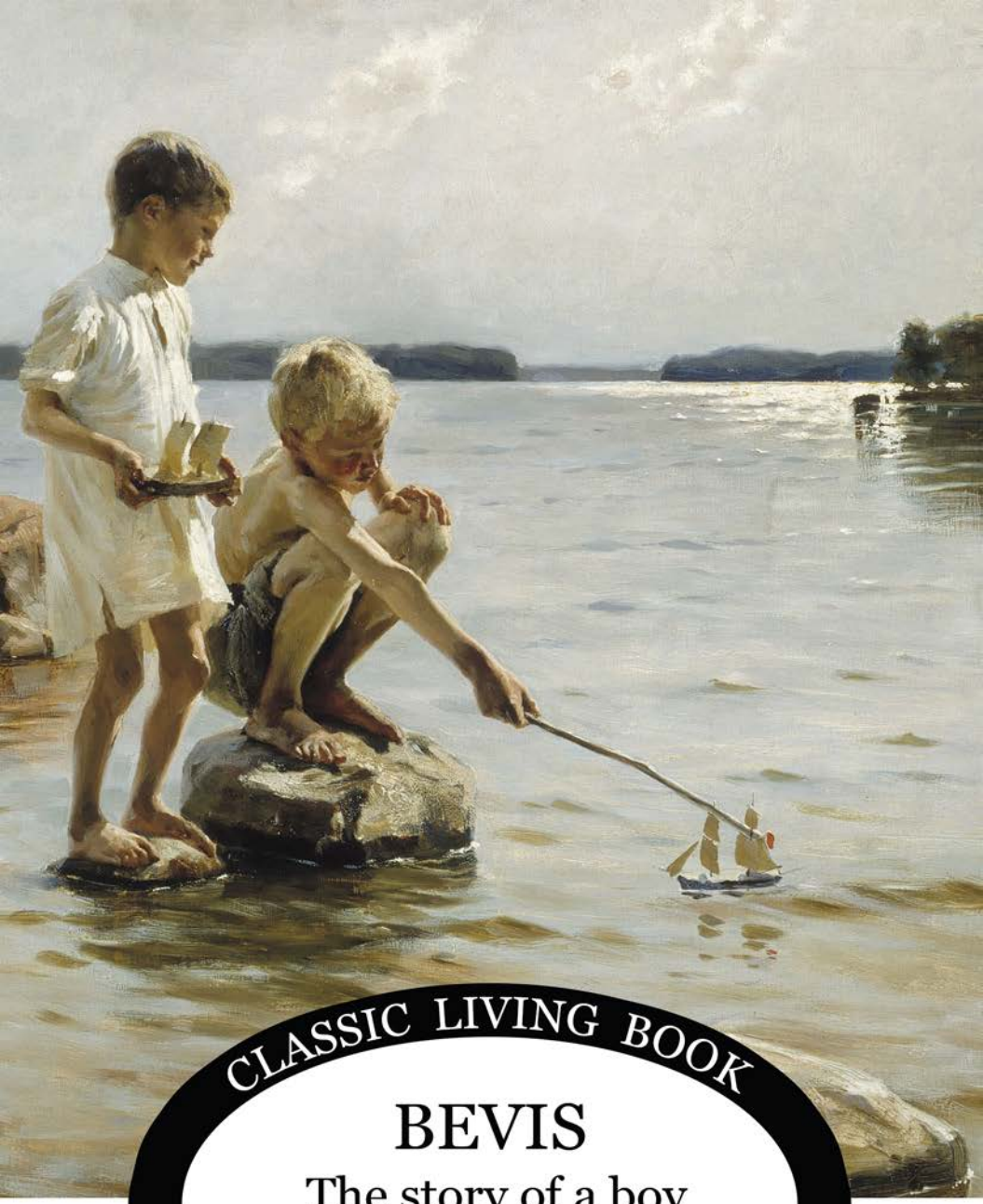

CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

BEVIS

The story of a boy

Richard Jefferies

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

BEVIS

THE STORY OF A BOY

BY

RICHARD JEFFERIES

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VOLUME ONE, CHAPTER I.

BEVIS AT WORK.

One morning a large wooden case was brought to the farmhouse, and Bevis, impatient to see what was in it, ran for the hard chisel and the hammer, and would not consent to put off the work of undoing it for a moment. It must be done directly. The case was very broad and nearly square, but only a few inches deep, and was formed of thin boards. They placed it for him upon the floor, and, kneeling down, he tapped the chisel, driving the edge in under the lid, and so starting the nails. Twice he hit his fingers in his haste, once so hard that he dropped the hammer, but he picked it up again and went on as before, till he had loosened the lid all round.

After labouring like this, and bruising his finger, Bevis was disappointed to find that the case only contained a picture which might look very well, but was of no use to him. It was a fine engraving of "An English Merry-making in the Olden Time," and was soon hoisted up and slung to the wall. Bevis claimed the case as his perquisite, and began to meditate what he could do with it. It was dragged from the house into one of the sheds for him, and he fetched the hammer and his own special little hatchet, for his first idea was to split up the boards. Deal splits so easily, it is a pleasure to feel the fibres part, but upon consideration he thought it might do for the roof of a hut, if he could fix it on four stakes, one at each corner.

Away he went with his hatchet down to the withy-bed by the brook (where he intended to build the hut) to cut some stakes and get them ready. The brook made a sharp turn round the withy-bed, enclosing a tongue of ground which was called in the house at home the Peninsula, because of its shape and being surrounded on three sides by water. This piece of land, which was not all withy, but partly open and partly copse, was Bevis's own territory, his own peculiar property, over which he was autocrat and king.

He flew at once to attack a little fir, and struck it with the hatchet: the first blow cut through the bark and left a "blaze," but the second did not

produce anything like so much effect, the third, too, rebounded, though the tree shook to its top. Bevis hit it a fourth time, not at all pleased that the fir would not cut more easily, and then, fancying he saw something floating down the stream, dropped his hatchet and went to the edge to see.

It was a large fly struggling aimlessly, and as it was carried past a spot where the bank overhung and the grasses drooped into the water, a fish rose and took it, only leaving just the least circle of wavelet. Next came a dead dry twig, which a wood-pigeon had knocked off with his strong wings as he rose out of the willow-top where his nest was. The little piece of wood stayed a while in the hollow where the brook had worn away the bank, and under which was a deep hole; there the current lingered, then it moved quicker, till, reaching a place where the channel was narrower, it began to rush and rotate, and shot past a long green flag bent down, which ceaselessly fluttered in the swift water. Bevis took out his knife and began to cut a stick to make a toy boat, and then, throwing it down, wished he had a canoe to go floating along the stream and shooting over the bay; then he looked up the brook at the old pollard willow he once tried to chop down for that purpose.

The old pollard was hollow, large enough for him to stand inside on the soft, crumbling "touchwood," and it seemed quite dead, though there were green rods on the top, yet it was so hard he could not do much with it, and wearied his arm to no purpose. Besides, since he had grown bigger he had thought it over, and considered that even if he burnt the tree down with fire, as he had half a mind to do, having read that that was the manner of the savages in wild countries, still he would have to stop up both ends with board, and he was afraid that he could not make it water-tight.

And it was only the same reason that stayed his hand from barking an oak or a beech to make a canoe of the bark, remembering that if he got the bark off in one piece the ends would be open and it would not float properly. He knew how to bark a tree quite well, having helped the woodmen when the oaks were thrown, and he could have carried the short ladder out and so cut it high enough up the trunk (while the tree stood). But the open ends puzzled him; nor could he understand nor get any one to explain to him how the wild men, if they used canoes like this, kept the water out at the end.

Once, too, he took the gouge and the largest chisel from the workshop, and the mallet with the beech-wood head, and set to work to dig out a boat from a vast trunk of elm thrown long since, and lying outside the rick-yard, whither it had been drawn under the timber-carriage. Now, the

bark had fallen off this piece of timber from decay, and the surface of the wood was scored and channelled by insects which had eaten their way along it. But though these little creatures had had no difficulty, Bevis with his gouge and his chisel and his mallet could make very little impression, and though he chipped out pieces very happily for half an hour, he had only formed a small hole. So that would not do; he left it, and the first shower filled the hole he had cut with water, and how the savages dug out their canoes with flint choppers he could not think, for he could not cut off a willow twig with the sharpest splinter he could find.

