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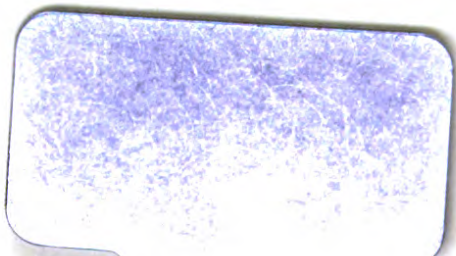
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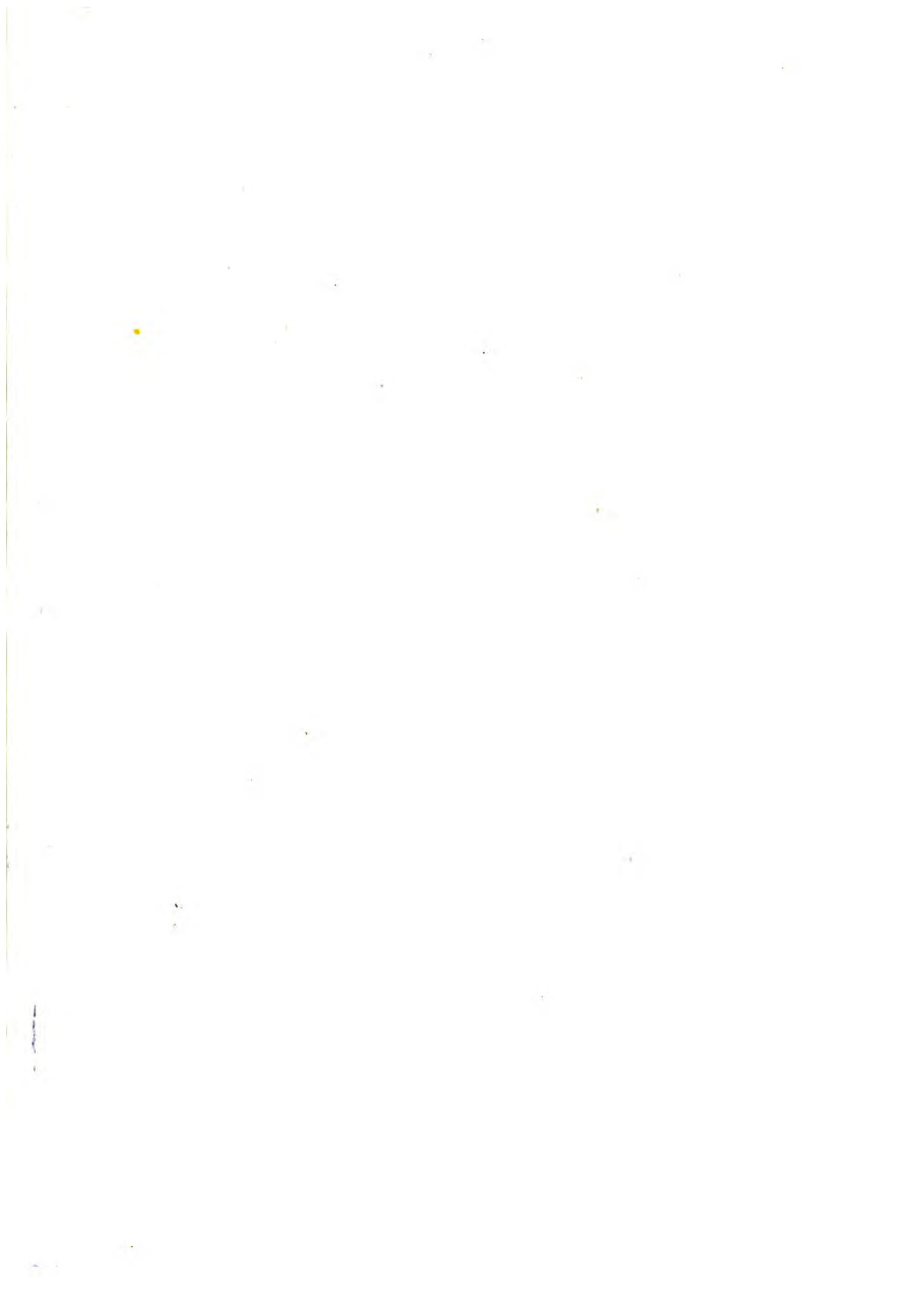
THE
STORY OF A TERM THERE





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DORRINCOURT.

Ballantyne Press
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"So absorbed were they in this novel pleasure, that they had no time to notice that some one was approaching."—See page 112.

[Frontispiece.]

DORRINCOURT:

THE STORY OF A TERM THERE.

BY

BERNARD HELDMANN,

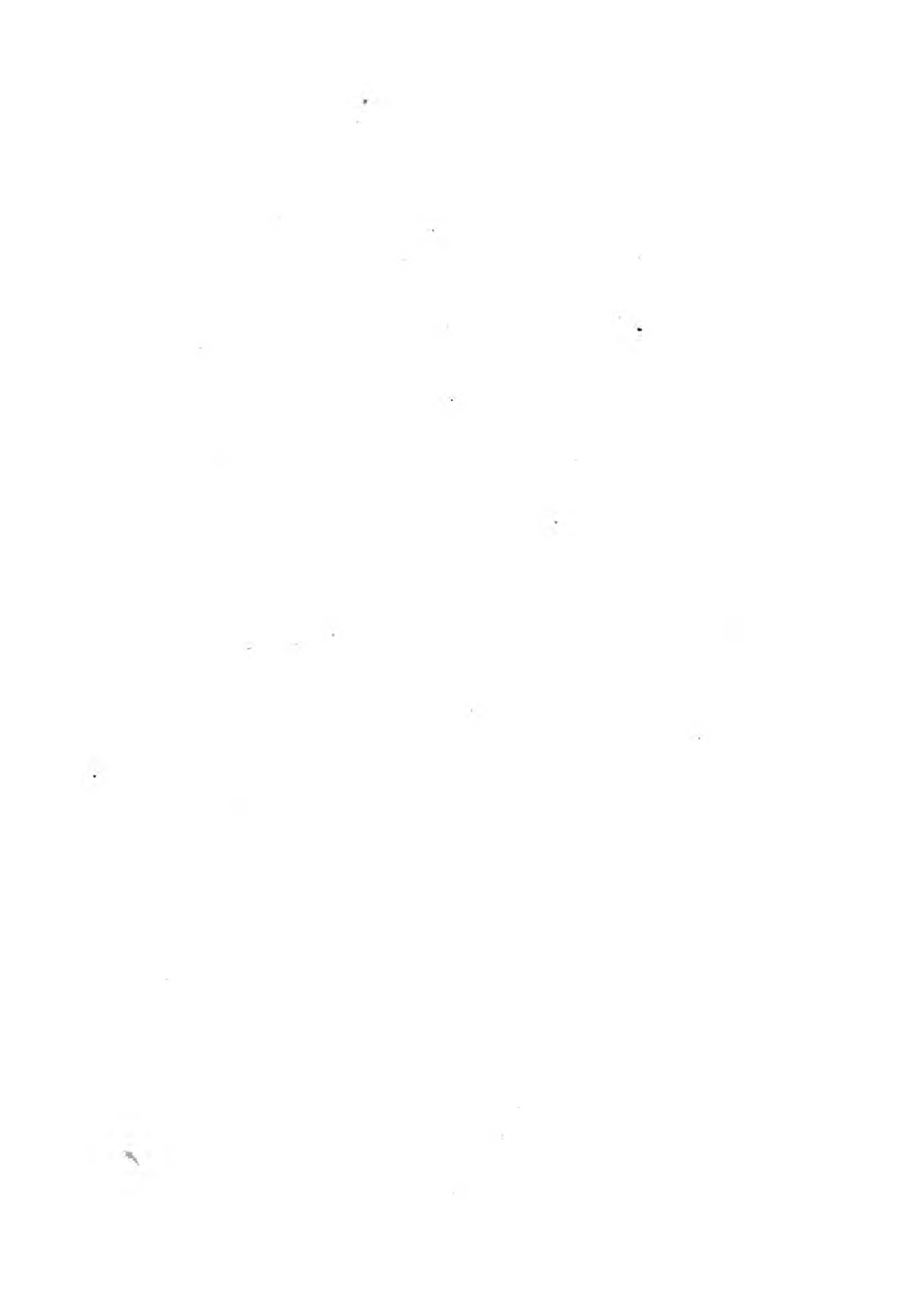
AUTHOR OF

"BOXALL SCHOOL," ETC.



LONDON:
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TO
BENJAMIN CLARKE, ESQ.,
WHO GAVE ME COURAGE
BY
BEING THE FIRST TO ACCEPT
A Story of Mine for Boys.

PREFACE.

NOT a few of the following characters have had their originals in life. Those who know boys best will be least inclined to lay the charge of exaggeration at the author's door.

The author has striven to write a pure story, strong with a wholesome strength, which shall find friends among those among whom he has lived nearly his whole life long.

If the present generation of boys be but such as their fathers were and are, generally speaking, God be thanked, they will not go greatly wrong. It is not by preaching, but example, that a lad is trained.

ROSEWORTHY, *June* 1881.

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DORRINCOURT:

The Story of a Term There.



CHAPTER I.

DORRINCOURT.

THE headmaster's sanctum. By the fireplace, with his arm leaning on the mantelshelf, stands a man, tall, and slightly built. His frame is spare almost to attenuation, and it hardly needs the evidence of his pale and shrunken cheeks to tell the story which is pictured there. Undoubtedly a handsome man; undoubtedly a face and a form once seen not easily to be forgotten. There is grace and dignity in his figure, worn though it is, and stooping forward though his shoulders are; and in his face there is more than that, more than outward charms—the beauty of a lovely soul, the grandeur of a manly mind.

None can look at him and not feel that here is one of whom it would be well to make a friend; in

his flashing eyes there can come a softer light, a light which it is well to have bent on one. His is the innate majesty which God only gives to those who love Him well. Let there be occasion, and Henry Graham can awe the evil-doer with the lightning of his glance; none conscience-stained has ever yet been able to sustain the inquisition of those burning eyes. But, on the other hand, let there be need for comfort, need for strength, need for a helping hand, and the fire goes from his eyes, and the light of love looks forth with such tender pity, that it is almost good to be in trouble to come within the influence of his strange sympathy.

This is the Dorrincourt headmaster, the Rev. Henry Graham, Master of Arts, of Magdalen College, Oxford.

He has been headmaster for fourteen years; he was a student as a lad, and has been a student as a man. He is not yet old, but his hair is silver white; he has neither moustache nor whisker to disguise his face, and it is easily seen how aged he looks. There was a time when Henry Graham was the strongest among the strong. Many a tale is told of his feats of derring-do; how he ran five miles in a marvellous space of time, how he was a giant in the football field, how his feats at cricket were the glory of his fellows, how he could pull an oar with any in the 'varsity, how he was foremost in every manly sport and pastime; but those days are gone—gone as in a single night, never to return.

