

RIGHTING THE WRONG

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Righting the Wrong by Edward S. Ellis

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EDWARD S. ELLIS

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BY

EDWARD S. ELLIS

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"WYOMING" SERIES, ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

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RIGHTING THE WRONG.

CHAPTER I.

I INTIMATED at the close of the preceding story in this series, entitled "Honest Ned," that I would have something more to tell you about Ned Melton, who played such a creditable part in the incidents of that story; for I am sure I am not mistaken in believing that you feel an interest in the youth, who possessed the courage of his convictions, and was one of those rare youths that is not afraid to do right under any and all circumstances.

When the Maiden Lane firm of Shipman & Gumblebridge learned the whole history of Ned's charity, kindness, integrity, and manliness, under a most trying ordeal, they felt that something more than mere thanks was due him. His salary at the time was the small one of ten dollars a week, not because his employers were unwilling to give more, for they were anxious to make it the equal of Ashton Gibbons's, the leading clerk, who received just four times that sum; but, as you will recall, Ned was an orphan, and a ward

of Colonel Marcellus Bainbridge, a stern old martinet, who had his own ideas about boys, and who would brook no opposition. He insisted that the smaller wages was sufficient for any young man in the situation of his nephew, out of which the lad had to pay only his board, amounting to three dollars weekly, and his clothing, which could readily be brought within his stipend.

But need I dwell upon the peculiar hardship of Ned's situation? It seems unnecessary, but I must do so in as few words as possible. We have plenty of bad weather here in New York; and though it was a pleasure for the athletic youth to walk from his home to the store and back again in the afternoon, there were times when storm and snow and sleet compelled him to make use of the surface or elevated cars. The fare is small, but it amounts to something in the course of a week. Then there was the noon lunch, to miss which is a hardship to a strong, growing youth. It cost little, but "many a little makes a muckle," as the old proverb goes.

He found that by the strictest economy, by making his noonday "bites" as light as possible (and he suffered the pangs of hunger oftener than you would suppose, frequently going without anything at all in the way of food in the middle of the day), by walking, even when the weather was stormy, by the utmost care with his clothing, he could bring his weekly expenses to a fig-

ure very little, if any, more than four dollars. This left six dollars, out of which he had to provide himself with clothes and meet other expenses, of which it is impossible to make a list; for it was necessary that he should always present a pleasing appearance, and save up enough funds to pay for his summer outing of two weeks, and dispense the little charities which daily appeal to one's sympathies in a great city like the metropolis of our country.

It was this admirable side of Ned Melton's character that played havoc with his financial matters during that summer in which occurred the incidents already told. He voluntarily shortened his stay at the seashore that he might be with poor Wash Fulmer, who lay on his death-bed, and from his scanty savings went more than one dollar to buy delicacies for the stricken lad, and to help the impoverished mother after the boy was laid in his grave. The inevitable consequence was that, when Ned entered upon his duties in the store at the close of his summer vacation, he was in debt for the first time in his life. Not only that, but he was involved to the extent that he saw no way of relief without the increase in salary which his employers wished to give to him. Nearly three years must pass before he would reach his majority and become his own master. If he lived to see that time, he would not only be free to receive whatever he could earn, but would come into the possession

of a considerable amount of money. Three years, however, is a long time for one in his situation to wait; and it is no wonder that when he cast his eyes ahead, as he often did, he felt a shrinking of heart and depression of spirits that never ought to have come to him, or rather for which there never should have been the cause.

I have told elsewhere how his employers were so impressed by the injustice of his guardian's sternness, that an appeal was made to him to permit a moderate increase. Being met with a brusque refusal, and a broad intimation by Colonel Bainbridge that it was none of their business, they proposed to Ned that he should accept the increase without the knowledge of his guardian. But Ned's sense of honor would not permit this course. Much as he wanted and needed the extra compensation, he could not stoop to any subterfuge to obtain it. Then Mr. Shipman offered to loan Ned five hundred dollars for three years, charging him legal interest for the same. The youth came very near accepting this offer; but, when he sat down to write his promissory note, the conviction that it was only another form of deception was so strong, that he refused. It was the same fine strain of honor and high regard for truthfulness that led him resolutely to refuse to borrow from any of his acquaintances, who would have been glad to help him. To him, there was but one course that was honorable and right: that was to live up to the wishes of his uncle, in spirit as well as in letter.

Ned was in this distressful state, and meditating a direct appeal to him, when the latter proposed one evening that he should accompany him to the lecture by Stanley the great explorer. The youth accepted the invitation with delight, for he had been longing for the privilege ever since learning that the treat was to be given in New York. Then, too, it would serve to wean his mind, for a time at least, from the distressing anxiety caused by his financial straits. Accordingly, he went with his uncle; and among all the numerous auditors that evening there was none more delighted and charmed than our young friend. He resolved that, if he lived to come into the possession of his own, he would devote a considerable portion of it to just such treats as this.

Colonel Bainbridge insisted that on every Saturday night his nephew should hand three dollars to him, that amount being due for his board, lodging, and washing. The old soldier often reminded him that he was securing all these very cheaply; and, in a certain sense, it cannot be denied that such was the fact. Besides this, Ned was charged nothing for his sitting in church, and his dues as a member of the Y. M. C. A. were regularly paid by his guardian. But, on the Saturday evening succeeding Stanley's lecture, his uncle, when receiving his three dollars, said,—

“There's another dollar coming to me.”

"How is that?" asked the surprised youth.

"One dollar for the lecture."

"But—but—I understood you invited me to go with you."

"So I did," was the crisp reply; "but I didn't invite myself to pay for your ticket."

Ned's heart sank, for he had paid four dollars that afternoon of his indebtedness, meaning to keep three dollars to see him through the week. His lips moved with the trembling protest; but he was proud, and he forced back the words before they escaped him. The stern uncle was standing by his desk, looking expectantly at him, and plainly waiting for the other dollar. With hardly a moment's hesitation, Ned passed it over to him. He said nothing, but his thoughts were busy.

"Next week I won't ride a block on a street-car or on the elevated; I won't eat any lunch, or buy so much as a sandwich; that will leave me thirty-three and one-third cents for each day, not counting Sundays. Maybe," he added grimly, "I will find a thousand dollars on the street."

"That makes it right," remarked Colonel Bainbridge as he took the proffered dollar; "there are not many boys as favored as you, and I hope you appreciate it, Edmund."