Of course he knew perfectly well that boats are built of plank, but if you try to build one you do not find it so easy; the planks are not to be fitted together by just thinking you will do it. That was more difficult to him than gouging out the huge elm trunk; Bevis could hardly smooth two planks to come together tight at the edge or even to overlap, nor could he bend them up at the end, and altogether it was a very cross-grained piece of work this making a boat.

Pan: the spaniel, sat down on the hard, dry, beaten earth of the workshop, and looked at Bevis puzzling over his plane and his pencil, his footrule, and the paper on which he had sketched his model; then up at Bevis's forehead, frowning over the trouble of it; next Pan curled round and began to bite himself for fleas, pushing up his nostril and snuffling and raging over them. No. This would not do; Bevis could not wait long enough; Bevis liked the sunshine and the grass under foot. Crash fell the plank and bang went the hammer as he flung it on the bench, and away they tore out into the field, the spaniel rolling in the grass, the boy kicking up the tall dandelions, catching the yellow disk under the toe of his boot and driving it up in the air.

But though thrown aside like the hammer, still the idea slumbered in his mind, and as Bevis stood by the brook, looking across at the old willow, and wishing he had a boat, all at once he thought what a capital raft the picture packing-case would make! The case was much larger than the picture which came in it; it had not perhaps been originally intended for that engraving. It was broad and flat; it had low sides; it would not be water-tight, but perhaps he could make it—yes, it was just the very thing. He would float down the brook on it; perhaps he would cross the Longpond.

Like the wind he raced back home, up the meadow, through the garden, past the carthouse to the shed where he had left the case. He tilted it up against one of the uprights or pillars of the shed, and then stooped

to see if daylight was visible anywhere between the planks. There were many streaks of light, chinks which must be caulked, where they did not fit. In the workshop there was a good heap of tow; he fetched it, and immediately began to stuff it in the openings with his pocket-knife. Some of the chinks were so wide, he filled them up with chips of wood, with the tow round the chips, so as to wedge tightly.

The pocket-knife did not answer well. He got a chisel, but that cut the tow, and was also too thick; then he thought of an old table-knife he had seen lying on the garden wall, left there by the man who had been set to weed the path with it. This did much better, but it was tedious work, very tedious work; he was obliged to leave it twice—once to have a swing, and stretch himself; the second time to get a hunch, or cog, as he called it, of bread and butter. He worked so hard he was so hungry. Round the loaf there were indentations, like a cogged wheel, such as the millwright made. He had one of these cogs of bread cut out, and well stuck over with pats of fresh butter, just made and fresh from the churn, not yet moulded and rolled into shape, a trifle salt but delicious.

Then on again, thrusting the tow in with the knife, till he had used it all, and still there were a few chinks open. He thought he would get some oakum by picking a bit of rope to pieces: there was no old rope about, so he took out his pocket-knife, and stole into the waggon-house, where, first looking round to be sure that no one was about, he slashed at the end of a cart-line. The thick rope was very hard, and it was difficult to cut it; it was twisted so tight, and the rain and the sun had toughened it besides, while the surface was case-hardened by rubbing against the straw of the loads it had bound. He haggled it off at last, but when he tried to pick it to pieces he found the larger strands unwound tolerably well, but to divide them and part the fibres was so wearisome and so difficult that he did not know how to manage it. With a nail he hacked at it, and got quite red in the face, but the tough rope was not to be torn to fragments in a minute; he flung it down, then he recollected some one would see it, so he hurled it over the hedge into the lane.

He ran indoors to see if he could find anything that would do instead, and went up into the bench-room where there was another carpenter's bench (put up for amateur work), and hastily turned over everything; then he pulled out the drawer in his mamma's room, the drawer in which she kept odds and ends, and having upset everything, and mixed her treasures, he lighted on some rag which she kept always ready to bind round the fingers that used to get cut so often. For a makeshift this, he thought,

would do. He tore a long piece, left the drawer open, and ran to the shed with it. There was enough to fill the last chink he could see; so it was done. But it was a hundred and twenty yards to the brook, and though he could lift the case on one side at a time, he could not carry it.

He sat down on the stool (dragged out from the workshop) to think; why of course he would fasten a rope to it, and so haul it along! Looking for a nail in the nail-box on the bench, for the rope must be tied to something, he saw a staple which would do much better than a nail, so he bored two holes with a gimlet, and drove the staple into the raft. There was a cord in the summer-house by the swing, which he used for a lasso—he had made a running noose, and could throw it over anything or anybody who would keep still—this he fetched, and put through the staple. With the cord over his shoulder he dragged the raft by main force out of the shed, across the hard, dry ground, through the gate, and into the field. It came very hard, but it did come, and he thought he should do it.

The grass close to the rails was not long, and the load slipped rather better on it, but farther out into the field it was longer, and the edge of the case began to catch against it, and when he came to the furrows it was as much as he could manage, first to get it down into the furrow, next to lift it up a little, else it would not move, and then to pull it up the slope. By stopping a while and then hauling he moved it across three of the furrows, but now the cord quite hurt his shoulder, and had begun to fray his jacket. When he looked back he was about thirty yards from where he had started, not halfway to the gateway, through which was another meadow, where the mowing-grass was still higher.

Bevis sat down on the sward to rest, his face all hot with pulling, and almost thought he should never do it. There was a trail in the grass behind where the raft had passed like that left by a chain harrow. It wanted something to slip on; perhaps rollers would do like those they moved the great pieces of timber on to the saw-pit. As soon as he had got his breath again, Bevis went back to the shed, and searched round for some rollers. He could not find any wood ready that would do, but there was a heap of poles close by. He chose a large, round willow one, carried the stool down to it, got the end up on the stool, and worked away like a slave till he had sawn off three lengths.

These he took to the raft, put one under the front part, and arranged the other two a little way ahead. Next, having brought a stout stake from the shed, he began to lever the raft along, and was delighted at the ease with which it now moved. But this was only on the level ground and

down the slope of the next furrow, so far it went very well, but there was a difficulty in getting it up the rise. As the grass grew longer, too, the rollers would not roll; and quite tired out with all this work, Bevis flung down his lever, and thought he would go indoors and sit down and play at something else.

First he stepped into the kitchen, as the door was open; it was a step down to it. The low whitewashed ceiling and the beam across it glowed red from the roasting-fire of logs split in four, and built up on the hearth; the flames rushed up the vast, broad chimney—a bundle of flames a yard high, whose tips parted from the main tongues and rose disjointed for a moment by themselves: the tiny panes of yellowish-green glass, too, in the window reflected the light. Such a fire as makes one's lips moist at the thought of the juicy meats and the subtle sweetness imparted by the wood fuel, which has a volatile fragrance of its own. Bevis thought he would get the old iron spoon, and melt some lead, and cast some bullets in the mould—he had a mould, though they would not let him have a pistol—he knew where there was a piece of lead-pipe, and a battered bit of guttering that came off the house.

Or else he would put in a nail, make it white hot, and hammer it into an arrowhead, using the wrought-iron fire-dog as an anvil. The heat was so great, especially as it was a warm May day, that before he could decide he was obliged to go out of the kitchen, and so wandered into the sitting-room. His fishing-rod stood in the corner where he had left it; he had brought it in because the second joint was splitting, and he intended (as the ferrule was lost) to bind it round and round with copper wire. But he did not feel much inclined to do that either; he had half a mind to go up in the bench-room, and take the lock of the old gun to pieces to see how it worked. Only the stock (with the lock attached) was left; the barrel was gone.

While he was thinking he walked into the parlour, and seeing the bookcase open—the door was lined within with green material—put his hand involuntarily on an old grey book. The covers were grey and worn and loose; the back part had come off; the edges were rough and difficult to turn over, because they had not been cut by machinery; the margin, too, was yellow and frayed. Bevis's fingers went direct to the rhyme he had read so often, and in an instant everything around him disappeared, room and bookcase and the garden without, and he forgot himself, for he could see the "bolde men in their deeds," he could hear the harper and the minstrel's song, the sound of trumpet and the clash of steel; how—

"As they were drinking ale and wine Within Kyng Estmere's halle: When will ye marry a wyfe, brother, A wyfe to glad us all?"