For the Lord has chastened him whom He loved;

first his wife, the darling of his heart, the light of his home, had died; then his only child; then troubles came on him thick and fast; then, the climax of it all, a cruel malady took stern hold of his weakened frame, and made him what we see him now, the shadow of his former self; he who should be in the prime of life trembling by the side of a yawning grave.

He is plainly occupied with melancholy thoughts; he puts his elbow on the mantelshelf, and leans his face upon his hand, and then he sighs. The room is half in shadow; the fire has sunk low in the old-time grate, he has neither gas, nor lamp, nor candles, and without the evening glowers; the wind blows coldly round the many corners of the schoolhouse buildings, moaning as if in sorrow over the ice-bound world. Then, drawing himself up, with a somewhat haughty gesture he moves to the window, and with his hands behind his back looks out upon the scene.

The world lies all in shadow, the snow is thick upon the ground; it is not a lively prospect, and is suited to his mood. All is silent, save that now and then, borne by the murmuring wind, come the sounds of voices and of laughter; he knows what they mean, and as at times they rise into louder shouts and louder laughter, a smile lights up his lips in the wintry twilight.

For the boys are coming back to school, that is the secret of the sounds borne on the wind; it is the first day after the Christmas holidays, and they are

coming with all the life and with all the gaiety of the merry season fresh upon them back to school.

“That is Maxted,” the doctor says, as a louder laugh and a gayer shout falls on his ear, “I am sure, with some more of those fourth-form scamps and friends of his; Vincent, I daresay, and Farthingale. I wonder if they’ll be as great plagues as ever when I am gone? Ah, they are rogues indeed; but with all their faults, they have knit themselves so round my heart that even yet the parting will be hard! Surely some of the sixth must have arrived by now; what is the time?”

He goes to the fire, and lets its gleams glance on his watch.

“The train is in; surely some of them must have come.”

He puts his watch into his pocket, and thinks a moment; then rings the bell, and a servant enters.

“Let me have the lamp, Jennings; and do you know if any of the boys by the 3.30 are in yet—any of the sixth-form boys, I mean?”

“I am not sure, but I think I heard Mr. Otway’s voice just now, sir; he was asking for Mr. Selden.”

“Go and see; if it was he, tell him that I should like to see him in the study.”

The servant went, and the doctor was again alone; again alone, apparently, with troubled thoughts.

“I wonder what sort of man this Macqueen will be? I wish it had been a man with whom I was personally acquainted. If I had had my own way,

I should have chosen Selden, young though he may be; a man may be a perfect scholar, and so on, and yet be unsuited to be headmaster; boys are kittle cattle, and there are more than one or two among our present ones who need delicate handling. I don't like, either, this idea of his to put off coming till the day we are actually opening; he will find it no easy task to get them into working order all at once."

His musing was interrupted by a tapping at his study door; and in response to his "Come in!" the servant entered, and placed the lighted reading-lamp upon his master's table.

"Mr. Otway has arrived, sir, and will come to you immediately."

Hardly had the man withdrawn when steps were heard advancing along the corridor, and again somebody knocked at the study door.

"Is that you, Otway, my boy? Come in, sir." And the knocker entered.

A lad, tall and broadly built, with homely, honest face and grave brown eyes; there was an anxious look in them now, as though he were not quite sure what was about to happen, as he advanced to take the doctor's outstretched hand. The doctor took his hand in his, and retained it in his grasp, bending on him a look of curious inquiry.

"Well, George," he said, laying his hand upon his shoulder, "and how wags the world with you? Is all well with you, and well at home?"

"All well, sir; and my father and mother wished

me to remember them to you. And you, sir, how are you?"

"I, George? As well, the physicians tell me, as I shall ever be while I stay here; if I want strength to keep you turbulent ones in order, I shall have to lose no time in going to look for it abroad."

Otway smiled; he knew he was not one of the turbulent ones referred to. Head boy of Dorrincourt, the last thing in the world one might expect from him would be misconduct of any kind; he was almost as much the master's friend as pupil.

"I start on Monday."

"And Dr. Macqueen, sir, has he arrived?"

"No, George, not yet; he wrote to say that it would be impossible for him to arrange his affairs in time to enable him to be here before to-day. He may arrive any minute, so far as I know, for he has not written to specify the train by which he comes."

"You have seen him, sir, of course?"

"No, George, strange enough, I have not. The affair has been out of my hands entirely. Except that I have heard great things of his scholarship, he is as total a stranger to me as he is to you. That is one reason why, before he comes, I wished to speak to you."

He paused for a moment, and before he could go on there was another knocking at the door, and two more boys came in—two more members of the upper form, contrasts to each other, and both unlike the senior boy.

One was tall and slight, with singularly handsome

face, and light brown curly hair; this was Beaumont Henderson, commonly called Beau, partly because it was an abbreviation of his name, and partly because it so well described his habits and appearance.

The other was short and thickset; he had Indian blood in his veins, for his skin was copper coloured, his lips were thick, his nose was short and "tip-tilted," his hair was black, and even more curly than Beau Henderson's. This was Lewis Thelton, called behind his back, and sometimes before his face, for he was the essence of good humour, "Nigger;" his characteristic was his tremendous strength, he seemed all thews and sinews. As is not often the case with such as he, he was both clever and industrious.

"Well, Henderson—well, Thelton," holding out a hand to each, "so you are come. I am glad of that; how are you both? I was going to say a word or two to Otway, which I should like you to hear as well—indeed your whole form, if that could be, but I suppose the rest of you will not be here until tomorrow, and then, perhaps, it may be too late. It is about what I want you to do when—when I am gone. As you know, Dr. Macqueen will be the Dorrincourt headmaster till I am strong enough—if it be God's will—to come back among you. I know nothing of him, except that he is a thorough scholar; and therefore all the more I should wish him to find that you—all of you, are no disgrace to me. I shall say a few words when the whole school is assembled, but now, in private, I want to point out to you lads, and I should like you to repeat it to your colleagues, how

much the matter is in your own hands. We are old friends, you and I. If our friendship is real and not a sham, while I am gone you will not fail, one and all, to use your personal influence to keep the *morale* of the school—you know what I mean; if you like, the *religion* of the school—not only up to its present standard, but to exalt it higher, so that when I do come back I may find, as it happened in the parable, that the talents committed to your charge have increased, some twenty, some fifty, and some a hundred-fold.”

He ceased, and looked at Otway, as though waiting for him to speak; which, as senior boy, he did for them all.

“I think, sir, that you will find that all of us will endeavour to be faithful to your teaching.”

Then he stopped, and went on with not a little hesitation—

“To some of us, sir, you have been, not—not only a master, but a friend; with—with myself, I fear, none other can fill your place.”

“Eh—ah excuse me; Dr. Graham, I believe?”

The boys had been so occupied in listening to the doctor, and the doctor so engaged in addressing them, that neither he nor they had had eyes or ears for anything but their own affairs.

There had been a tapping at the door, but they had paid no heed, until the tapper, out of patience, had entered of his own accord.

“Eh—ah—excuse me; Dr. Graham, I believe?”

At the first sound of his voice, Otway had stopped

short in his reply, and, with a start, they turned to see whom the speaker might chance to be.

The reading-lamp stood on the table, casting its mellow light within the circle of its shade, the ruins of the fire glowed red-hot upon the hearth; before it stood the bowed form of the Dorrincourt headmaster, and in front of him, in the centre and on either hand, the head boy and his colleagues; these, taken entirely by surprise, stood staring at the stranger.

He stood in the open doorway, holding the handle in his right hand; his hat was in his left, and his head inclined slightly forward.

A man in the prime of life, forty or thereabouts, clad in a long travelling overcoat reaching almost to the ground, and enveloped to the chin in a variety of shawls and comforters; distinctly below the middle height, short and stout, with rosy cheeks, and very short, sparse, sandy whiskers; bald at the forehead, his head was elsewhere covered with a scant display of sandy hair; he wore spectacles, and his nose was small and of doubtful shape.

Directly you saw him you at once decided that he must be the personification of good humour; it beamed from every inch of him, from his small black eyes twinkling behind his glasses, from his jolly face and jolly frame, from the smooth expanse of his broad white forehead.

“I believe—the servant told me that I should have the pleasure of finding Dr. Graham in his study.”

And, releasing the door-handle, he advanced into the room.

The doctor's thoughts had been so much occupied with other things, that the unexpected entrance of the stranger had for once surprised him into forgetfulness of his good manners; now, suddenly awaking to a sense of the proprieties, he advanced with a courteous smile to welcome the new-comer.

"Dr. Macqueen?"

"Yes, yes, I'm Dr. Macqueen," and he almost wrenched off the other's proffered hand; then relaxing his grasp, after fumbling in his multifarious coat-pockets he produced a pocket-handkerchief, and commenced to wipe his heated forehead. "Dreadful day for travelling—dreadful; no idea how cold it is,"—he did not look cold—"it's quite a comfort to see a fire again, and a decent room—and how are you?"

This he said rather as a wind up to his remarks than with any apparent anxiety for information.

"Thank you, I have not been braving the inclemencies of winter, while you must be both tired and hungry. I have ordered dinner at six; you will prefer, no doubt, to rest in your room till then?"

"Thank you, I shouldn't mind, and getting off some of these—these things as well; horrid nuisance being wrapped up like a mummy. My wife, Mrs. Macqueen, I expected would come with me, but she'll follow in a day or two, with our girl Emily, and the luggage. By the way, Graham, Mrs. Macqueen sends her compliments, and hopes that you won't go until she's come."

These observations fell from him in a disjointed fashion, which seemed habitual, while he was strug-

gling to disengage himself from some of his encumbrances.

Otway charitably going to his assistance, between them they managed to remove two or three comforters, a large shepherd's plaid shawl, and his enormous travelling overcoat. Relieved of so much extra burden, Dr. Macqueen ran both his hands through his sandy hair, and shook himself like a giant refreshed.

"These," said Dr. Graham, introducing the lads, "are three of your pupils—George Otway, the senior boy, Beaumont Henderson, and Lewis Thelton, colleagues in his form."

"Oh, you're six-form boys!" With his hands clasped upon his capacious stomach, Dr. Macqueen presented rather a comical picture. "Hum! that reminds me; came down with a train of boys—seven in my carriage—one smoked till he was sick as a dog—the rest lighted fusees to make me go into another carriage, but I wouldn't go—threw things at me in the tunnels, and asked me if I travelled with one ticket or with two." Turning sharply on the doctor—"Is that the way your boys behave when they chance to meet a stranger in a train?"

"I am afraid," replied Dr. Graham, with an involuntary smile at the picture conjured up by the other's words, "that on occasions such as this it is almost impossible to exercise authority over them till they are actually within our bounds."

"Oh! nice boys! very nice boys! There was one boy who, when I asked his name, said that he was

the son of the Emperor of Seringapatam, and asked if I was acquainted with his late uncle, Julius Cæsar. Nice boy, that! Are you any relation to the Emperor of Seringapatam?" this to Otway, who was unable to resist a smile.

"Not that I'm aware of, sir."

"No? sorry to hear it—distinguished man, very. But you've character in your face, and, what's more, honesty, and that's almost as good as being related to the Emperor of Seringapatam. Give me your hand, Otway. I beg to congratulate myself on my senior boy. And you, sir," to Henderson; "your name's—?"

