

The Prince's Compliments

By FREEMAN PUTNEY.

THE prince's big scarlet automobile stopped before Matthew Blake's door-yard. Matthew Blake was mending a lobster-pot at the side of the house near the barn.

Mr. Strafford, who was already known in town as the Prince's adviser and secretary, sat in the car, apparently waiting. The chauffeur sounded his horn, Matthew Blake glanced up, looked with apparent interest at the car and its occupants, and then continued to hammer at the lobster-pot.

Mr. Strafford's rosy English complexion shaded to a deeper red. With dignity he rose in the car, with dignity he descended from it, and with dignity he walked across the yard to the over-busy fisherman.

"Er I wish you good afternoon, Mr. Blake," he began, still with dignity.

"Up-huh noon," responded Matthew, the first syllables being tangled in a mouthful of nails.

Mr. Strafford drew back his shoulders, and with a full breath began:

"His Royal Highness presents his compliments, and—"

Matthew's mouthful of nails cascaded to the grass.

"Mr. Strafford, I told you the day before yesterday I don't want no more o' your Prince's compliments! He's been sendin' 'em for two weeks now, an' if he keeps up sendin' 'em all summer, he won't get that gate open!"

Matthew picked up a fresh nail and reselected a nail from the grass.

"But Mr. Blake, if you would be reasonable—"

"Reasonable! I been jest as reasonable as His Royal Highness! Dye call it reasonable to take advantage of a man when he's out fishin', by openin' a gate in his fence an' makin' a thoroughfare across his property, without so much as a by-your-leave? I don't."

"But, I told you, Mr. Blake, that it was with the intention of recompensing you in full. By using the short cut to the big house we save half a mile—"

"Five eights," amended Matthew.

"And in England—"

"Yes," broke in Matthew, "you said the other day that in England the country folk'd be tickled ter death ter have a real live prince traipin' over their land. Melbbe in England you can use a man's property first an' then ask him about it afterwards. I ain't sayin' you can't. But you can't in this country—hereawise, not in this section. So, if you made a mistake on account o' your bringin' up, I'm sorry, but you'll have to go the long way round this summer you an' the Prince. By the way, I ain't seen His Royal Highness yet. Didn't know but he'd come round himself to talk gate."

Mr. Strafford drew himself up.

"I am in charge—sole charge—of His Royal Highness's business affairs here," he said stiffly.

"Oh, I ain't kickin'!" Matthew cheerfully assured him. "Guess I can stand it, if the Prince can. Now, if you don't mind, I'll go on with my work. This here trap—"

Mr. Strafford first bit his lips and then set them firmly.

"My good man," he began; Matthew cut him short:

"Don't you call me good man! That's worse! His Royal Highness's compliments!"

Mr. Strafford swallowed the rest of his sentence and began again:

"We have been very patient, Mr. Blake, but I am sorry to see you force us to harsher measures. I have been in consultation with the other side of your fence, and I find that your little property here was once a portion of the great estate we have just bought for the Prince."

"Strutin'!" agreed Matthew. "My grandfather bought it before the summer visitor was dreamed of. He wouldn't take the pasture, 'cause they wouldn't even graze sheep in them days."

"Exactly. And now we find, Mr. Blake, that there is a flaw in your title."

Matthew's uplifted hammer came down upon its nail with a gentle tap. Then it slipped slowly from his hand to the grass.

"A flaw in my title?"

Mr. Strafford permitted himself a grim smile.

"A flaw, Mr. Blake. A slight one, I admit, but, our solicitors assure us, amply sufficient to afford grounds for a lawsuit."

"A lawsuit! I don't jest follow—"

Mr. Strafford's countenance became stern.

"We shall begin suit to eject you at once."

"Eject me! Out o' this place that my father an' grandfather—" Matthew laughed. "Mr. Strafford, they ain't a jury—they ain't twelve men in this country that you could get together to give you a verdict."

"Maybe not, Mr. Blake. But once started, we shall exhaust every measure—carry it to the highest courts. It will cost you thousands of dollars, and, I fancy will consume your place even if you win your case. You'll lose either way, Mr. Blake, and the alternative is so simple!"



"And now we find that there is a flaw in your title."

"You mean, this is all a threat unless I open the gate?"

"If you put it that way."

"Mr. Strafford, I ought to lam you over the head with this hammer, an' then git a belayin'-pin an' go up an' call on the Prince. But I got a wife in the house, an'—Mr. Strafford, did you ever hear o' the battle of Bunker Hill?"

"I fancy so. Here in America, was it not?"

"It was. I guess our folks like ter remember it better'n yours. My ancestors fought at Bunker Hill. Now the British won Bunker Hill, Mr. Strafford, but by the time they captured it they was an awful mess o' British killed an' wounded. You go ahead with your lawsuit, Mr. Strafford!"

But, as the scarlet car whirled away, Matthew's defiant head dropped, and he walked toward the barn with dragging steps, his lobster-pot in one hand and his hammer swinging listlessly in the other. Dropping the lobster-pot on the barn floor he stepped into his shed workshop to put away the hammer. There, seated upon an upturned wheel-tub, was a strange small boy in a blue sailor-suit.

In Matthew's heart was a tender spot that even now sometimes quivered for the "little feller," he and his wife had laid away a good many years before.