How the kyng and "Adler younge" rode to the wooing, and the fight they had, fighting so courageously against crowds of enemies,—

"That soone they have slayne the Kempery men, Or forst them forth to flee."

Bevis put himself so into it, that he did it all, *he* bribed the porter, *he* played the harp, and drew the sword; these were no words to him, it was a living picture in which he himself acted.

He was inclined to go up into the garret and fetch down the old cutlass that was there among the lumber, and go forth into the meadow and slash away at "gix" and parsley and burdocks, and kill them all for Kempery men, just as he out them down before when he was Saint George. As he was starting for the cutlass he recollected that the burdocks and the rest where not up high enough yet, the Paynim scoundrels had not grown tall enough in May to be slain with any pleasure, and a sense that you were valiantly swording. Still there was an old wooden bedstead up there, on which he could hoist up a sail, and sail away to any port he chose, to Spain, or Rhodes, or where the lotus-eaters lived. But his mind, so soon as he had put down the grey book, ran still on his raft, and out he raced to see it again, fresh and bright from the rest of leaving it alone a little while.

VOLUME ONE, CHAPTER II.

THE LAUNCH.

As he came near a butterfly rose from the raft, having stayed a moment to see what this could be among the dandelions and buttercups, but Bevis was too deeply occupied to notice it. The cord was of no use; the rollers were of no use; the wheelbarrow occurred to him, but he could not lift it on, besides it was too large, nor could he have moved it if it would go on. Pan was not strong enough to help him haul, even if he would submit to be harnessed, which was doubtful. The cart-horses were all out at work, nor indeed had they been in the stable would he have dared to touch them.

What he wanted to do was to launch his raft before any one saw or guessed what he was about, so that it might be a surprise to them and a triumph to him. Especially he was anxious to do it before Mark came; he might come across the fields any minute, or along the road, and Bevis wished to be afloat, so that Mark might admire his boat, and ask permission to stop on board. Mark might appear directly; it was odd he had not heard his whistle before. Full of this thought away went Bevis back to the house, to ask Polly the dairymaid to help him; but she hunted him out with the mop, being particularly busy that day with the butter, and quite deaf to all his offers and promises. As he came out he looked up the field, and remembered that John was stopping the gaps, and was at work by himself that day; perhaps he would slip away and help him.

He raced up the meadow and found the labourer, with his thick white leather gloves and billhook, putting thorn bushes in the gaps, which no one had made so much as Bevis himself.

"Come and help me," said Bevis. Now John was willing enough to leave his work and help Bevis do anything—for anything is sweeter than the work you ought to do—besides which he knew he could get Bevis to bring him out a huge mug of ale for it.

But he grinned and said nothing, and simply pointed through the hedge. Bevis looked, and there was the Bailiff with his back against the great oak, under which he once went to sleep. The Bailiff was older now, much older,

and though he was so stout and big he did not do much work with his hands. He stood there, leaning his back against the oak, with his hazel staff in his hand, watching the stone-pickers, who were gathering up the bits of broken earthenware and rubbish from among the cowslips out of the way of the scythe; watching, too, the plough yonder in the arable field beyond; and with his eyes now and then on John. While those grey eyes were about, work, you may be sure, was not slack. So Bevis pouted, and picked up a stone, and threw it at the Bailiff, taking good care, however, not to hit him. The stone fell in the hedge behind the Bailiff, and made him start, as he could not think what creature it could be, for rabbits and weasels and other animals and birds move as silently as possible, and this made a sharp tap.

Bevis returned slowly down the meadow, and as he came near the house, having now given up hope of getting the raft to the brook, he caught sight of a cart-horse outside the stable. He ran and found the carter's lad, who had been sent home with the horse; the horse had been hauling small pieces of timber out of the mowing-grass with a chain, and the lad was just going to take off the harness.

"Stop," said Bevis, "stop directly, and hitch the chain on my raft."

The boy hesitated; he dared not disobey the carter, and he had been in trouble for pleasing Bevis before.

"This instant," said Bevis, stamping his foot; "I'm your master."

"No; that you beant," said the boy slowly, very particular as to facts; "your feyther be my master."

"You do it this minute," said Bevis, hot in the face, "or I'll *kill* you; but if you'll do it I'll give you—sixpence."

The boy still hesitated, but he grinned; then he looked round, then he turned the horse's head—unwilling, for the animal thought he was going to the manger—and did as Bevis told him. Behind the strong cart-horse the raft was nothing, it left a trail all across the grass right down to the brook; Bevis led the way to the drinking-place, where the ground sloped to the water. The boy once embarked in the business, worked with a will—highly delighted himself with the idea—and he and Bevis together pushed the raft into the stream.

"Now you hold the rope," said Bevis, "while I get in," and he put one foot on the raft.

Just then there came a whistle, first a long low call, then a quaver, then two short calls repeated.

"That's Mark," said Bevis, and in he hastened. "Push me off," for one edge of the raft touched the sandy shore.

"Holloa!" shouted Mark, racing down the meadow from the gateway; "stop a minute! let me!—"

"Push," said Bevis.

The boy shoved the raft off; it floated very well, but the moment it was free of the ground and Bevis's weight had to be entirely supported, the water squirted in around the edges.

"You'll be drownded," said the carter's lad.

"Pooh!" said Bevis.

"I shall jump in," said Mark, making as if he were about to leap.

"If you do I'll hit you," said Bevis, doubling his fists; "I say!—"

For the water rushed in rapidly, and was already half an inch deep. When he caulked his vessel, he stopped all the seams of the bottom, but he had overlooked the chinks round the edges, between the narrow planks that formed the gunwales or sides, and the bottom to which they were fastened.

Bevis moved towards the driest side of the raft, but directly he stepped there and depressed it with his weight the water rushed after him, and he was deeper than over in it. It came even over his boots.

"Let I get in," said the boy; "mine be water-tights."

"Pull me back," said Bevis.

Mark seized the rope, and he and the boy gave such a tug that Bevis, thrown off his balance, must have fallen into the brook had he not jumped ashore and escaped with one foot wet through to the ankle.

"Yaa—you!" they heard a rough voice growling, like a dog muttering a bark in his throat, and instantly the carter's lad felt a grip on the back of his neck. It was the Bailiff who marched him up the meadow, holding the boy by the neck with one hand and leading the cart-horse with the other. Bevis and Mark were too full of the raft even to notice that their assistant had been haled off.

First they pulled till they had got it ashore; then they tilted it up to let the water run out; then they examined the chinks where it had come in.

"Here's my handkerchief," said Mark; "put that in."

The handkerchief, a very dirty one, was torn into shreds and forced into the chinks. It was not enough, so Bevis tore up his; still there were holes. Bevis roamed up and down the grass in his excitement, gazing round for something to stop these leaks.

"I know," said he suddenly, "moss will do. Come on."

He made for a part of the meadow much overshadowed by trees, where the moss threatened to overcome the grass altogether, so well did

it flourish in the coolness and moisture, for the dew never dried there even at noonday. The Bailiff had it torn up by the harrow, but it was no good, it would grow. Bevis always got moss from here to put in his tin can for the worms when he went fishing. Mark was close behind him, and together they soon had a quantity of moss. After they had filled the chinks as they thought, they tried the boat again, Bevis insisting on his right to get in first as it was his property. But it still leaked, so they drew it out once more and again caulked the seams. To make it quite tight Bevis determined to put some clay as well, to line the chinks with it like putty. So they had to go home to the garden, get the trowel out of the summer-house where Bevis kept such things, and then dig a few lumps of clay out of the mound.