"Henderson—Beaumont Henderson, sir."

"And also your friend on your right?"

"Lewis Thelton, sir."

"Lewis Thelton. So you three are six-form boys? Six-form boys, Graham. There's something for you to do, boys, as well as me, and the success of my something depends pretty well on how your something's done. It's not only head-work, though there's a deal in that, but heart-work too," making a great show of wiping his nose with his pocket-handkerchief; "and don't you ever tell any stranger who happens to ask your name that you're the son of the Emperor of Seringapatam."

The boys laughed; they did not think it necessary to inform him that, apart from other considerations, it was not in accordance with six-form dignity to descend to such small triflings. If he warned anybody, let him warn those youngsters who needed it.

Directly after they bowed themselves out, and went.

They had not heard, perhaps, all that Dr. Graham had to say to them, but they had been introduced to his successor—successor, that is to say, at least, for the time being—and that was almost as well.

Thelton was the first to speak when they got outside.

“What do you think of him?” he said, as they passed along the corridor to their own quarters.

“Think of him,” replied Henderson, with his nose high in the air; “I don’t think of him at all. Did you ever see such an object to look at? Fancy him in the place of Graham! Scholar, indeed! more likely a country clown, who has spent all his life in stuffing pigs.”

Evidently something either in Dr. Macqueen’s manner or appearance had offended the elegant and refined Mr. Beau. In a different tone spoke Otway.

“You’re too hasty in forming an opinion,” said George, “and you draw your conclusions from the surface. If Dr. Graham says he is a scholar, you may be sure it is the case; and as for other things, you may rest assured there is more in him than you think, or he would not have been chosen to come here.”

“In him!” retorted Beau, in his supercilious way; “on him, you mean. He would make his fortune at a show.”

Otway said nothing; he knew that Henderson had a tendency, having said a thing to stand by it, right

or wrong, simply because he had said it. Whether in his estimate he was right or wrong, is premature to say.

Dr. Macqueen plays a leading part in the events which follow ; if it had not been for him they certainly would not have happened ; and as they are rather of an extraordinary nature—forming one of the most remarkable episodes in the history of the ancient school—I would ask you to reserve your judgment till my tale is done.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST NIGHT OF THE TERM.

THE great schoolroom at Dorrincourt was a curious building. Beautiful, not even the most partial speaker—and there were many who looked on it with a sort of sentimental reverence—could say it was. Had it not been that round its precincts hovered the traditions of the long past years, before this it would have given place to a structure more in accordance with scholastic dignity and the requirements of the day.

Inside it bore more resemblance to a barn than any apartment of a graver kind. No wonder the stranger, on his first introduction to the chamber whence had issued so much of the world's genius and knowledge, was apt to be surprised. No wonder he promptly decided in his own mind that the authorities must have curious notions of convenience, and beauty too, if they allowed such a place to stand.

Built principally of stones piled irregularly upon each other, the interior was devoid of ornament of any kind. Originally the bare stone walls had stared the students in the face, but by degrees it dawned upon their superiors that they were both cold and

damp as well. So, in a moment of inspiration, some bright genius had covered them from top to bottom and from end to end with wooden boarding. As, in the course of time, this yielded to the influence of wear and tear, it was thought advisable to call in the painter's aid to conceal deficiencies. So from that day to this the walls have been annually white-washed.

As a rule, whatever might be the case in other portions of the building, in the schoolroom quiet reigned; but to-night was an exception.

The first night of the term was almost as exceptional an occasion as the last; quietly, and as a matter of course, it was taken for granted that little or no notice would be taken of the young gentlemen's proceedings, unless, indeed, liberty degenerated into undoubted license.

Every jet of gas was flaring, every fire blazing. All the school seemed crowded there; boys were flocking in and flocking out; some rushed straight in on their arrival, not troubling first to divest themselves of hats or overcoats. There was a perfect Babel of sounds; everybody seemed anxious to speak at once, and each to outshout his fellows.

It was a lively scene; the change from the cold dark night was so sudden that no wonder each newcomer's spirits brightened on his entrance, as it were, to a new world of life and light.

Round the spacious old-fashioned fireplaces were grouped crowds of excited youngsters, enjoying the light and heat, laughing and talking all together.

A boy's ideal conversation seems to be that in which every voice is raised at once, and in which it is absolutely necessary to bawl with the full power of your lungs if you want to stand the remotest chance of being heard by your neighbour sitting next to you.

If that be so, then they certainly were enjoying themselves at the top of their bent, for the noise they made was of a kind to render temporary deafness more than bearable. This was particularly the case with those seated round the fire nearest the top of the room, and farthest from the main entrance.

An onlooker might easily have been excused if he had supposed that they were engaged in the throes of a mortal quarrel, rather than in the enjoyment of a friendly conversation. Now the din would rise into a hurricane of words, and then, as if the disputants were worn out for want of breath, would follow a period of comparative calm.

We come upon them in one of the lulls of the storm; one lad alone is speaking, short and thickset, with red hair, and an ugly, good-humoured face, alive with mischief. This was Martin Maxted, or, as his friends had it, Tiny, or Tiny Maxted. He was narrating to his interested auditors an incident of the downward journey.

"There was an old duffer, with spectacles and carroty hair"——

"What hair?" asked a friend, while a grin went round the throng.

"Carroty hair," returned Maxted undauntedly,

apparently oblivious of the fact that that adjective was distinctly applicable to his own red locks; "and he wouldn't get out; of course we didn't want him in with us."

"I should think not, indeed," said a young gentleman with very fair hair and very pale cheeks, who was resplendent in dress and jewellery; "he took up the room of two of us."

"No wonder you objected to his presence," struck in Maxwell Bromley, a good-looking young scamp, with jet black hair, and large, saucy black eyes, "considering how he grinned at you when you were ill."

"And then there was that other youngster," went on the boy who had interrupted Maxted, and who was perhaps fourteen years old himself, "who sat in the corner; didn't he think it a joke when Hazlemere was taken bad?"

"Poor Geoff!" said Maxted, in a tone of mocking sympathy, "I did so feel for you; but you shouldn't—you really shouldn't, you know, smoke until you're older."

"Joke away!" retorted Hazlemere, the lad with the fair hair and pallid cheeks. "When I want your advice I'll ask you for it. Besides, it wasn't the smoking; it was that vile cigar; it was the vilest thing I ever tasted."

"Indeed! Now only to think that a judge, a real judge like you, should be so taken in!"

And Maxted raised his hands by way of expressing his amazement.

His cue was instantly taken—no body of professed critics are so ready to find a victim on which to ply their art as boys—and again the storm began.

With compressed lips and an unpleasant look in his small eyes, Geoffrey Hazlemere ran the gauntlet of his friends' small jokes; without any attempt at retaliation, he stood silent before the mocking throng.

The noise was subsiding, and the curl of Geoffrey's lip was becoming more contemptuous still, when their attention was attracted by a hubbub at the other end of the schoolroom.

In a second they were on their feet and looking in the direction whence the new disturbance came.

"What's the matter?" asked Bromley, straining his neck to see.

"Only some new youngster they're badgering," answered Howard Vincent; and as that was a spectacle at which he would probably be able to assist for some short time to come, he philosophically resumed his seat.

The majority of his friends followed his example, and heedless that the noise was becoming louder and louder, plunged again into their own affairs.

Geoffrey Hazlemere, however, and one or two others, after momentary hesitation, walked down the room to see what all the riot was about.

"What's the matter?" he asked, forcing his way through the shouting throng, who had left their places by the firesides, and were crowded round some object which he could not see. By dint of using his elbows to the best advantage, he gradually worked himself

to the front, and was able to see what it was which was causing so much interest.

There, in the centre of the hustling, scrambling crowd, looking utterly bewildered, and frightened half out of his senses, stood a boy, so small that he was entirely hidden in the confusion, and it was only by actually stumbling over him that Hazlemere caught sight of him at all. Then, seizing him by the shoulder, he endeavoured to discover what sort of boy this was who was the cause of so much excitement. He twisted the little one round so that he might get a glimpse of his face.

"Oh, sir!" he cried, in a thin, childish treble, thinking perhaps that a deliverer had come, "please take me away from this!"

But directly Hazlemere perceived his features, an ugly gleam came to his eyes, and he tightened his grasp upon his shoulder.

"You're the fellow who was in the train, and thought it a joke when I was turned up by that vile cigar?" he said, in a voice which reached the little one's ears alone. "This is an unexpected meeting."

Then, turning to those about him, he said in louder tones—

"Let's put him on a table. I've a word or two to say to him."

Not far from them stood a writing-table. Suddenly raising the little one from the ground, he pushed through the crowd until he reached it; then, lifting him up, he placed him there in sight of them all, holding him prisoner with his hand upon his waist-

coat, while they crowded round as though for all the world they were assisting at a raree show.

Then, for the first time, Geoffrey Hazlemere clearly perceived that the centre of so much interest, the lad who had enjoyed his discomfiture in the train, was hunchbacked and a dwarf.

That was, of course, the cause of all. Even an ordinary newcomer would hardly be allowed to pass without being made the recipient of attentions scarcely courteous. But a hunchback! That was a sight not often to be seen, and, when seen, to be made the most of.

There stood the lad, willingly or unwillingly, so placed as to be the cynosure of every eye.

He was certainly the smallest there, so slight, and thin, and pale—so childish, so helpless, and so frightened—he would have won the pity of anything else but boys. The malformation was apparently spinal; he carried a hump upon his back.

His face was almost femininely beautiful. His eyes were very large and very blue—not colourless, as such eyes sometimes are, but full of characteristic life and light. His mouth was at once tender and strong, and his delicate lips were compressed into a plea for mercy more pitiful than any words could be.

A rare sweetness, a too infrequent gentleness, was the prevalent expression of his face; and, as he looked down on Hazlemere with that mute pleading in his tearless eyes, even that young gentleman could not but be momentarily touched by a sense of his exceeding helplessness.

Not that his was a nature to yield to such soft stuff as the touch of pity. Boys are, in the main, the most pitiless animals existent.

Giving him a preliminary shake, by way of showing him he could not be trifled with—

“What’s your name?” asked Hazlemere.

Whether the lad answered or not was hard to say. His lips moved, but if he spoke it was in tones too low to make themselves audible in all that din of sounds.

“Do you hear, you young animal? What’s your name?” repeated Hazlemere, taking his silence as insolent, and shaking him more violently than before.

Still he gave no answer; and Geoffrey, indignant at the dumb petition of his eyes, jerked him smartly forward, and before he could recover, gave him a sounding box on his right ear.

“Now, will you answer a gentleman,” he said, “when you are spoken to?”

He was apparently about to emphasise his question with another blow, when his arm was caught by some one who stood behind him.

Turning to see who thus interfered with his liberty of action, he found himself confronted by a boy somewhat smaller than himself, but the passion in whose flashing eyes warned him of his earnestness.