This small boy's black hair was brush-

ed straight, and close to his round head; his black, almond-shaped eyes seemed somehow a trifle cross-fixed; his nose was broad and flat; his skin was yellow; and, as he turned to the fisherman, his thick lips parted in a friendly but somewhat sober smile.

"Hello, Bub!" greeted Matthew. "You look like a brother to the youngster that used to pester me last summer. His pa was cook up ter the big place. I s'pose your pa cooks for His Royal Highnessness up yonder. That so?"

The child turned a grave, uncomprehending stare. "I am Chuen Hock," he said in curiously-precise English. "Who are you, and what is this little thing of wood with the string around it?"

"I'm Mr. Blake—most folks call me Matthew. An' that contraption is a seine-nettle."

"I will call you Matthew. And for what use is the contraption seine-nettle?" asked the boy.

"Jest seine-nettle. It's to mend nets. See?" He picked up a bit of seine from the floor and deftly added a couple of meshes to it, Chuen watching gravely and intently.

"Why is the blue ship on your arm, and what is the little blue worm with horns?"

"Blue worm?" echoed Matthew, looking at his forearm with new interest. "Oh, that's an anchor with chain and cable. No, it didn't grow; it was painted there. An anchor? Why, that's a big hook to hold a vessel fast to bottom. No, a vessel is a ship—a big boat. No, all American people don't have them on their arms. Say, don't you think you'd better run home and play?"

"I like better this place," returned the child. "There is much here that I

to-morrow and help you make the fish-catch," he announced.

Matthew laughed.

"Why, Bub, I'm up an' away to work long before you get them eyes o' yorn open. Four o'clock I start to-morrow Your folks wouldn't hear to it. You see, I go out in a boat—that sloop tied up at the wharf there—the Emma J. Miles outside the Point I go, an' sometimes the sea's so rough ye wouldn't know whether you was wearin' your boots on your feet or on your elbows. No, you stay home an' help your pa cook, an' melbbe some day, when you're older, I'll take you out with me."

The youngster's grave eyes were fixed on the fisherman's face, but he gave no sign that he understood the postponement of his proffered assistance.

"For what," he demanded suddenly, "is your first ear of different colour than your second ear?"

Matthew rubbed the "first" ear. "It was frostbit," he explained patiently, "Is there anything else about me ye want to know?"

"I wish to know many things," returned the boy gravely, "but I cannot think of all now. For what do you put red on your shoes, and why to your wear that shirt; instead of shining white shirt like Mr. Strafford?"

"Them shoes! Oh, salt water turns 'em that colour. An' I'd look nice fishin' in a biled-shirt wouldn't I?"

"I do not know," replied Chuen. "How can I tell when I have not seen you? And what is a bile shirt?"

"Bub," returned Matthew, "it's gettin' most supper-time, an' I guess you better lay your course home-ward, or your pa'll be lookin' for ye with the rollin'-pin. You can come again some day when ye think o' suitin' else ye'd like to know. Good-by!"

He watched the blue-clad figure trotting sturdily over the fields up towards the big house, and then turned again to his work.

The next morning's sun was well risen over the Emma J., anchored far outside Sunrise Point, and a dozen good-sized eel and pollack were already flapping about Matthew's feet, when a sound in the door of the little cuddy caused him to turn quickly from his work.

"For what," demanded a small voice, "is the square blue part on the back of your trousers which are black?"

Matthew stared, wide-eyed; then closed his mouth under the effort of trying to obtain a view of his own hips.

"Oh," he exclaimed, "I didn't jest get your drift. That's a patch, an' ma she made it out o' what was handy. Say, how in breathin' Peter did you get here?"

"I have come to help you make the fish-catch."

"Did your folks know it?"

"I have not said it to them. When three o'clock, I rise from the bed and made escape from window. It was dark under the trees, but there was moon's light by the wharf. I have hidden in the hole beyond, when you were eating some breakfast. But I am now hungry also, and I desire to make the fish-catch."

"Well," ejaculated Matthew, "Talk o' kids with nerves! They's older ones than you wouldn't have took that walk at three in the mornin'. An' you expect me ter feed ye, too!"

He picked up a rock-rod from the planks, tapped it quiet with the butt of a golf, cleaned it, and then plunged into the cuddy. In a few minutes Chuen Hock was stuffing himself with fried fish in cornmeal. Matthew himself took a few bites. "Not that I'm hungry, but jest to be sociable," he explained. "Your folks'll be worried about you, an' I ought to take ye right home; but I've got my day's livin' to make, so we'll get trip first. Yes, you can have a fine an' catch fish, now you're here."

A little later they were fishing, for a wonder in silence, Matthew busy with his work and Chuen Hock intent on his new amusement. Several times the boy's bait was taken, but he did not succeed in bringing aboard a fish.

"You'll learn," Matthew told him, "jest keep on till ye git the knack."

He looked at the youngster a little uneasily. The day was calm, but there was the motion of the open sea, and the little sloop described a considerable arc as such broad roller raised and then shook her off.

"Youngster ain't worth o' nothin'," he murmured. "Fust thing I know, the Emma J. she'll pitch sudden an' he'll go overboard."

"Every day, if it ain't too foul. But I catch 'em with hooks—books like this on a long line. See?"

The boy nodded. "I will go with you