There was only one place where there was any clay accessible, they knew the spot well—was there anything they did not know? Working up the lumps of clay with their hands and the water so as to soften and render it plastic, they carefully lined the chinks, and found when they launched the raft that this time it floated well and did not admit a single drop. For the third time, Bevis stepped on board, balancing himself with a pole he had brought down from the garden, for he had found before that it was difficult to stand upright on a small raft. Mark pushed him off: Bevis kept one end of the pole touching the bottom, and so managed very well. He guided the raft out of the drinking-place, which was like a little pond beside the brook, and into the stream.

There the current took it, and all he had to do was to keep it from grounding on the shallows, where the flags were rising out of the mud, or striking against the steep banks where the cowslips overhung the water. With his feet somewhat apart to stand the firmer, his brow frowning (with resolution), and the pole tight in his hands—all grimed with clay—Bevis floated slowly down the stream. The sun shone hot and bright, and he had of course left his hat on the sward where it had fallen off as he stooped to the caulking: the wind blew and lifted his hair: his feet were wet. But he never noticed the heat, nor the wind, nor his wet feet, nor his clayey hands. He had done it—he was quite lost in his raft.

Round the bend the brook floated him gently, past the willow where the wood-pigeon built (he was afraid to come near his nest while they were about), past the thick hawthorn bushes white with may-bloom, under which the blackbirds love to stay in the hottest days in the cool shadow by the water. Where there were streaks of white sand sifted by the stream from the mud, he could see the bottom: under the high bank there was a

swirl as if the water wrestled with something under the surface: a water-rat, which had watched him coming from a tiny terrace, dived with a sound like a stone dropped quietly in: the stalks of flags grazed the bottom of the raft, he could hear them as it drew on: a jack struck and rushed wildly up and down till he found a way to slip by; the raft gave a heave and shot swiftly forward where there had once been a bay and was still a fall of two inches or so: a bush projected so much that he could with difficulty hold the boughs aside and prevent the thorns from scratching his face: a snag scraped the bottom of the boat and the jerk nearly overthrew him—he did not mind that, he feared lest the old stump had started a seam, but fortunately it had not done so.

Then there was a straight course, a broad and open reach, at which he shouted with delight. The wind came behind and pushed his back like a sail and the little silvery ripples ran before him, and dashed against the shore, destroying themselves and their shadows under them at the same time. The raft floated without piloting here, steadily on. Bevis lifted his pole and waved his hand in triumph.

From the gateway the carter's lad watched him; he had got away from the angry Bailiff. From the garden ha-ha, near the rhubarb patch, Polly the dairymaid watched him, gesticulating every now and then with her arms, for she had been sent to call him to dinner. Mark, wild with envy and admiration and desire to share the voyage, walked on the bank, begging to conic in, for Bevis to get out or let him join him, threatening to leap aboard from the high bank where the current drifted the raft right under him, pulling off his shoes and stockings to wade in and seize the craft by main force; then, changing his mind, shouting to Bevis to mind a boulder in the brook, and pointing out the place.

The raft swept with steady, easy motion down the straight broad reach; Bevis did not need his pole, he stood without its help, all aglow with joy.

The raft came to another bend, and Bevis with his pole guided it round, and then, looking up, stamped his foot with vexation, for there was an ancient, hollow willow right in front, so bowed down that its head obstructed the fair way of the stream. He had quite hoped to get down to the Peninsula, and to circumnavigate it, and even shoot the cataract of the dam below, and go under the arch of the bridge, and away yet farther. He was not fifty yards from the Peninsula, and Mark had run there to meet him; but here was this awkward tree, and before he could make up his mind what to do, bump the raft struck the willow, then it swung slowly round and one side grounded on the bank, and he was at a standstill.

He hit the willow with his pole, but that was of no use, and called to Mark. Bevis pushed the willow with his pole, Mark pulled at a branch, and together they could shake it, but they could not move it out of the way; the stream was blocked as if a boom had been fastened across it. The voyage was over.

While they consulted, Polly came down, having failed to make them hear from the garden, and after she had shook them each by the shoulder brought them to reason. Though she would have failed in that too had not the willow been there, not for dinner or anything would Bevis have abandoned his adventure, so bent was he always on the business he had in hand.

But the willow was obstinate, they could not get past it, so reluctantly he agreed to go home. First Polly had to fetch his hat, which was two hundred yards away on the grass by the drinking-place; then Mark had to put his shoes and stockings on, and take one off again because there was a fragment of stone in it. Next, Bevis had to step into the raft again—a difficult thing to do from the tree—in order to get the cord fastened to the staple to tie it up, not that there was the least risk of the raft floating away, still these things, as you know, ought to be done quite properly.

After he had tied the cord or painter to a branch of the willow as firmly as possible, at last he consented to come. But then catching sight of the carter's lad, he had first to give him his sixpence, and also to tell him that if he dared go near the raft, even to look at it, he would be put in the brook. Besides which he had to wash his hands, and by the time Mark and he reached the table the rest had finished. The people looked at them rather blackly, but they did not mind or notice in the least, for their minds were full of projects to remove the willow, about which they whispered to each other.

Pan raced beside them after dinner to the ha-ha wall, down which they jumped one after the other into the meadow. The spaniel hesitated on the brink, not that he feared the leap, which he had so often taken, but reflection checked him. He watched them a little way as they ran for the brook, then turned and walked very slowly back to the house; for he knew that now dinner was over, if he waited till he was remembered, a plateful would come out for him.

VOLUME ONE, CHAPTER III.

THE MISSISSIPPI.

They found the raft as they had left it, except that petals of the may-bloom, shaken from the hawthorn bushes by the breeze, as they came floating down the stream had lodged against the vessel like a white line on the water. Already, too, the roach, which love a broad shadow to play about its edge, had come underneath, but when they felt the shaking of the bank from the footsteps turned aside, and let the current drift them down. Bevis fetched his hatchet from the Peninsula and began to hack at the willow; Mark, not without some difficulty, got leave to climb into the raft, and sit in the centre. The chips flew, some fell on the grass, some splashed into the brook; Bevis made a broad notch just as he had seen the men do it; and though his arm was slender, the fire behind it drove the edge of the steel into the wood. The willow shook, and its branches, which touched the water, ruffled the surface.

But though the trunk was hollow it was a long way through, and when Bevis began to tire he had only out in about three inches. Then Mark had to work, but before he had given ten strokes Bevis said it was of no use chopping, they could never do it, they must get the grub-axe. So they went back to the house, and carried the ungainly tool down to the tree.

It was too cumbrous for them, they pocked up a little turf, and just disturbed the earth, and then threw the clumsy thing on the grass. Next they thought of the great saw—the cross-cut—the men used, one at each end, to saw though timber; but that was out of their reach, purposely put up high in the workshop, so that they should not meddle with it or cut themselves with its terrible teeth.

"I know," said Mark, "we must make a fire, and burn the tree; we are savages, you know, and that is how they do it."

"How silly you are!" said Bevis. "We are *not* savages, and I shall not play at that. We have just discovered this river, and we are going down it on our raft; and if we do not reach some place to-night and build a fort, very likely the savages will shoot us. I believe I heard one shouting just now; there was something rustled, I am sure, in the forest."

He pointed at the thick double-mound hedge about a hundred yards distant.

"What river is it?" said Mark. "Is it the Amazon, or the Congo, or the Yellow River, or the Nile—"

"It is the Mississippi, of course," said Bevis, quite decided and at ease as to that point. "Can't you see that piece of weed there. My papa says that weed came from America, so I am sure it is the Mississippi, and nobody has ever floated down it before, and there's no one that can read within a thousand miles."

"Then what shall we do?"

"O, there's always something you can do. If we could only get a beaver now to nibble through it. There's always something you can do. I know," and Bevis jumped up delighted at his idea, "we can bore a hole, and blow it up with gunpowder!"

"Lot us fetch an auger," said Mark. "The gimlet is not big enough."

"Be quick," said Bevis. "Run back to the settlement, and get the auger; I will mind the raft and keep off the savages; and, I say, bring a spear and the cutlass; and—I say—"

But Mark was too far, and in too much of a hurry to hear a word. Bevis, tired of chopping, rolled over on his back on the grass, looking up at the sky. The buttercups rose high above his head, the wind blew and cooled his heated forehead, and a humble-bee hummed along: borne by the breeze from the grass there came the sweet scent of green things growing in the sunshine. Far up he saw the swallows climbing in the air; they climbed a good way almost straight up, and then suddenly came slanting down again.