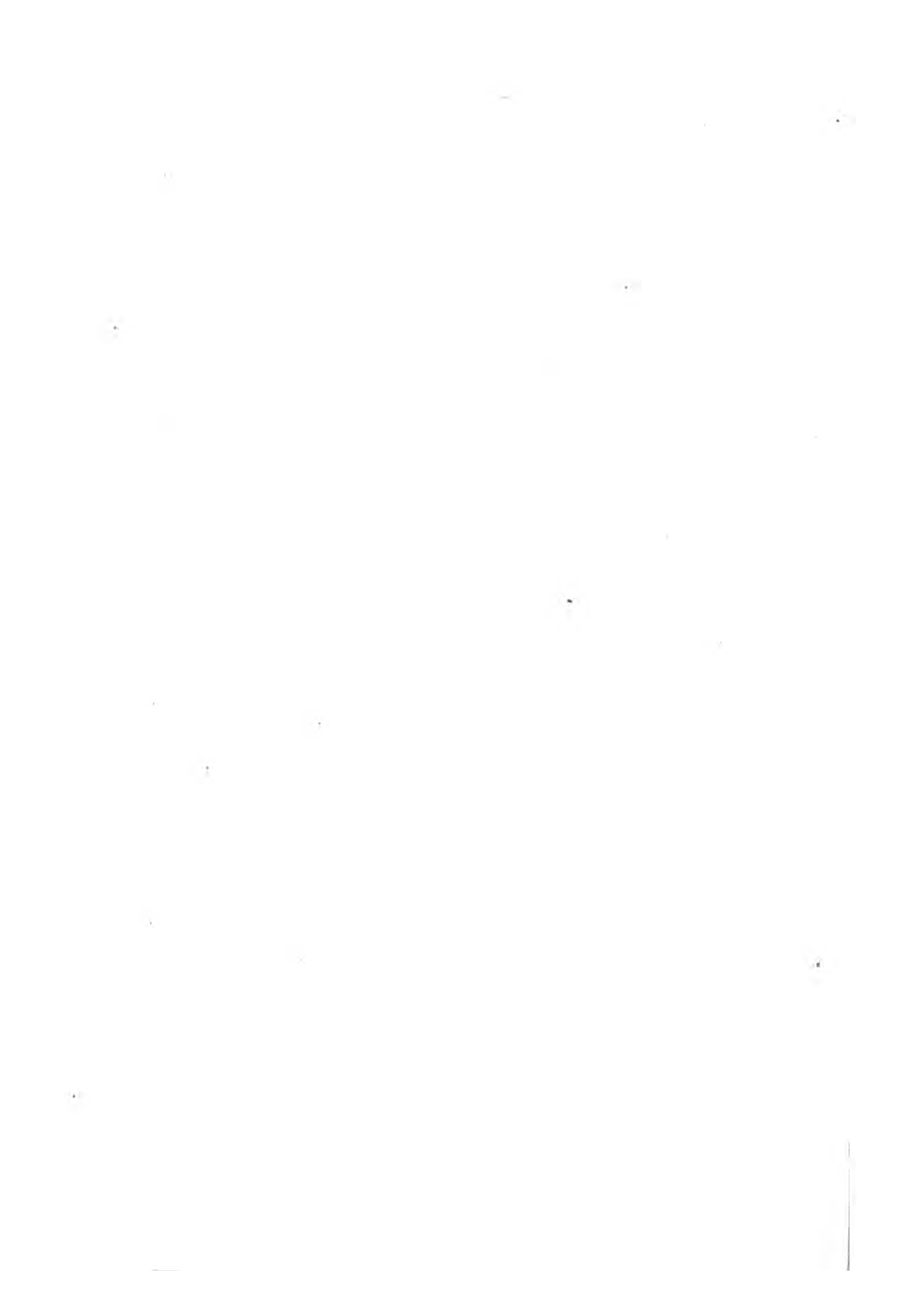
“Let him alone! How dare you, a fifth-form boy, touch a child like that?”

The newcomer spoke in tones low and eager, but singularly clear.

“Really, Mason,” answered Geoffrey, with an icy



“ Let him alone ! How dare you, a fifth-form boy, touch a child like that ? ”
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sneer, "it is very kind of you to interest yourself in"— He paused, and glancing at the trembling lad, added—"in a gorilla!"

"You!"— The other stopped, as if at a loss for an epithet strong enough. "I advise you, Hazlemere, for your own sake, to let that youngster go!"

Hazlemere was about to reply; but what he intended saying, or how the matter would have ended, or which side would have yielded, it boots not to inquire, for while the bystanders watched with new interest the progress of events, some one sprang on the table from the other end, and, striding quickly forward, seized the lad in his arms, and held him high above them all.

Absorbed in the little conversation which was taking place between Geoffrey and his friend, they had been taken unawares. But now that the thing was actually done, they turned to see who it might be; and when they recognised him, they crowded round with shouts and cries of welcome.

And as the newcomer stood before them then, towering like a giant in his strength, holding the hunchback in his arms, he looked like one worthy of a welcome. Taller than any average man, there was something almost kingly in his grace, and strength, and beauty. He was the ideal in boyish eyes of all that a hero should be. And as, with his head thrown back, he looked down half laughingly on the shouting crowd, he would have been a cold-blood critic, even though of a maturer age, who had not admired him then.

“Hallo, Boltington, my boy!” “So your lordship’s back again?” “And how has your majesty enjoyed yourself?” were some of the cries which rose about him.

The lad—for though so tall and strong, he was no more—waited for the noise to have subsided. But seeing it promised to continue, he directed his attention to the little one still held in his arms.

Bowing his head, he looked down with a sudden glance of sympathy at the little face which was turned up to his.

“Well, youngster, and have they frightened you?” he asked. “You mustn’t mind them. They’re only noisy. They do no harm!”

“Thank you,” replied the lad. “I’m all right now, if I may go.”

“Of course you may go,” returned the giant. “You see you’re so little compared to a great hulk like me, that I quite forgot that you were there.”

Then advancing to the edge of the table—

“Now, gentlemen,” he cried, “room for Mr. Boltington’s friend!”

“Room!” cried the lads below.

And as his protector carefully lowered the hunchback to the ground, they opened their ranks to let him through.

Henry Boltington—he who had just come on the scene at such a fortunate moment for the little stranger—was the most popular boy in the school; known, not to a few of his friends, as the Dorrincourt king,

he was almost as celebrated, if not as powerful, a personage as the doctor himself.

Clever, even brilliant when he chose to exert his powers, he was one of the most promising members of the upper form. Generous to a fault, strong as a young lion, active as strong, handsome as an Apollo, there was a grace, an instinctive charm, a brilliancy, in all he did and said, and the way he did and said it, which enabled him to win the hearts of his comrades as easily as the indulgence of his masters.

Still young, and in one sense younger than his years, there was about him the natural authority of the man; the best-tempered and best-natured fellow in the world, he was as quick to notice an affront as to forgive it. Careless as he was thoughtless, he not seldom plunged into scrapes which, had they been perpetrated by any but himself, would long since have cost him his seat in the upper form, if not his place in the school.

“Well, gentlemen,” he said, after he had seen the hunchback safe through the crowd, still standing above them on the table, “I am back again among you in the enjoyment of excellent health, and as lively spirits as might be expected. This is one of those occasions which I think I may call the happiest in my life, when, in the best of health and the best of spirits, I come back to meet those whom my heart holds dear. Now, if you please.”

And without any notice of his intention, he sprang lightly down into the very centre of the crowd.

In an instant they were all around him, ex-

changing greetings and chattering nonsense at the top of their voices. Shaking them off without the slightest ceremony, he forced his way to the other end of the room.

“Well, my lord,” was Maxted’s greeting to him, “and have you been favoured with a sight of the new chief?”

“Sight?” returned Boltington, taking the seat they promptly offered him; “yes, I have just had that pleasure.”

“And what’s he like?”

“Like? Well, I am afraid it will almost sound impertinent, but it is quite true. He is very short, and very stout, and very bald, and has red hair like Tiny’s, and wears spectacles.”

Holding his hands to catch the generous warmth, with his eyes fixed on the fire, he did not notice the expression which flitted across the faces of more than one of his hearers as they listened to his description of the new headmaster. Maxted looked at Vincent, then they both exchanged glances with Bromley, then Vincent nudged Bromley in his side, and said beneath his breath—

“Rummy, isn’t it? But I should say from Boltington’s description that he might be own brother to our friend in the train.”

But Bromley answered nothing; only a rather curious look came to his eyes.

Meanwhile, the little stranger whom Boltington had snatched from Hazlemere’s persecution had sought quiet and safety in the extreme corner of

the room. There, leaning against the wall, he kept glancing about him in an anxious, frightened sort of way, as though he momentarily expected an attack from another quarter.

Standing thus, timidly eyeing every stranger who approached him, he was addressed by the lad who had first interfered on his behalf.

The majority of the boys had crowded to the other end of the room, close on Boltington's heels, so that they two had that end almost entirely to themselves.

"Well, little one," said the elder boy, leaning over a desk, and regarding him with a look half scornful and half pitiful, "what's your name?"

"Tom Jackson, sir."

"Bosh! don't 'sir' me. I'm only a fourth-form boy as yet. Well, you're a curious sort of animal, frightened at your shadow, I should think. I never saw any one in a bluer funk than you when Geoffrey boxed your ears. My name's Leopold Mason, but you can call me Leo, if you like."

And he stopped for the other to speak.

"I did not think," said Jackson, in that childish voice of his, "that I was such a coward before to-day. Perhaps it is because no one has ever tried to frighten me before. I think they thought I was too weak and helpless."

"Oh, they thought you were too weak and helpless," replied Mason drily; "then you had precious few boys among your acquaintances. You'll find they'll take a pleasure in frightening you, just because you can do nothing in return."

Jackson looked at him to see if his friend were joking; but there was no sign of merriment, but rather scorn, upon his face.

“But if they do,” continued Mason, “if they do try to frighten you, come to me; I’ll be upon your side.”

CHAPTER III.

A SINGULAR OCCURRENCE.

TINY MAXTED and a select party of his acquaintances were standing in the corner of one of the fives-courts with a look of consternation in their faces. It was the morning after their return to school—miserable weather, bitterly cold, and a wretched mist hanging in the air; the snow lay thick upon the ground; their hands were thrust for warmth into their trousers pockets; their noses were pinched and blue with cold; they certainly showed rather an eccentric taste in choosing to loiter in such a place on such a day.

But the fact is, Master Maxted and his companions were much troubled in mind; they were as fond of warmth and comfort as any of their fellows, but it seemed to them that privacy and seclusion were more suited to their condition than the unsympathetic turmoil of a noisy crowd.

“You’re quite sure,” asked Vincent, who looked the picture of misery as he kept stamping his feet to keep his blood from freezing, “that it was he?”

“Sure?” replied Geoffrey Hazlemere, who had his coat-collar turned up to his chin. “Do you suppose

I should make a mistake like that? It was as certainly he as that I am standing here."

Which, literally speaking, he was not doing, for he was hopping from one leg to the other.

"This is a pretty state of things," said Maxted gloomily, "a very pretty state of things. This is the sort of way I like to begin a term; it will mean a flogging all round, of course, and we shall be in his bad books for the rest of our natural lives."

