to George Ealer's flute, or to his readings from his two Bibles, that is to say, Goldsmith and Shakespeare, or I played chess with him--and would have beaten him sometimes, only he always took back his last move and ran the game. Presently he shouted: "Put down that shovel! Derndest numskull I ever saw--ain't even got sense enough to load up a stove." Whenever I took the wheel for a moment on Ealer's watch, Ritchie would sit back on the bench and play Brown, with continual ejaculations of "Snatch her! Snatch her! Derndest mudcat I ever saw!" This was simply bound to be a success; nothing could prevent it; for he had never allowed me to round the boat to before; consequently, no matter how I might do the thing, he could find free fault with it. He stood back there with his greedy eye on me, and the result was what might have been foreseen: I lost my head in a quarter of a minute, and didn't know what I was about; I started too early to bring the boat around, but detected a green gleam of joy in Brown's eye, and corrected my mistake. Perceiving at a glance that the Pennsylvania was in no danger, Brown gathered up the big spyglass, war-club fashion, and ordered me out of the pilothouse with more than ordinary bluster. I reformed his ferocious speeches for him, and put them into good English, calling his attention to the advantage of pure English over the dialect of the collieries whence he was extracted. I am to this day profiting somewhat by that experience; for in that brief, sharp schooling, I got personally and familiarly acquainted with about all the different types of human nature that are to be found in fiction, biography, or history. So I always had a rough time of it, no matter whose watch it was; and sometimes it seemed to me that Ritchie's good-natured badgering was pretty nearly as aggravating as Brown's dead-earnest nagging. I killed Brown every night for months; not in old, stale, commonplace ways, but in new and picturesque ones--ways that were sometimes surprising for freshness of design and ghastliness of situation and environment. "Dod dern" was the nearest he ventured to the luxury of swearing. Brown glared at me in unaffected surprise; and for as much as a moment he was entirely speechless; then he shouted to me: "I'll attend to your case in a half a minute!" then to Henry, "And you leave the pilothouse; out with you!" After which he removed his countenance and I saw it no more for some seconds; then it came around once more, and this question greeted me: "Are you Horace Bigsby's cub?"⁴ "Yes, sir." "You've had no orders! My, what a fine bird we are! We must have orders! Our father was a gentleman --and we've been to school. Yes, we are a gentleman, too, and got to have orders! Orders, is it? Orders is what you want! Dod dern my skin, I'll learn you to swell yourself up and blow around here about your dod-derned orders! G'way from the wheel!" Ritchie had steered for Brown the season before; consequently, he knew exactly how to entertain himself and plague me, all by the one operation. His face turned red with passion; he made one bound, hurled me across the house with a sweep of his arm, spun the wheel down, and began to pour out a stream of vituperation upon me which lasted till he was out of breath. The boy started out, and even had his foot on the upper step outside the door, when Brown, with a sudden access of fury, picked up a ten-pound lump of coal and sprang after him; but I was between, with a heavy stool, and I hit Brown a good honest blow which stretched him out. I do not know how long, the pleasure of it probably made it seem longer than it really was; but in the end he struggled free and jumped up and sprang to the wheel: a very natural solicitude, for, all this time, here was this steamboat tearing down the river at the rate of fifteen

miles an hour and nobody at the helm! The fact is daily borne in upon me that the average shore employment requires as much as forty years to equip a man with this sort of an education. The figure that comes before me oftenest, out of the shadows of that vanished time, is that of Brown, of the steamer Pennsylvania. The moment I was in the presence, even in the darkest night, I could feel those yellow eyes upon me, and knew their owner was watching for a pretext to spit out some venom on me. Preliminarily he would say: "Here! Take the wheel." A cub had to take everything his boss gave, in the way of vigorous comment and criticism; and we all believed that there was a United States law making it a penitentiary offense to strike or threaten a pilot who was on duty. I made other false moves, and still managed to save myself; but at last I grew so confused and anxious that I tumbled into the very worst blunder of all—I got too far down before beginning to fetch the boat around. The racket had brought everybody to the hurricane deck, and I trembled when I saw the old captain looking up from amid the crowd. I slid out, happy with the sense of a close shave and a mighty deliverance; and I heard him laughing to himself and slapping his fat thighs after I had closed his door. When I say I am still profiting by this thing, I do not mean that it has constituted