While he lay there he distinctly heard the Indians rustling again in the forest. He raised himself on one arm, but could not see them; then recollecting that he must try to conceal himself, he reclined again, and thought how he should be able to repel an attack without weapons. There was the little hatchet, he could snatch up that and defend himself. Perhaps they would sink the raft? Perhaps when Mark returned they had better tow it back up stream, and draw it ashore safely at home, and then return to the work of clearing the obstruction. As he lay with his knees up among the buttercups he heard the thump, thump of Mark's feet rushing down the hill in eager haste with the auger. So he sat up, and beckoned to him to be quiet, and explained to him when he arrived that the Indians were certainly about. They must tow the raft back to the drinking-place. Bevis untied the cord with which the raft was fastened to the willow, and stepped on board.

"Don't pull too quick," he said to Mark, giving him the cord; "or perhaps I shall run aground."

"But you floated down," said Mark. "Let me get in, and you tow; it's my turn."

"Your turn?" shouted Bevis, standing up as straight as a bolt. "This is *my* raft."

"But you always have everything, and you floated down, and I have not; you have everything, and—"

"You are a great story," said Bevis, stamping so that the raft shook and the ripples rushed from under it. "I don't have everything, and you have more than half; and I gave you my engine and that box of gun-caps yesterday; and I hate you, and you are a big story."

Out he scrambled, and seizing Mark by the shoulders, thrust him towards the raft with such force that it was with difficulty Mark saved himself from falling into the brook. He clung to the willow—the bark gave way under his fingers—but as he slipped, he slung himself over the raft and dropped on it.

"Take the pole," said Bevis, still very angry, and looking black as thunder. "Take the pole, and steer so as not to run in the mud, and not to hit against the bank. Now then," and putting the cord over his shoulder, off he started.

Mark had as much as ever he could do to keep the raft from striking one side or the other.

"Please don't go so fast," he said.

Bevis went slower, and towed steadily in silence. After they had passed the hawthorn under the may-bloom, Mark said, "Bevis," but Bevis did not answer.

"Bevis," repeated Mark, "I have had enough now; stop, and you get in."

"I shall not," said Bevis. "You are a great story."

In another minute Mark spoke again:—

"Let me get out and tow you now." Bevis did not reply. "I say—I say— I say, Bevis."

No use. Bevis towed him the whole way, till the raft touched the shallow shore of the drinking-place. Then Mark got out and helped him drag the vessel well up on the ground, so that it should not float away.

"Now," said Bevis, after it was quite done. "Will you be a story any more?"

"No," said Mark, "I will not be a story again."

So they walked back side by side to the willow tree; Mark, who was

really in the right, feeling in the wrong. At the tree Bevis picked up the auger, and told him to bore the hole. Mark began, but suddenly stopped.

"What's the good of boring the hole when we have not got any gunpowder," said he.

"No more we have," said Bevis. "This is very stupid, and they will not let me have any, though I have got some money, and I have a great mind to buy some and hide it. Just as if we did not know how to use powder, and as if we did not know how to shoot! Oh, I know! We will go and cut a bough of alder—there's ever so many alders by the Longpond—and burn it and make charcoal; it makes the best charcoal, you know, and they always—use it for gunpowder, and then we can get some saltpetre. Let me see—"

"The Bailiff had some saltpetre the other day," said Mark.

"So he did: it is in the dairy. Oh yes, and I know where some sulphur is. It is in the garden-house, where the tools are, in the orchard; it's what they use to smother the bees with—"

"That's on brown paper," said Mark; "that won't do."

"No it's not. You have to melt it to put it on paper, and dip the paper in. This is in a piece, it is like a short bar, and we will pound it up and mix; them all together and make capital gunpowder."

"Hurrah!" cried Mark, throwing down the auger. "Let's go and cut the alder. Come on!"

"Stop," said Bevis. "Lean on me, and walk slow. Don't you know you have caught a dreadful fever, from being in the swamps by the river, and you can hardly walk, and you are very thin and weak? Lean on my arm and hang your head."

Mark hung his head, turning his rosy cheeks down to the buttercups, and dragged his sturdy fever-stricken limbs along with an effort.

"Humph!" said a gruff voice.

"It's the Indians!" cried Bevis, startled; for they were so absorbed they had not heard the Bailiff come up behind them. They quite jumped, as if about to be scalped.

"What be you doing to that tree?" said the Bailiff.

"Find out," said Bevis. "It's not your tree: and why don't you say when you're coming?"

"I saw you from the hedge," said the Bailiff. "I was telling John where to cut the bushes from for the new harrow." That caused the rustling in the forest. "You'll never chop he down."

"That we shall, if we want to."

"No, you won't—he stops your ship."

"It isn't a ship: it's a raft."

"Well, you can't get by."

"That we can."

"I thinks you be stopped," said the Bailiff, having now looked at the tree more carefully. "He be main thick,"—with a certain sympathy for stolid, inanimate obstruction.

"I tell you, people like us are never stopped by anything," said Bevis. "We go through forests, and we float down rivers, and we shoot tigers, and move the biggest trees ever seen—don't we, Mark?"

"Yes, that we do: nothing is anything to us."

"Of course not," said Bevis. "And if we can't chop it down or blow it up, as we mean to, then we dig round it. O, Mark, I say! I forgot! Let's dig a canal round it."

"How silly we were never to think of that!" said Mark. "A canal is the very thing—from here to the creek."

He meant where the stream curved to enclose the Peninsula: the proposed canal would make the voyage shorter.

"Cut some sticks—quick!" said Bevis. "We must plug out our canal—that is what they always do first, whether it is a canal, or a railway, or a drain, or anything. And I must draw a plan. I must get my pocket-book and pencil. Come on, Mark, and get the spade while I get my pencil."

Off they ran. The Bailiff leaned on his hazel staff, one hand against the willow, and looked down into the water, as calmly as the sun itself reflected there. When he had looked awhile he shook his head and grunted: then he stumped away; and after a dozen yards or so, glanced back, grunted, and shook his head again. It could not be done. The tree was thick, the earth hard—no such thing: his sympathy, in a dull unspoken way, was with the immovable.

Mark went to work with the spade, throwing the turf he dug up into the brook; while Bevis, lying at full length on the grass, drew his plan of the canal. He drew two curving lines parallel, and half an inch apart, to represent the bend of the brook, and then two, as straight as he could manage, across, so as to shorten the distance, and avoid the obstruction. The rootlets of the grass held tight, when Mark tried to lift the spadeful he had dug, so that he could not tear them off.

He had to chop them at the side with his spade first, and then there was a root of the willow in the way; a very obstinate stout root, for which the little hatchet had to be brought to cut it. Under the softer turf the

ground was very hard, as it had long been dry, so that by the time Bevis had drawn his plan and stuck in little sticks to show the course the canal was to take, Mark had only cleared about a foot square, and four or five inches deep, just at the edge of the bank, where he could thrust it into the stream.

"I have been thinking," said Bevis as he came back from the other end of the line, "I have been thinking what we are, now we are making this canal?"

"Yes," said Mark, "what are we?—they do not make canals on the Mississippi. Is this the Suez canal?"

"Oh no," said Bevis. "This is not Africa; there is no sand, and there are no camels about. Stop a minute. Put down that spade, don't dig another bit till we know what we are."

Mark put down the spade, and they both thought very hard indeed, looking straight at one another.

"I know," said Bevis, drawing a long breath. "We are digging a canal through Mount Athos, and we are Greeks."

"But was it the Greeks?" said Mark. "Are you sure—"

"Quite sure," said Bevis. "Perfectly quite sure. Besides, it doesn't matter. *We* can do it if they did not, don't you see?"

"So we can: and who are you then, if we are Greeks?"

"I am Alexander the Great."

"And who am I!"

"O, you—you are anybody."

"But I *must* be somebody," said Mark, "else it will not do."

"Well, you are: let me see—Pisistratus."