"Not that that will make much difference," added Bromley; "we should have been in his bad books soon enough in any case."

"If he thrashes me," said Hazlemere, with his habitual sneer, "I wish him well out of it; if we're not quits before I've done with him, my name's not Hazlemere."

"Pooh!" retorted Bromley, who seemed in the best spirits of them all. "What rubbish you talk, as though we shan't deserve all that we get. You're such a fellow, Geoff; you seem to think that you can do as you like with everybody, but nobody must do as they like with you."

The cause of their anxiety was simple to a fault, and it must be allowed as well grounded as it was simple. You will remember that Dr. Macqueen, on his first introduction to the senior boy and his two colleagues, had hinted at rather than narrated some adventures he had met with in the train, in which some Dorrincourt boys had not shown to very good advantage—how one had smoked till he was ill, and the rest behaved themselves in a fashion which did

them little credit. As luck had it, the young gentleman who smoked was Geoffrey Hazlemere, and his companions were Tiny Maxted and his friends.

Of course, had they had the faintest notion of who their stout and rather eccentric fellow-traveller really was, they would have been on their best, instead of on their worst, behaviour. Had they had the least idea that the middle-aged gentleman who was so anxious to know their names, and so strongly objected to be the target for their missiles whenever the tunnels came, was none other than the new headmaster, it is not impossible they would have apologised on the spot for insulting him instead of some other person.

It was too late now; the comfortable reflection remained that they had done their best to prejudice against them the very person whom, considering their proneness to backslide, they should have done their best to conciliate. There could be no doubt that the individual in the train and the new headmaster were one and the same person; Geoffrey had met him face to face. It did not require a great effort of imagination to perceive that if he chose he might make it warm for them.

“Oh, dear!” groaned Tiny, “whenever shall I learn sense? The pater promised that if I wasn’t down for punishment this term he’d make it an extra fiver, and I could see by the look in the pater’s eyes that he would make it ten; and I’ve been and gone and done for it already.”

But the select party of misdoers were left to mourn in solitude; the school in general were con-

cerned in other things. For it was understood that this morning Dr. Graham, in bidding them for the time good-bye, would introduce the new headmaster who was to take his place.

There was a more than ordinarily earnest crowd gathered together in morning chapel; the mist even penetrated through the walls and hung in thick wreaths about the building. It was so dark that it was with difficulty they could see; in the chancel the gas was lighted, and the candles above the reading-desk. The boys moved to their places silently, a sense of unusual solemnity of those coming events which cast their shadows before seemed upon them all. The first day of the term, it would probably be the last day that the doctor—*their* doctor—would be among them as the Dorrincourt headmaster; and as among that crowd there were none who could refuse him their respect, there were many who gave him their love as well; so to many this was the prelude to parting with one who was both friend and master.

When the doctor entered, every eye was turned towards to him to see who his companion was; but, to the disappointment of not a few, he was alone. The service was very short but very earnest, the doctor reading the lesson, which was from the fourteenth of St. John, and dwelling on the words, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you." And at the end he offered up a special prayer, asking that this new term, to which they were this day assembled,

might be richly blessed, and that those young ones, who were the joy of many a home, and the hope of many a heart, might be fully endowed not only with the wisdom of many books, but also with that wisdom which is more precious than rubies, and to which all the things one can desire are not to be compared.

Then trooping out, they all went into the school-room. On the way they split up into little groups, and talked together. Geoffrey Hazlemere, who was with Maxted and some kindred spirits—that little meeting in the fives-court was before morning chapel—seeing, a few steps in front, Tom Jackson, the object of his attentions of the previous evening, pressed quickly after him.

“Now, youngster,” he said, striking him on the shoulder with his Prayer-book, “be so good as to take it easy; I’ve got a word to say to you.”

The child—for he seemed hardly more—stopped at the sound of his voice, and glanced back at him with an obvious start of fear; which so offended Hazlemere that he struck him angrily with the edge of his book.

“What do you mean by looking at me like that? I’m not going to eat you. Come here,” catching hold of him by the arm and dragging him aside out of the stream of moving boys. “I’ve got something to say to you in a friendly sort of way.” Taking him a little way apart, so as to be free from the uninvited observation of his friends, he set him up against the schoolhouse wall, and proceeded to squeeze him flat against it.

"Now, youngster," he began, giving his head a premonitory tap against the stones, "what's your name?"

"Tom Jackson, sir," replied the lad, white as his own shirt collar, and with his great eyes fixed upon his tormentor's face.

"Very well, Tom Jackson, you listen to me. My name's Hazlemere, Geoffrey Hazlemere, Mr. Geoffrey Hazlemere to you, you young cub," with another tap against the wall; "and if you don't want your life made miserable, and your head knocked into the shape of your hump, you'll always do as I tell you. I'm not going to stop here talking to you, so I want you to tell me, as quick as you like, what you'd say supposing somebody was to ask you who was smoking in the railway carriage yesterday?"

"I should say it was you, sir."

"Oh, you would, would you, you young vagabond?" tapping his head pretty smartly between each word; but any further exposition of his feelings was interrupted by the monitor of the day shouting—

"Now then, Hazlemere, why aren't you inside? If you're not there directly I'll have you entered late."

"All right, my young Cupid," whispered Geoffrey as he prepared to obey the monitorial warning; "there'll be some trouble between you and me. There's a good deal of nonsense in your head which it will be my bounden duty to knock out of it."

And leaving the other to follow at his leisure, he hurried off into the school.

It was only on rare occasions that all the boys were assembled in the great schoolroom. The masters of the upper forms had each his separate class-room, and here, as a rule, might the senior boys be found. But this morning, both, as being the first of the term, and for other reasons, the order had gone forth that all, big and little, were to be seated in the one apartment.

Right across the upper end of the room ran the forms for the senior boys, while in front of them, facing the school, behind a little rostrum, stood the senior boy, who was responsible for order until the masters appeared.

“Blagrove secundus, be still! Farquharson primus, take a seat with the fourth remove! Lower fourth boys, if you make that noise I will have you marked!”

Otway's voice, clear and cool, rang down the room, quickly reducing chaos into order. Then they waited in tolerable silence until the masters came.

When at last the door opened, and the long stream of gowns began to enter, in accordance with immemorial custom, the boys all rose and began to cheer; and when all were at their respective desks, and it was noticed that the doctor was not alone at his, the monitors rose, led by Otway, one after another, and shook hands with him, he exchanging a word or two with each as they went by. Something he said to Boltington seemed to tickle his fancy, for throwing back his head that young gentleman burst into a full rich laugh, which was so

infectious that a subdued titter passed all round the room.

“What are you laughing at?” asked James Farquharson primus—commonly called “The Ghost,” because he was so very tall, so very grave, and so very thin—of a friend who sat beside him.

“How should I know?” replied Bob Griffin, the friend in question, who was black in the face with the mirth he was endeavouring to suppress. “What an idiot you are.”

Then, the monitors having regained their seats, there was silence, and a hush went round the room as the doctor, putting on his mortar-board, stood up to speak. He paused a moment before he began, looking round the room with that keen, swift, sweeping glance of his which they knew so well; then in clear, ringing tones, which were audible to the dullest there, he addressed them all.

It was not eloquent what he said to them—not as eloquence is understood by men—had it been so it would neither have been plain to them, nor suited to his purpose; what he said was rendered memorable by the events which followed. Moreover, there was an indefinite something, an indefinite charm in his voice and manner, which touched them, moved them, more than any mere elegance of speech would ever have done.

He was going, he told them, to leave them—whether for ever or only for a time was for the Lord, and not for him—going, not as a master from his pupils, not as a teacher from the taught, but as more

than that, as a master and a teacher, he trusted, in the fuller sense—as a friend, a true friend, who leaves those nearest to his heart. His fourteen years at Dorrincourt had known both clouds and sunshine, but now, in these last days, it was as if there had been no clouds.

They were not perfect—he would neither deceive himself nor them; there were many things among them which should not be, and there were other things they sorely needed; whether they would ever meet in this old room again, he could not say; but he reminded them in that case it was for themselves to say if that parting should be eternal.

Finally, he said he was very glad to see them back in such good health, and such sunny spirits; he bade them enjoy life—to use it, not abuse it. And now, ere he said his last word, which would be farewell—and here there was an odd tremor in his voice, which caused some of his hearers to look another way—he would introduce to them he who had been chosen to fill his place. Then after a few words referring to the new headmaster, in sentences which have not ceased to echo in the hearts of some of those who heard, he bade them one and all farewell; and, whatever might be his own lot in the days to come, wished to Dorrincourt, and all within the shadow of its walls, a happy and a glorious futurity.

This was said in clear and ringing tones; but suddenly his voice dropped to a broken whisper, and when he ceased not a few declared the tears stood in his eyes; then, in an instant he bowed his head, and

with quick step and stooping form passed from the room, every boy standing in his place to salute him as he went.

So the old master was gone, and the new one stayed behind! This new one mounted to the seat vacated by his predecessor, and, resting his elbows on the desk, twitching his gown from one of his shoulders, proceeded to address the school.

“Boys—except such of you as call yourselves young men, which is a class which increases daily”—Dr. Macqueen paused, looking round with his twinkling eyes, apparently to see if he could discover any such, “you have just been in the company of a Christian man—which is a class which is not increasing daily, at least, so I fear—and he has spoken to you as a Christian should always speak;” he stopped, as if in hesitation, then added “to Christians. I come after him; you’re my boys now, and I’m your master. It seems as though he had left me in charge of you for him, and I shall do my best to return that charge at least no worse than I shall find it. I suppose some of you,” laying stress upon *some*, “are possessed of common sense; these some I shall look upon as my supporters. I am not a tyrant, and I am not bad-tempered; but if you suppose that because Providence has made me good-natured, I am to be trifled with at your discretion, I trust that experience will prove you in the wrong.

“That reminds me”—he had remained for about a minute perfectly tranquil, leaning with his arms upon the desk, looking at the boys, while the boys,

wholly at a loss what to make of the new headmaster, looked back with interest—"I made the acquaintance yesterday, of some of you; one was the son of the Emperor of Seringapatam" (Master Martin Maxted felt a cold shiver through him, while the majority of those who listened began to wonder if Dr. Macqueen was quite right as to his mental faculties), "who was at the same time the nephew of Julius Cæsar." There was a mournful titter; they began in a doubtful sort of way to think that this was intended for a joke. "I don't see anything to laugh at in such an honourable relationship; on the contrary, it is a thing of which to be greatly proud. This young gentleman, the son of the Emperor of Seringapatam, and the nephew of Julius Cæsar, amused himself by throwing paper pellets at me as we travelled through the tunnels." Here there was a loud guffaw: every one of them could see the joke of that; but the doctor didn't.

"I thought you would think that comical; it shows how quick you are to see the humour of a thing"—his tone was rather more acidulated than before. "He had very red hair, and a very"—pause—"handsome face, and I understand his name is"—referring to a slip of paper held in his hand—"Martin Maxted. Stand up, Martin Maxted."

And up stood Tiny, his cheeks the colour of his locks, while every face was turned to look at him.