me a judge of men—no, it has not done that, for judges of men are born, not made. My profit is various in kind and degree, but the feature of it which I value most is the zest which that early experience has given to my later reading. No matter how good a time I might have been having with the off-watch below, and no matter how high my spirits might be when I started aloft, my soul became lead in my body the moment I approached the pilothouse. There was silence for ten minutes; then my new boss turned and inspected me deliberately and painstakingly from head to heel for about—as it seemed to me—a quarter of an hour. (I had approached it without knowing it.) I moved back a step or two and stood as in a dream, all my senses stupefied by this frantic assault. Then he would jump from the bench, snatch the wheel from me, and meet her himself, pouring out wrath upon me all the time. He was having good times now; for his boss, George Ealer, was as kind-hearted as Brown wasn't. By and by he stepped back from the wheel and said in his usual snarly way: "Here! See if you've got gumption enough to round her to." asked the captain of me. Of course I didn't want to be mixed up in this business, but there was no way to avoid it; so I said: "Yes, sir." I knew what Brown's next remark would be, before he uttered it. It was: "Shut your mouth! Brown began, straightway: "Here! Why didn't you tell me we'd got to land at that plantation?" However, Eagle Bend was two miles wide at this bank-full stage, and correspondingly long and deep: and the boat was steering herself straight down the middle and taking no chances. But I was not afraid of him now; so, instead of going, I tarried, and criticized his grammar. When I find a well-drawn character in fiction or biography I generally take a warm personal interest in him, for the reason that I have known him before—met him on the river. After this there was a pause and another inspection. Then: "What's your name?" I told him. He repeated it after me. It was probably the only thing he ever forgot; for although I was with him many months he never addressed himself to me in any other way than "Here!" What occasion there was to be dod derved about it is a thing which is still as much of a mystery to me now as it was then. It must have been all of fifteen minutes—fifteen minutes of dull, homesick silence—before that long horse-face swung round upon me again—and then what a change! "What you standing there for? Take that ice-pitcher down to the texas-tender!? Come, move along, and don't you be all day about it!" "Derved likely

story! Fill up the stove."All through the watch this sort of thing went on. Yes, and the subsequent watches were much like it during a stretch of months. George Ritchie was the other pilot's cub. "There she goes! Just as I expected! I told you not to cramp that reef. G'way from the wheel!" He cast a furtive glance at me every now and then. I had long ago learned what that meant; viz., he was trying to invent a trap for me. I wondered what shape it was going to take. "He did come up; and that's all the good it done, the dod-derned fool. He never said anything." "Very well," said the captain, "let it be yourself," and resumed his talk with the passengers. During the brief remainder of the trip I knew how an emancipated slave feels, for I was an emancipated slave myself. I early got the habit of coming on watch with dread at my heart. "In Florida, Missouri." A pause. When the leads had been laid in he resumed: "How long you been on the river?" After a pause: "Where'd you get them shoes?" Now came this shriek: "Here! You going to set there all day?" I lit in the middle of the floor, shot there by the electric suddenness of the surprise. As soon as I could get my voice I said apologetically: "I have had no orders, sir." The moment I got back to the pilothouse Brown said: "Here! What was you doing down there all this time?" I proceeded to do so. He watched me like a cat. As I have said, I soon got the habit of coming on duty with dread. "Here! Where are you going now? Going to run over that snag?" "Pull her down! However, I could imagine myself killing Brown; there was no law against that; and that was the thing I used always to do the moment I was abed. I started around once more while too high up, but corrected myself again in time. In the course of this speech he called me all the different kinds of hard names he could think of, and once or twice I thought he was even going to swear—but he had never done that, and he didn't this time. Two trips later I got into serious trouble. "Didn't you hear him?" It was pilot law, and must be obeyed. I had committed the crime of crimes—I had lifted my hand against a pilot on duty! Still, that was only luck—a body might have found her charging into the woods. "I won't even stay on the same boat with him. One of us has got to go ashore." I still remember the first time I ever entered the presence of that man. and then his command followed. "Where was you born?" "Hold up your foot!" and returned to his wheel. It was as red as fire, and every muscle in it was working. Don't you hear me? I often wanted to kill .Brown, but this would not answer