"Who was Pisistratus?"

"I don't know," said Bevis. "It doesn't matter in the least. Now dig."

Pisistratus dug till he came to another root, which Alexander the Great chopped off for him with the hatchet. Pisistratus dug again and uncovered a water-rat's hole which went down aslant to the water. They both knelt on the grass, and peered down the round tunnel: at the bottom where the water was, some of the fallen petals of the may-bloom had come in and floated there.

"This would do splendidly to put some gunpowder in and blow up, like the miners do," said Bevis. "And I believe that is the proper way to make a canal: it is how they make tunnels, I am sure."

"Greeks are not very good," said Mark. "I don't like Greeks: don't let's be Greeks any longer. The Mississippi was very much best."

"So it was," said Bevis. "The Mississippi is the nicest. I am not Alexander, and you are not Pisistratus. This is the Mississippi."

"Let us have another float down," said Mark. "Let me float down, and I will drag you all the way up this time."

"All right," said Bevis.

So they launched the raft, and Mark got in and floated down, and Bevis walked on the bank, giving him directions how to pilot the vessel, which as before was brought up by the willow leaning over the water. Just as they were preparing to tow it back again, and Bevis was climbing out on the willow to get into the raft they heard a splashing down the brook.

"What's that?" said Mark. "Is it Indians?"

"No, it's an alligator. At least, I don't know. Perhaps it's a canoe full of Indians. Give me the pole, quick; there now, take the hatchet. Look out!"

The splashing increased; then there was a "Yowp!" and Pan, the spaniel, suddenly appeared out of the flags by the osier-bed. He raced across the ground there, and jumped into the brook again, and immediately a moorcock, which he had been hunting, scuttled along the water, beating with his wings, and scrambling with his long legs hanging down, using both air and water to fly from his enemy. As he came near he saw Bevis on the willow, and rose out of the brook over the bank. Bevis hit at him with his pole, but missed; and Mark hurled the hatchet in vain. The moorcock flew straight across the meadow to another withy-bed, and then disappeared. It was only by threats that they stopped the spaniel from following.

Pan having got his plateful by patiently waiting about the doorway, after he had licked his chops, and turned up the whites of his eyes, to see if he could persuade them to give him any more, walked into the rick-yard, and choosing a favourite spot upon some warm straw—for straw becomes quite hot under sunshine—lay down and took a nap. When he awoke, having settled matters with the fleas, he strolled back to the ha-ha wall, and, seeing Bevis and Mark still busy by the brook, went down to know what they were doing. But first going to a place he well knew to lap he scented the moorcock, and gave chase.

"Come here," said Bevis; and, seizing the spaniel by the skin of his neck, he dragged him in the raft, stepped in quickly after, and held Pan while Mark hauled at the tow-line. But when Bevis had to take the pole to guide the raft from striking the bank Pan jumped out in a moment, preferring to swim rather than to ride in comfort, nor could any persuasions or threats get him on again. He barked along the shore, while Mark hauled and Bevis steered the craft.

Having beached her at the drinking-place on the shelving strand, they thought they had better go up the river a little way, and see if there were any traces of Indians; and, following the windings of the stream, they soon came to the hatch. Above the hatch the water was smooth, as it usually is where it is deep and approaching the edge, and Bevis's quick eye caught sight of a tiny ripple there near one bank, so tiny that it hardly extended across the brook, and disappeared after the third wavelet.

"Keep Pan there!" he said. "Hit him—hit him harder than that; he doesn't mind."

Mark punched the spaniel, who crouched; but, nevertheless, his body crept, as it were, towards the hatch, where Bevis was climbing over. Bevis took hold of the top rail, put his foot on the rail below, all green and slippery with weeds where the water splashed, like the rocks where the sea comes, then his other foot further along, and so got over with the deep water in front, and the roar of the fall under, and the bubbles rushing down the stream. The bank was very steep, but there was a notch to put the foot in, and a stout hawthorn stem—the thorns on which had long since been broken off for the purpose—gave him something to hold to and by which to lift himself up.

Then he walked stealthily along the bank—it overhung the dark deep water, and seemed about to slip in under him. There was a plantation of trees on that side, and on the other a hawthorn hedge, so that it was a quiet and sheltered spot. As he came to the place where he had seen the ripple, he looked closer, and in among a bunch of rushes, with the green stalks standing up all round it, he saw a moorhen's nest. It was made of rushes, twined round like a wreath, or perhaps more like a large green turban, and there were three or four young moorhens in it. The old bird had slipped away as he came near, and diving under the surface rose ten yards off under a projecting bush.

Bevis dropped on his knee to take one of the young birds, but in an instant they rolled out of the nest, with their necks thrust out in front, and fell splash in the water, where they swam across, one with a piece of shell clinging to its back, and another piece of shell was washed from it by the water. Pan was by his side in a minute; he had heard the splash, and seen the young moorhens, and with a whine, as Mark kicked him—unable to hold him any longer—he rushed across.

"They are such pretty dear little things," said Bevis, in an ecstasy of sentiment, calling to Mark. "Lie down!" banging Pan with a dead branch which he hastily snatched up. The spaniel's back sounded hollow as the

wood rebounded, and broke on his ribs. "Such dear little things! I would not have them hurt for anything."

Bang again on Pan's back, who gave up the attempt, knowing from sore experience that Bevis was not to be trifled with. But by the time Mark had got there the little moorhens had hidden in the grasses beside the stream, though one swam out for a minute, and then concealed itself again.

"Don't you love them?" said Bevis. "I do. I'll *smash* you,"—to Pan, cowering at his feet.

The moorhens did not appear again, so they went back and sat on the top of the steep bank, their legs dangling over the edge above the bubbling water.

A broad cool shadow from the trees had fallen over the hatch, for the afternoon had gone on, and the sun was declining behind them over the western hills. A broad cool shadow, whose edges were far away, so that they were in the midst of it. The thrushes sang in the ashes, for they knew that the quiet evening, with the dew they love, was near. A bullfinch came to the hawthorn hedge just above the hatch, looked in and out once or twice, and then stepped inside the spray near his nest. A yellow-hammer called from the top of a tree, and another answered him across the field. Afar in the mowing-grass the crake lifted his voice, for he talks more as the sun sinks.

The swirling water went round and round under the fall, with lines of white bubbles rising, and quivering masses of yellowish foam ledged on the red rootlets under the bank and against the flags. The swirling water, ceaselessly beaten by the descending stream coming on it with a long-continued blow, returned to be driven away again. A steady roar of the fall, and a rippling sound above it of bursting bubbles and crossing wavelets of the hastening stream, notched and furrowed over stones, frowning in eager haste. The rushing and the coolness, and the song of the brook and the birds, and the sense of the sun sinking, stilled even Bevis and Mark a little while. They sat and listened, and said nothing; the delicious brook filled their ears with music.

Next minute Bevis seized Pan by the neck and pitched him over into the bubbles. In an instant, before he came to the surface, as his weight carried him beneath, Pan was swept down the stream, and when he came up he could not swim against it, but was drifted away till he made for the flags, which grew on a shallow spot. There he easily got out, shook himself, and waited for them to come over.

"I am hungry," said Mark. "What ought we to have to eat; what is

right on the Mississippi? I don't believe they have tea. There is Polly shouting for us."

"No," said Bevis thoughtfully; "I don't think they do. How stupid of her to stand there shouting and waving her handkerchief, as if we could not find our way straight across the trackless prairie. I know—we will have some honey! Don't you know? Of course the hunters find lots of wild honey in the hollow trees. We will have some honey; there's a big jar full."

So they got over the hatch, and went home, leaving their tools scattered hither and thither beside the Mississippi. They climbed up the ha-ha wall, putting the toes of their boots where the flat stones of which it was built, without mortar, were farthest apart, and so made steps while they could hold to the wiry grass-tufts on the top.

"Where's your hat?" said Polly to Bevis.

"I don't know," said Bevis. "I suppose it's in the brook. It doesn't matter."

VOLUME ONE, CHAPTER IV.

DISCOVERY OF THE NEW SEA.