"Thank you," went on the doctor; "remain as you are. It is not often we have an opportunity of seeing a son of the Emperor of Seringapatam and a

nephew of Julius Cæsar in one and the same person, and short-sighted though I am, I recognise those classic features.

“Then there was another young gentleman—*old* gentleman, I suppose we should call him—who seemed very fond of smoking” (Geoffrey Hazlemere tried to look as though what was going on was without interest for him), “and smoked a very good cigar, and smoked it very well, and it made him very ill indeed. I think the least that we can do is to inquire if it did him good. Eh! Mr. Geoffrey Hazlemere?” referring to his slip. “If Mr. Geoffrey Hazlemere will be so good as to stand up.”

The boys were by this time ready for anything, so when Geoffrey rose, with a very unpleasant look upon his face, he was instantly the observed of all observers.

“And how do you find yourself this morning, Mr. Hazlemere?” inquired the doctor, in sympathetic tones.

Geoffrey bit his lip, as if to repress words which rose unbidden to his tongue; and then, as a flush flitted over his pale face, replied as defiantly as he dare—

“Thank you, I am very well.”

“I am very glad to hear it. I was afraid I should have to call in the physician’s aid, you did seem so very ill,” returned the doctor blandly. “Next time you feel in want of an emetic, possibly you will try another cigar; you will certainly be saving the chemist’s fees.”

“Our two young friends,” he went on, addressing the boys generally, “are, we will say, the victims of two vices; a gentleman, whether he be boy or man, is always truthful, and never pretends to be what he is not. It is as vain to attempt to screen your identity behind a lie, as to ape manliness before you are rid of the folly of a child. Now, boys, we will commence our studies. I shall be with the sixth form in my room directly.”

The spell was broken; the silence which had reigned while the doctor spoke was at an end; there was the buzz of many sounds as each boy made his preparations to settle down to work. The seniors passed to their several class-rooms, while the juniors bustled hither and thither to take their proper seats at their respective desks.

“What do you think of him now?” asked Thelton, as the monitors passed out together.

“Think of him?” answered Boltington lightly. “Well, he is a queer fish; I couldn’t make out where he was sailing to at first. I don’t fancy either of his fellow-passengers will care to travel with him again.”

“It was a change to listen to him after Dr. Graham—from tragedy to farce,” said Dodwell, who sat next to Otway on the form; “but he is, at any rate, a scholar, and certainly wants understanding.”

“Mark my words,” observed Henderson, in his superior way, “we shall miss Dr. Graham in more ways than one. It is not every fellow who would

stand such a lecture as he treated Hazlemere and Maxted to."

"I'll be even with him yet, see if I don't," said Geoffrey to Maxted, as they passed each other on the way to their respective desks. "And as for that young Jackson, he sneaked to him. I'll make his life a misery."

"How do you mean, you'll be even with him? and how do you know young Jackson sneaked?"

"How do I know?" answered Hazlemere, ignoring his first question. "Of course he did, I saw it in his eyes; only wait till I'm alone with him."

But as it happened, young Jackson had done nothing of the kind.

CHAPTER IV.

A PAIR OF BLUE EYES.

IT was the fourth-form study ; a great fire burned in the grate, and the only two occupants of the room to reap the benefit of its warmth were two lads, Tom Jackson and Leo Mason. It was after morning school, a week after Dr. Graham's farewell words in the great schoolroom, and Dr. Macqueen's introduction as the new headmaster. Clear light weather, bright but cold, the school in general was taking advantage of the opportunity to cover the ice like a swarm of bees ; the great fields bounding Farmer Flaxman's farm was flooded to the depth of several inches ; and this, now that the frost had come, formed one great stretch of ice of a kind to delight the skater's heart.

Jackson was seated on a wooden chair placed half in the hearth, crouching over the fire as though he were perished with cold ; Mason, standing the other side, was looking down at him with a glance, half of pity, half of scorn ; his cap was on, a great scarf was round his neck, and his hands were hidden in thick cloth gloves.

"How do you feel now?" he asked, breaking a lengthy pause.

"Thank you, I am all right now; it was very kind of you to bring me here."

"Stuff and nonsense! I wasn't going to leave you there to freeze. But I say, young one, it's a puzzle to me what brought you to a place like this. You're a sort of fellow to be wrapped up in cotton-wool. A dame-school would be your style; it's little good you'll be doing here."

"You think so?"

The hunchback looked up at him with questioning eyes, as though it were a matter as to which he was himself in doubt.

"Perhaps they will get used to me in time; it is not often they see a—a"——

He was evidently hesitating to pronounce the word which expressed his own condition, when Mason took him up.

"Oh, that's not only it, you're such a weakling altogether. No fellow should come to a great school like this who hasn't got his fists ready if it comes to fighting; five boys out of ten will bully you if they can."

Jackson gave no answer; it was quite obvious that he was not one of those whose fists were ready, and the prospect Mason conjured up was an unpleasant one.

"But you needn't look as though you were broken-hearted," went on Leo, still with a mixture of contempt and pity, as he noted his companion's attitude

of complete dejection. "I daresay if you stop here long enough you'll live it through. Of one thing you may be sure, if you let them see you feel everything they say or do, they'll always be saying or doing something to make you feel. Now I'm off for another turn; you stop here, and if anybody asks you what you mean by it, say I gave you my permission."

And without further waste of time, turning upon his heels, he went out, and left Tom Jackson there.

Without appearing to notice Mason's going, Jackson remained crouching over the fire, with his eyes fixed on its flames. For some minutes he sat motionless, neither looking to the right hand nor to the left, but seeming as though he was reading in the burning coals a story which was hidden to the world. Then with a start he awoke from his musing, and glanced round the room. There was no one there; then, drawing his body back, he sat upright as he could. There was a new expression on his face, curiously keen, and, in one so young, curiously stern. He rose, and with his hands behind his back, standing in the centre of the fireplace, looked down upon the flames.

"Can you tell me, fire-flames," he said, addressing the dancing firelight, "how it is that only you, and dead things like you, are kind to me, while all living make me a mockery and a sport?"

Then, glancing upwards, with a sudden cry—

"Shall I always have a hump? Shall I never be straight? Oh! why am I misshapen?"

Then turning from the fire, he walked quickly to and fro across the room.

“Never mind! One day I shall be a man—I shall be a man! And what a man! No matter if I am clever as a man can be, no matter if I am a saint for goodness, I shall still be hunchbacked and a dwarf, and despised because I am not strong.”

And with a low cry he flung himself upon a form, and laid his face upon a desk.

He was an orphan; his father was a soldier who had been killed in battle, and when his mother heard the news she took to her bed, and Tom was born just before she died—a hunchbacked baby, and so weak! Strange enough, he lived, and was taken by an uncle to his home. That uncle was a bachelor, and, without being designedly unkind, had neglected him almost entirely; Tom was left practically to his own resources. An odd bringing up his was. He had neither tutor nor companion; his nurse was his only teacher; but when she had taught him all she knew, he entered on his own account upon a course of study which would have surprised his uncle had he known. Theology, philosophy, art, science, history, poetry, fiction—he devoured every book which came in his way; he had a perfect mania for reading; and one day he surprised his uncle by asking to be sent to school.

Now up to this his experience, his knowledge of the outer world, was practically, absolutely *nil*; he had never done more than exchange a few passing words with another boy in all his life; but his uncle

took as little heed of this as of his physical deformity. He himself had been to a public school—to Dorrincourt, he knew no other; his own life had been a strange one, and he had mixed little with other men; so when he found that his nephew's heart was set on going to school, he took the first opportunity which offered, and packed him off to Dorrincourt.

And now the lad was lying on a desk, and weeping his heart away; yet only a week ago there had been nothing in the world he had longed for so much as to be where he was now.

While he mourned some one hurried along the corridor, and came rushing into the room. It was Henry Boltington; his skates dangled over his shoulder, his cap was crumpled in his hand.

"Holloa! one of you fourth-form boys," he began; then seeing there were none there he stopped. Then he saw Jackson on the desk. "What's the matter here?" he asked, coming and standing over him; then half contemptuously, "Why, youngster, what are you crying for?"

"I am crying," said Tom, looking up at the stalwart querist, with suppressed bitterness in his words, "because I'm not like you."

"Lucky for you you're not! you'd be an uncommon rascal if you were," laughed Boltington, sitting at his side. "Why, aren't you the youngster I saw tumbling about the ice?"

"I did not tumble, they knocked me down, Hazlemere and the others; but it was Hazlemere who set them on; he is wicked, Geoffrey Hazlemere!"

This was said with such passionate emphasis that Boltington looked at him in astonishment.

“Steady there!” he said; “easy all! If I were you, young gentleman, I wouldn’t be so ready to set my elders down as wicked. And what may your name be?”

“My name is Tom Jackson, and I am hunchbacked and weak, and because I am hunchbacked and weak, Geoffrey Hazlemere said he would make my life a misery, and he is doing so; so I say that he is wicked; if he were good, he would not delight to take advantage of my weakness.”

This he said as though he were delivering judgment; then with a sudden burst of passion, raising his hand—

“Never let him be a friend of yours, for he will never do you anything but harm.”

Surprised at the lad’s vehemence, he remained for a moment silent; then putting his hand upon his shoulder, laughed; but when all was over, the words came back to him.

“Well, you’re a young man of mighty prejudices, and tolerably outspoken about them too; but, if you take my advice, you’ll keep them to yourself; you’ll do no good by taking all the world into your confidence.”

“It is not prejudice, but truth,” persisted Tom. “I say that he is bad, and will be no true friend, but false to every one.”

“The gift of prophecy is out of fashion now. I don’t think prophets were very popular fellows, and

if I were you, Mr. Tom Jackson, I'd take up some more promising *rôle* than that," retorted Boltington, still laughingly. "But, come, you're alone here, and that makes you mopish—homesick just a little bit; come up to my study, and drive black care away."

And stooping, before Tom knew what he was going to do, with his strong arm he lifted him upon his shoulder; then rising, he craned his neck to look up at him, and laughed.

"Now you're a giant if you please—tall to your heart's desire, and not only my equal, but so much my superior, that from your lofty height you can look down upon my insignificance with placid scorn."

"Ah!" said Tom, laying his hand upon his bearer's head, with a newborn smile, "that is because you have raised me up; for which God made great men, that they might raise the dwarfs."

"Why, you're a philosopher," returned Boltington, moving to the door as lightly as though his burden were a feather's weight; "that's a most intolerable thing, you know; no wonder you're objected to if you talk common sense."

Scarcely had the two gone, and the sound of their merry voices died away as they passed down the corridor, than a new actor entered stealthily upon the scene. Stealthily was the only word which could describe his entrance, for not only was no sound of his footsteps heard approaching down the passage, but even upon the threshold of the door he hesitated,

glancing round the room with suspicious eyes, as if anxious to be certain it held no occupant; then entering, as if reassured, he shut the door behind him, and advanced quickly toward the fireplace.