Next morning Bevis went out into the meadow to try and find a plant whose leaves, or one of them, always pointed to the north, like a green compass lying on the ground. There was one in the prairies by which the hunters directed themselves across those oceans of grass without a landmark as the mariners at sea. Why should there not be one in the meadows here—in these prairies—by which to guide himself from forest to forest, from hedge to hedge, where there was no path? If there was a path it was not proper to follow it, nor ought you to know your way; you ought to find it by sign.

He had "blazed" ever so many boughs of the hedges with the hatchet, or his knife if he had not got the hatchet with him, to recognise his route through the woods. When he found a nest begun or finished, and waiting for the egg, he used to cut a "blaze"—that is, to peel off the bark—or make a notch, or cut a bough off about three yards from the place, so that he might easily return to it, though hidden with foliage. No doubt the grass had a secret of this kind, and could tell him which was the way, and which was the north and south if he searched long enough.

So the raft being an old story now, as he had had it a day, Bevis went out into the field, looking very carefully down into the grass. Just by the path there were many plantains, but their long, narrow leaves did not point in any particular direction, no two plants had their leaves parallel. The blue scabious had no leaves to speak of, nor had the red knapweed, nor the yellow rattle, nor the white moon-daisies, nor golden buttercups, nor red sorrel. There were stalks and flowers, but the plants of the mowing-grass, in which he had no business to be walking, had very little leaf. He tried to see if the flowers turned more one way than the other, or bowed their heads to the north, as men seem to do, taking that pole as their guide, but none did so. They leaned in any direction, as the wind had left them, or as the sun happened to be when they burst their green bonds and came forth to the light.

The wind came past as he looked and stroked everything the way it went, shaking white pollen from the bluish tops of the tall grasses. The wind went on and left him and the grasses to themselves. How should I knew which was the north or the south or the west from these? Bevis asked himself, without framing any words to his question. There was no knowing. Then he walked to the hedge to see if the moss grew more on one side of the elms than the other, or if the bark was thicker and rougher.

After he had looked at twenty trees he could not see much difference; those in the hedge had the moss thickest on the eastern side (he knew which was east very well himself, and wanted to see if the moss knew), and those in the lane just through it had the moss thickest on their western side, which was clearly because of the shadow. The trees were really in a double row, running north and south, and the coolest shadow was in between them, and so the moss grew there most. Nor were the boughs any longer or bigger any side more than the other, it varied as the tree was closely surrounded with other trees, for each tree repelled its neighbour. None of the trees, nor the moss, nor grasses cared anything at all about north or south.

Bevis sat down in the mowing-grass, though he knew the Bailiff would have been angry at such a hole being made in it; and when he was sitting on the ground it rose as high as his head. He could see nothing but the sky, and while he sat there looking up he saw that the clouds all drifted one way, towards his house. Presently a starling came past, also flying straight for the house, and after a while another. Next three bees went over as straight as a line, all going one after another that way. The bees went because they had gathered as much honey as they could carry, and were hastening home without looking to the right or to the left. The starlings went because they had young in their nests in a hole of the roof by the chimney, and they had found some food for their fledglings. So now he could find his way home across the pathless prairie by going the same way as the clouds, the bees, and the starlings.

But when he had reached home he recollected that he ought to know the latitude, and that there were Arabs or some other people in Africa who found out the latitude of the place they were in by gazing at the sun through a tube. Bevis considered a little, and then went to the rick-yard, where there was a large elder bush, and cut a straight branch between the knots with his knife. He peeled it, and then forced out the pith, and thus made a tube. Next he took a thin board, and scratched a circle on it with the point of the compasses, and divided it into degrees. Round the

tube he bent a piece of wire, and put the ends through a gimlet-hole in the centre of the board. The ends were opened apart, so as to fasten the tube to the board, allowing it to rotate round the circle. Two gimlet-holes were bored at the top corners of the board, and string passed through so that the instrument could be attached to a tree or post.

He was tying it to one of the young walnut-trees as an upright against which to work his astrolabe, when Mark arrived, and everything had to be explained to him. After they had glanced through the tube, and decided that the raft was at least ten degrees distant, it was clearly of no use to go to it to-day, as they could not reach it under a week's travel. The best thing, Mark thought, would be to continue their expedition in some other direction.

"Let's go round the Longpond," said Bevis; "we have never been quite round it."

"So we will," said Mark. "But we shall not be back to dinner."

"As if travellers ever thought of dinner! Of course we shall take our provisions with us."

"Let's go and get our spears," said Mark.

"Let's take Pan," said Bevis.

"Where is your old compass?" said Mark.

"O, I know—and I must make a map; wait a minute. We ought to have a medicine-chest; the savages will worry us for physic: and very likely we shall have dreadful fevers."

"So we shall, of course; but perhaps there are wonderful plants to cure us, and we know them and the savages don't—there's sorrel."

"Of course, and we can nibble some hawthorn leaf."

"Or a stalk of wheat."

"Or some watercress."

"Or some nuts."

"No, certainly not; they're not ripe," said Bevis, "and unripe fruit is very dangerous in tropical countries."

"We ought to keep a diary," said Mark. "When we go to sleep who shall watch first, you or I?"

"We'll light a fire," said Bevis. "That will frighten the lions; they will glare at us, but they can't stand fire—you hit them on the head with a burning stick."

So they went in, and loaded their pockets with huge double slices of bread-and-butter done up in paper, apples, and the leg of a roast duck from the pantry. Then came the compass, an old one in a brass case; Mark

broke his nails opening the case, which was tarnished, and the card at once swung round to the north, pointing to the elms across the road from the window of the sitting-room. Bevis took the bow and three arrows, made of the young wands of hazel which grow straight, and Mark was armed with a spear, a long ash rod with sharpened end, which they thrust in the kitchen fire a few minutes to harden in the proper manner.

Besides which, there was Bevis's pocket-book for the diary, and a large sheet of brown paper for the map; you see travellers have not always everything at command, but must make use of what they have. Pan raced before them up the footpath; the gate that led to the Longpond was locked, and too high to be climbed easily, but they knew a gap, and crept through on hands and knees.

"Take care there are no cobras or rattlesnakes among those dead leaves," said Mark, when they were halfway through, and quite over-arched and hidden under brambles.

"Stick your spear into them," said Bevis, who was first, and Mark, putting his spear past him, stirred up the heap of leaves.

"All right," said he. "But look at that bough—is it a bough or a snake?"

There was an oak branch in the ditch, crooked and grey with lichen, half concealed by rushes; its curving shape and singular hue gave it some resemblance to a serpent. But when he stabbed at it with his spear it did not move; and they crept through without hurt. As they stood up in the field the other side they had an anxious consultation as to what piece of water it was they were going to discover; whether it was a lake in Central Africa, or one in America.

"I'm tired of lakes," said Mark. "They have found out such a lot of lakes, and the canoes are always upset, and there is such a lot of mud. Let's have a new sea altogether."

"So we will," said Bevis. "That's capital—we will find a new sea where no one has ever been before. Look!"—for they had now advanced to where the gleam of the sunshine on the mere was visible through the hedge—"look! there it is; is it not wonderful?"

"Yes," said Mark, "write it down in the diary; here's my pencil. Be quick; put `Found a new sea'—be quick—there, come on—let's run— hurrah!"

They dashed open the gate, and ran down to the beach. It was a rough descent over large stones, but they reached the edge in a minute, and as they came there was a splashing in several places along the shore. Something was striving to escape, alarmed at their approach. Mark fell on his knees, and put his hand where two or three stones, half in and half out

of water, formed a recess, and feeling about drew out two roach, one of which slipped from his fingers; the other he held. Bevis rushed at another splashing, but he was not quick enough, for it was difficult to scramble over the stones, and the fish swam away just as he got there. Mark's fish was covered with tiny slippery specks. The roach had come up to leave their eggs under the stones. When they had looked at the fish they put it back in the water, and with a kind of shake it dived down and made off. As they watched it swim out they now saw that three or four yards from the shore there were crowds upon crowds of fish travelling to and fro, following the line of the land.