It was Geoffrey Hazlemere. He had evidently just come from the ice, for he was still wrapped up to the chin, and had his cap upon his head; there was an odd look upon his pallid cheeks, and an odder gleam in his keen eyes. In spite of the seasonable coldness of the weather, he seemed unusually warm; removing his cap, he commenced to wipe the perspiration off his brow. For some moments his operations were confined to moping his forehead; then, again glancing keenly round, as if to make quite sure he was alone, he whistled beneath his breath.

“Whew-w! what a start the fellow gave me! what a state my nerves are in! It’s that confounded—that confounded”—what, he did not say, for he stopped short; then after a momentary pause, probably for reflection, “I thought the fool was going to make a row. I shouldn’t have minded so much if I had seen him coming, but he was on me before I knew he was anywhere about; ’pon my word, he set me off on such a fit of trembling, I do believe you could have knocked me down with a touch of a feather.” Pause—then, “I wonder what the fellow says.”

Still stealthily, as though yet doubtful as to whether or not he was observed, he put his hand

into his trousers pocket, and pulled out a blue envelope of more than doubtful cleanliness; tearing it open, within was a sheet of paper, on which something was written in a plain bold hand. This he read and re-read; then, with a low exclamation, his hand dropped to his side, and he stood staring at the fire—staring, with a look upon his face which was certainly not of a kind to invite a stranger's confidence.

“What shall I do?” grinding the words rather than speaking them, between his teeth; “anything rather than—than this shall be.”

Then with a bitter smile—

“At least, I'll not be the only sufferer; if I must drown, I'll take care Stornell drowns with me.”

He stood silent, with the letter still held by his side, and his eyes still fixed on the fire; so he remained for some few minutes, so absorbed in his own reflections that he did not appear to hear the sounds of voices and of feet advancing in the direction of the study. Indeed, it was only when a hand was laid upon the handle, and the door was flung rudely open, that he woke with a start to the consciousness that he was to be no more alone. A crowd of boys came streaming in, fresh and glowing from the ice, Maxwell Bromley leading the van.

“Holloa, Geoff!” cried Bromley, “are you alone? Whatever made you cut off from the ice like that? I did not know you were going, till you'd gone: a

pretty state of mind you must have been in, for you left your bran new skates behind ; lucky for you I saw them, or the parting might have been for ever."

And he flung a pair of skates upon the nearest desk.

"Thank you," said Hazlemere half mechanically. "I felt rather queer on a sudden, and hadn't time to think of them."

"Queer!" returned Howard Vincent, for the first time noticing the unusual pallor of Geoffrey's usually pallid cheeks. "You look as though you'd seen a ghost! What's wrong with you?"

"I'm right enough," replied Hazlemere more briskly, not pleased to notice that he was becoming the centre of attraction.

He had by this time crumpled the letter into a ball, and in that shape had slipped it into his pocket.

"Well, Tiny, did you cut the eight after all?" thinking it better, probably, to change the subject.

"No," said Vincent, answering for Maxted; "not he! I say, who was that seedy-looking fellow asking everywhere for you?"

"Oh, only some one from the village," said Geoffrey in an off-hand fashion, as though it were of no interest to him. "So, Tiny, after all you failed? I thought you were so sure of doing it!"

"Failed! my dear boy!" And Tiny raised himself in his most impressive manner. "My dear boy,

there was a girl upon that ice—a girl upon that ice, sir—to knock you all to fits!”

“Eh? A girl? What do you mean?”

“What I say. Mind, I’m not sure, but I fancy she’s old Macqueen’s. Mrs. M. came last night, you know, and I’m told”—in a confidential whisper, as though he were communicating a state secret at the least—“I’m told that she brought a daughter with her.”

“What sort of a girl was she?”

“What sort of a girl? What sort of a girl? Ask Mac, my boy, what sort of a girl she was!”

“Well,” said Master Bromley, who was seated on a desk, with his hands in his pockets, speaking as a critic who is master of his subject; “she looked a real sort of a girl! No nonsense about her! Up to larks, you know! and a great deal too good to look at Tiny Maxted!”

“What do you mean?” cried Tiny, firing at the insinuation. “Do you mean to say that she wouldn’t look at me?”

“I don’t know about looking at you,” said Howard Vincent in tones of studied courtesy, “but I know you daren’t look at her. Why, when she came near where you were skating, you looked for all the world like a dying pig in a thunderstorm!”

“A dying pig in a thunderstorm!” cried Tiny, naturally indignant at this reflection cast upon his natural gallantry. “A lot you know of it! You wait till I see her again, and then you may talk about a dying pig in a thunderstorm!”

“ Boo ! ” retorted Vincent, hardly civilly. “ Why, if you saw her again this minute you wouldn’t have the pluck to speak to her ! ”

“ Wouldn’t I have the pluck to speak to her ? ” stormed Tiny, who was getting red in the face. “ Why, if she came through that door this second ”——

What was to have happened if she came through that door this second history sayeth not ; for, as fortune had it, that very second the door was opened, and there, right in the full glare of the indignant speaker’s eye, on the threshold stood a little girl. A little girl, as to personal appearance decidedly attractive, with golden brown hair which crinkled naturally, with pretty arching nose, tender, tempting lips, and the sunniest blue eyes you ever saw.

It is popularly supposed that it is the strong who overcome the weak ; but this is by no means always as of course the case, for here was an example. Here was this crowd of boys, who certainly might have been supposed to be equal to that one small girl, and who yet, directly she appeared, looked as shamefaced and abashed as they could have done.

Maxwell Bromley and one or two others tumbled tumultuously off the desk, and each did his best to look as though he were not at all confused.

“ I’m afraid, ” said the little lady, in tones which were perfectly self-possessed, “ that I have come into the wrong room. ”

But though she might be afraid, she showed no haste to go out of it again.

“Why don’t you speak to her? why don’t you speak to her?” demanded Vincent, vigorously inserting his elbow into Maxted’s side.

“I’ll break your head for you, Howard Vincent, if you don’t take care!” shouted Tiny, suddenly turning on his friend.

“I hope you won’t take to fighting,” said the little lady courteously. “I am Emily Macqueen, and my papa sent me to the sixth form studies, to tell George Otway he would like to speak to him.”

“Eh—ah—did he?” observed Geoffrey Hazlemere, with his thumbs thrust in his waistcoat armholes, balancing himself on his toes and heels before the fire. “This isn’t a sixth form study—nothing so vulgar! This is—eh—our room. At the same time I shall have much pleasure in going to a sixth form study to be the bearer of your message to George Otway.”

“No, thank you. I’m very much obliged, but I shouldn’t like to trouble you. Papa wished me to take the message myself. I hope I have not disturbed you. But, you see, I’m quite a stranger here. I only came last night. I daresay I shall know better in time. Good morning!”

And with a dignified nod the little lady disappeared.

And that same instant the young gentlemen she had left behind broke into a perfect Babel of sounds.

“There! there! What did I say?” remarked

Vincent, in a sociable sort of way, and at the top of his voice, to his friend Tiny. "Did you have the pluck to speak to her? A nice sight you looked! Who's a liar now?"

"What do you mean?" roared Master Maxted. "Look here! I'll tell you what, Howard Vincent, I've warned you before to-day that there'll be a row between us two if you don't take care; so I tell you now!"

"Bah!" retorted Vincent, who was supposed to be Tiny's best friend in all the world; a very Jonathan to his David. "Think I'm afraid of you? Why, you're afraid of a girl!"

"I'm not afraid of you!" declared Tiny, clenching his fists, and showing every inclination to bring matters to a climax there and then.

"That's right," said Bromley, who had regained his seat upon the desk. "Fight away! Anything for a change! But it's my private opinion that if you were put down by yourselves in the middle of a howling desert, you'd neither of you have the courage to speak to a girl!"

"I like that!" began Tiny, turning upon this new assailant.

But Geoffrey interposed—

"I don't see that any of you have anything to be proud of. I never saw such a set of muffs as you looked in all my life. Perhaps you will remember that the only one who dare speak to her was I!"

Whereat the whole assembly set up a howl of indignation. They were certainly unlikely to admit the superiority of such as he. So every one made haste to express his candid opinion of Geoffrey Hazlemere.

CHAPTER V.

MISS EMILY MACQUEEN.

ONE thing was certain, Dr. Macqueen did not seem to be on a fair way to winning popularity with the boys. On the contrary, there was every prospect of his gaining anything but favour.

This was the more singular, because boys, as a rule, are the most unstable creatures in creation. Nothing more suited to their tastes than changes. There are very few boys of, say under sixteen, who are not perfectly convinced that any change would tend to an improvement. They pick the most terrible flaws in their present rulers, and are therefore all the more prepared to throw themselves into the arms of whoever may come after them.

But the present case was an exception. Dr. Graham was not only liked when he was with them, but missed greatly when he was gone. He had been so long among them—there were many who had been so long beneath his influence, that they had almost unconsciously begun to regard him as everything a headmaster ought to be. Any who came after him would be sure to be keenly criticised, and

if he chanced in any way to differ from their model, that difference would be sure to be resented.

There could be no doubt that in nearly every point Dr. Macqueen differed from his predecessor as widely as are the poles asunder. If the authorities had desired to elect a gentleman who was in complete contrast to the late headmaster, they could hardly have chosen better.

Dr. Graham was as refined in manners as in mind; as careful and as courteous in speaking to his smallest pupil as to his most honoured friend. In fact, it was the boast of the boys that, whatever might be the case with other schools, their headmaster was a finished and a polished gentleman.

Nothing Dr. Macqueen seemed to think so insignificant as the little outward refinements of speech, and dress, and manner. The boys could not understand him. The judges of the sixth form unhesitatingly pronounced his scholarship to be profound; but his other attributes—on that subject they were inclined to be less eloquent.

He was continually treading upon his pupils' corns. He waged unceasing war against all those little weaknesses to which boyhood—and especially certain stages of it—is peculiarly liable. He never lost an opportunity of keeping the young gentlemen in what he called their place; and he had a habit of calling public attention to their failings, overwhelming them with floods of sarcasm, which they declared to be more galling than any punishment inflicted in private could have been.

In this way he was breeding a spirit among the boys which the more discerning among them viewed with not a little dissatisfaction.

“I wish with all my heart,” said Boltington, one evening, when three or four of the seniors were assembled in Otway’s room, “that Dr. Graham would come back to-morrow! There’s something about this fellow which makes me positively mad! He has a perfect genius for finding out your most vulnerable points, and then making sly underhand attacks at them. The first time I saw him I felt sure we should not get on together, and I’m surer of it every day!”

Boltington had planted himself in the centre of Otway’s hearthrug, with his back to the fire.

George himself was seated by the table, and, shading his eyes from the lamplight with his hand, looked at the handsome Henry for some seconds before replying.

“It appears to me,” he said at last, “that it is not so much the master’s duty to please the pupil, as the pupil’s to please the master. Don’t you think that if you were to make some slight effort to act up to the spirit as well as the letter of his wishes it might be as well?”

Boltington laughed.

“We are not all such sober ones as you, nor gifted with such a high standard of one’s duty! With Dr. Graham I felt always in accord; with Macqueen I always feel at loggerheads!”

A few minutes after Boltington went out.

“To win the doctor’s good will by being perfect in his prep,” he said.