They were so many, that the water seemed thick with them, and some were quite large for roach. These had finished putting their eggs under the stones, and were now swimming up and down. Every now and then, as they silently watched the roach—for they had never before seen such countless multitudes of fish—they could hear splashings further along the stones, where those that were up in the recesses were suddenly seized with panic fear without cause, and struggled to get out, impeding each other, and jammed together in the narrow entrances. For they could not forget their cruel enemies the jacks, and dreaded lest they should be pounced upon while unable even to turn.

A black cat came down the bank some way off, and they saw her swiftly dart her paw into the water, and snatch out a fish. The scales shone silver white, and reflected the sunshine into their eyes like polished metal as the fish quivered and leaped under the claw. Then the cat quietly, and pausing over each morsel, ate the living creature. When she had finished she crept towards the water to get another.

"What a horrid thing!" said Mark. "She ate the fish alive—cruel wretch! Let's kill her."

"Kill her," said Bevis; and before he could fit an arrow to his bow Mark picked up a stone, and flung it with such a good aim and with such force that although it did not hit the cat, it struck a stone and split into fragments, which flow all about her like a shell. The cat raced up the bank, followed by a second stone, and at the top met Pan, who did not usually chase cats, having been beaten for it, but seeing in an instant that she was in disgrace, he snapped at her and drove her wild with terror up a pine-tree. They called Pan off, for it was no use his yapping at a tree, and walked along the shore, climbing over stones, but the crowds of roach were everywhere; till presently they came to a place where the stones ceased, and there was a shallow bank of sand shelving into the water and forming a point.

There the fish turned round and went back. Thousands kept coming up and returning, and while they stayed here watching, gazing into the clear water, which was still and illuminated to the bottom by the sunlight, they saw two great fish come side by side up from the depths beyond and move slowly, very slowly, just over the sand. They were two huge tench, five or six pounds a-piece, roaming idly away from the muddy holes they lie in. But they do not stay in such holes always, and once now and then you may see them like this as in a glass tank. The pair did not go far; they floated slowly rather than swam, first a few yards one way and then a few yards the other. Bevis and Mark were breathless with eagerness.

"Go and fetch my fishing-rod," whispered Bevis, unable to speak loud; he was so excited.

"No, you go," said Mark; "I'll stay and watch them."

"I shan't," said Bevis sharply, "you ought to go."

"I shan't," said Mark.

Just then the tench, having surveyed the bottom there, turned and faded away into the darker deep water.

"There," said Bevis, "if you had run quick!"

"I won't fetch everything," said Mark.

"Then you're no use," said Bevis. "Suppose I was shooting an elephant, and you did not hand me another gun quick, or another arrow; and suppose—"

"But *I* might be shooting the elephant," interrupted Mark, "and you could hand me the gun."

"Impossible," said Bevis; "I never heard anything so absurd. Of course it's the captain who always does everything; and if there was only one biscuit left, of course you would let me eat it, and lie down and die under a tree, so that I might go on and reach the settlement."

"I *hate* dying under a tree," said Mark, "and you always want everything."

Bevis said nothing, but marched on very upright and very angry, and Mark followed, putting his feet into the marks Bevis left as he strode over the yielding sand. Neither spoke a word. The shore trended in again after the point, and the indentation was full of weeds, whose broad brownish leaves floated on the surface. Pan worked about and sniffed among the willow bushes on their loft, which, when the lake was full, were in the water, but now that it had shrunk under the summer heat were several yards from the edge.

Bevis, leading the way, came to a place where the strand, till then so low and shelving, suddenly became steep, where a slight rise of the ground

was cut as it were through by the water, which had worn a cliff eight or ten feet above his head. The water came to the bottom of the cliff, and there did not seem any way past it except by going away from the edge into the field, and so round it. Mark at once went round, hastening as fast as he could to get in front, and he came down to the water on the other side of the cliff in half a minute, looked at Bevis, and then went on with Pan.

Bevis, with a frown on his forehead, stood looking at the cliff, having determined that he would not go round, and yet he could not get past because the water, which was dark and deep, going straight down, came to the bank, which rose from it like a wall. First he took out his pocket-knife and thought he would cut steps in the sand, and he did cut one large enough to put his toe in; but then he recollected that he should have nothing to hold to. He had half a mind to go back home and get some big nails and drive into the hard sand to catch hold of, only by that time Mark would be so far ahead he could not overtake him and would boast that he had explored the new sea first. Already he was fifty yards in front, and walking as fast as he could. How he wished he had his raft, and then that he could swim! He would have jumped into the water and swam round the cliff in a minute.

He saw Mark climbing over some railings that went down to the water to divide the fields. He looked up again at the cliff, and almost felt inclined to leave it and run round and overtake Mark. When he looked down again Mark was out of sight, hidden by hawthorn bushes and the branches of trees. Bevis was exceedingly angry, and he walked up and down and gazed round in his rage. But as he turned once more to the cliff, suddenly Pan appeared at an opening in the furze and bramble about halfway up. The bushes grew at the side, and the spaniel, finding Bevis did not follow Mark, had come back and was waiting for him. Bevis, without thinking, pushed into the furze, and immediately he saw him coming, Pan, eager to go forward again, ran along the face of the cliff about four feet from the top. He seemed to run on nothing, and Bevis was curious to see how he had got by.

The bushes becoming thicker, Bevis had at last to go on hands and knees under them, and found a hollow space, where there was a great rabbit-bury, big enough at the mouth for Pan to creep in. When he stood on the sand thrown out from it he could see how Pan had done it; there was a narrow ledge, not above four inches wide, on the face of the cliff. It was only just wide enough for a footing, and the cliff fell sheer down to the water; but Bevis, seeing that he could touch the top of the cliff, and so steady himself, never hesitated a moment.

He stepped on the ledge, right foot first, the other close behind it, and hold lightly to the grass at the edge of the field above, only lightly lest he should pull it out by the roots. Then he put his right foot forward again, and drew his left up to it, and so along, keeping the right first (he could not walk properly, the ledge being so narrow), he worked himself along. It was quite easy, though it seemed a long way down to the water, it always looks very much farther down than it does up, and as he glanced down he saw a perch rise from the depths, and it occurred to him in the moment what a capital place it would be for perch-fishing.

He could see all over that part of the lake, and noticed two moorhens feeding in the weeds on the other side, when puff! the wind came over the field, and reminded him, as he involuntarily grasped the grass tighter, that he must not stay in such a place where he might lose his balance. So he went on, and a dragonfly flew past out a little way over the water and then back to the field, but Bevis was not to be tempted to watch his antics, he kept steadily on, a foot at a time, till he reached a willow on the other side, and had a bough to hold. Then he shouted, and Pan, who was already far ahead, stopped and looked back at the well-known sound of triumph.

Running down the easy slope, Bevis quickly reached the railings and climbed over. On the other side a meadow came down to the edge, and he raced through the grass and was already halfway to the next rails when some one called "Bevis!" and there was Mark coming out from behind an oak in the field. Bevis stopped, half-pleased, half-angry.

"I waited for you," said Mark.

"I came across the cliff," said Bevis.

"I saw you," said Mark.

"But you ran away from me," said Bevis.

"But I am not running now."

"It is very wrong when we are on an expedition," said Bevis. "People must do as the captain tells them."

"I won't do it again," said Mark.

"You ought to be punished," said Bevis, "you ought to be put on half-rations. Are you quite sure you will never do it again?"

"Never."

"Well then, this once you are pardoned. Now, mind in future, as you are lieutenant, you set a good example. There's a summer snipe."

Out flew a little bird from the shore, startled as Pan came near, with a piping whistle, and, describing a semicircle, returned to the hard mud fifty yards farther on. It was a summer snipe, and when they approached, after

getting over the next railings, it flew out again over the water, and making another half-circle passed back to where they had first seen it. Here the strand was hard mud, dried by the sun, and broken up into innumerable holes by the hoofs of cattle and horses which had come down to drink from the pasture, and had to go through the mud into which they sank when it was soft. Three or four yards from the edge there was a narrow strip of weeds, showing that a bank followed the line of the shore there. It was so unpleasant walking over this hard mud, that they went up into the field, which rose high, so that from the top they had a view of the lake.