Then Dodwell turned to Otway, declaring dryly—

“You might as well talk nonsense to the sea, as preach prudence to Henry Boltington! Were I asked, I should say that the doctor and he were formed by nature not to get on together. And before long you’ll find they’ll make that discovery for themselves. The consequences I leave others to foretell.”

But whatever might be the feeling thus growing in the school in general, a feeling of a very different kind was just now prominent in the minds of at least a section of the scholars.

This had nothing to do in any way with the doctor; or at any rate, those most interested seemed to think it was no concern of his. But it had everything to do with the doctor’s daughter. For it must be confessed—and it is with very mixed feelings that I say it—that young lady was beginning to occupy a position of very unusual importance in a scholastic establishment which was intended entirely for young gentlemen.

Miss Emily Macqueen was of a very sociable disposition; and as at this particular time she was without friends of her own sex, it was possibly with the hope of deriving some consolation for their absence that she lost no opportunity of shedding the light of her countenance upon such of the young gentlemen as might chance to be at hand.

But there is this to be observed, that while the

friendship between girl and girl is one thing, that between girl and boy is another thing; at least, so outsiders appear to think.

It was remarkable in what an astonishingly short space of time feelings of the most surprising kind began to occupy the bosoms of those young gentlemen who chanced to cross her path. It was the old story retold. Miss Emily Macqueen was like the apple of discord which fell among the Olympian revellers.

Boys are not, as a class, notable for generosity, yet it was strange what a new tendency was evinced to invest their funds in articles which could be of no possible use to them. Fans, wonderful both as to design and shape; jewellery of the most miscellaneous description—bracelets, lockets, earrings, brooches—gorgeous in appearance, but suspicious as to quality; nick-nacks, for which the most ingenious could find no use, except the very obvious one that they were made to sell; rubbish and trumpery in endless variety, these remarkable young gentlemen took to purchasing in reckless profusion, for what purpose they alone could best discover.

It is to be feared, however, that all these treasures were destined for one and the same recipient—Miss Emily Macqueen. For the fact was that before that young lady had been domiciled in her father's new abode seven fleeting days, her admirers might be counted by the score.

“Dear me!” she said one morning to Maxwell Bromley, whom she had accidentally met at a shel-

tered corner of her father's privileged domain, he standing one side of the hedge and she the other. "It's most unfortunate, but I really can't be true to you alone. You see, there are so many of you at once that it would be unkind to all the rest. I've got seven sweethearts now—I think that's quite enough—and you are one of them."

"Seven!" groaned Master Maxwell, who was really smitten. "What's the use of being one of the other seven? You might as well make them seventy at once! Besides, who are the other six?"

"I don't think it's fair of you to ask," replied Miss Emily, who had most proper notions of her own, "and it would be quite unfair of me to say. I shouldn't have thought it of you!"

"Shouldn't have thought what?" gasped her fond adorer. "I'm sure I've given you an awful lot of things, and I'm quite stumped, and yet you don't like me a bit better than any of the rest!"

"If you think," replied the young lady loftily, "that I value my affections at what I can get for them, you are mistaken altogether!"

"It's all very well to say that now!" retorted Maxwell, not without reason, if with little gallantry, "now that they are given. If you had said it before I might have kept my money in my pocket."

"Well! I never heard such a thing in all my life!" declared Miss Macqueen, getting very tall indeed upon a sudden. "The idea of such a thing! I didn't think I should live to be insulted!"—she might have been, perhaps, thirteen years old at the

time of speaking. "This comes of lowering myself to mix with some people! Don't let me ever hear of your speaking to me again!"

And turning her back upon him, she marched proudly down the garden path.

"If you're going to go on in that sort of way," shouted Master Bromley to the retreating damsel, "perhaps you'll let me have back that pound of chocolate creams you've got inside your jacket; and if you're not going to have anything more to do with me, I think you ought to let me have back the things I've given you!"

But if the young lady heard, she heeded not. Such an appeal was perhaps beneath her notice. With her head held in the air, and her figure erect as it well could be, she passed from sight, and left him there.

"If ever I trust a girl again," mourned the disconsolate wooer as he wended his weary way, "you may call me names! After all the things I've given her! Every penny spent, and I'm eighteenpence in debt, and she turns round on me like this!"

Nor would he probably have found much consolation for his wounded spirit had he been an unseen spectator of Miss Macqueen's proceedings in the seclusion of her own apartment.

It was perhaps half an hour after that distressing interview; a fire burned brightly on the hearth—for it is not impossible that Miss Macqueen was spoilt by other people besides the boys—a little table was drawn up in front of it, on which was

a resplendent bran-new writing-desk, and a quantity of other articles of the most miscellaneous description. Here sat the maiden, and at her side a large paper, full of chocolate creams, which she was devouring with considerable relish.

“I like Bromley, and I like his chocolate creams,” she observed, stuffing three or four of them into her mouth at once, and then wiping her fingers on a handkerchief, which was not quite so white as it might have been; “but he is so selfish,” with a melancholy sigh. “I do dislike people who are selfish,” which was rather good, considering; “he is always talking about what he’s given me, as though that had anything to do with it,” which was even better. “I’m sure if I were to like every boy because he gave me something, I should have to fall in love with half the school, and that would be absurd;” which was correct from one point of view at any rate.

Then, turning her attention to a small heap of unopened letters which lay in front of her, picking up the first—

“That’s from Maxted, I know.” It was an elaborate affair, in a pink envelope; Tiny had laid it among his Windsor soap by way of scenting it. “I detest that boy; just as though I could have a sweetheart with hair like his! It’s only got some nonsense in it, which is not worth reading, I dare say.” And very calmly she dropped Master Tiny’s unopened envelope where the fire burned the fiercest.

Then, taking up another: "That's from Hazlemere; he's the best writer of them all, but" — putting it down, she clasped her hands in front of her, and leaning her arms upon the table, subsided into silent thought.

Somewhat like this her thoughts were running—of course one cannot be quite certain, but I'll be bound we're not so far out after all—

"Tom Jackson! Tom Jackson! It is not a very pretty name, but" — a curious look softened her sunny eyes, "what a sweet look there is upon his face and in his eyes; and he is so small, and so weak, and—and hunchbacked too, poor Tom Jackson! and they say they bully him. Bully him!" the softness faded, and there was a very different expression in her glance; the words which followed were not only said aloud, but very emphatically too. "I should like to see anybody DARE to bully him when I was by!" and rising suddenly, she tapped her dainty little hand in an imperious fashion upon her gorgeous desk.

Then, bethinking her, perhaps, that somebody might be wanting her elsewhere, taking the remainder of the unopened letters she stuffed them unceremoniously in her pocket, and, still with the same bright sparkle in her eyes, left the room and went downstairs.

At the same time that her young ladyship was thus engaged, a very different scene was taking place in the fourth-form study. There, first of all, were

seated by themselves Master Martin Maxted and Master Geoffrey Hazlemere. Geoffrey was in front of the fire, himself on one chair, and his feet on a second; he had two or three books upon his knees, and was studying another with considerable attention; in fact, circumstances, of what kind no matter, had prevented his getting up his preparation-work when he should have done, and he was trying to do in this, his leisure time, what he had not done at its proper season; he was not in a particularly good temper, and was inclined to fall out with any one.

As with Tiny now; that young gentleman was seated at a desk, and with much labour and anguish of mind was writing a letter, over which he seemed to be taking an unusual degree of pains; every now and then—about every fourth word on an average—he was in doubt as to the correctness of his spelling, and kept applying to Hazlemere to set his mind at rest; this Geoffrey resented as being an interruption to his own more serious studies.

“Why don’t you get a dictionary?” he asked. “Don’t keep bothering me. The best present anybody could make you, would be somebody-or-other’s spelling-book for beginners.”

“I only want to know how to spell ‘believe,’” said Tiny, with more humility than was his wont; “upon my word I won’t bother you again.”

“You’ve said that about a dozen times already, but you always do. ‘Believe?’ b-e-l-double e-v-e

'beleeve,'” said Geoffrey, with an utter disregard of truth.

“I thought it had an ‘i’ in it?” suggested Tiny, who did not think it sounded as it ought to do.

“Then you thought wrong,” declared Geoffrey, with unblushing countenance; “if you know how to spell it yourself, why do you bother me?”

“All right,” answered Tiny, “you needn’t be crusty.”

And believing in his friend’s integrity, he wrote, “beleeve me yours,” and then stopped short; “truly” was a word he was never certain of; t-r-e-u-, t-r-u-e-, he tried it several ways, but yet he did not feel satisfied; finally, he again resorted to his friend Geoffrey.

“Of all the blockheads I’ve met, you’re the biggest,” replied Hazlemere, by way of showing his civility; “‘truly?’ t-r-e-w-l-e-y.”

“T-r-e-w-l-e-y?” repeated Tiny, who was not so ignorant as that. “I know it’s not; I know there’s no ‘w’ in it, and there’s no ‘e’ before the ‘y.’”

“Very well then,” retorted Geoffrey, “spell it as you like. You ask me how it’s spelt, and if you don’t choose to believe me, you can do the other thing.”

Just then, and while Maxted was turning the matter over in his mind, Tom Jackson entered. Although a new-comer, and so small a one, Dr. Macqueen had placed him in the fourth form; and

this was resented by more than one of those who sat beside him.

"You're the very fellow I wanted," cried Tiny, as he came in; "how do you spell 'truly'?"

"T-r-u-l-y," returned Jackson, without hesitation, and never for a moment suspecting that such a very different version had been given just now.

"Of course—I thought so," announced Tiny, triumphantly. Then, struck by another thought, "and 'believe'?"

"B-e-l-i-e-v-e," replied Tom, in the same prompt fashion, never imagining there would be a doubt about it.

"There! what did I say?" asked Maxted, turning on the discomfited Hazlemere, and choosing to think he had erred through ignorance, and not through malice. "Didn't I say there was an 'i' in it? who's the big dunce now?"

Jackson, innocent that he was giving cause for offence by answering such very easy questions with simplicity and truth, had advanced towards the fire with the probable intention of deriving the benefit of some of its warmth; but Hazlemere, to whose eyes an angry light had come, putting out his hand as he was passing, caught him by the arm and held him there.

"What do you mean," he asked, working the muscles of Jackson's wrist, "by calling me a liar, eh?"

"Calling you a liar?" replied Jackson, who was

wonderfully susceptible to pain, and whose face was crimsoning already, as Geoffrey squeezed his wrist as in a thumbscrew. "I never thought of doing such a thing."

"How dare you contradict me?" queried Hazlemere, giving a sudden wrench which made his victim writhe with pain.

"I did nothing of the kind," cried Jackson, with one of those bursts of passion which were peculiar to him; "but I do say you are a coward and a bully, and a coward and a bully is usually a liar!"

"What!" returned Hazlemere, paling ominously, and giving Tom's arm a sudden artistic twist, causing the acutest agony. "I thought we should have to come to an understanding before long."

But to his surprise, maddened by the pain and the injustice of the attack, wholly careless of the consequences, Jackson clenched his fist, and without an instant's warning struck Hazlemere with all his strength three or four times in the face.

Without speaking a word, white to the lips with fury, the elder boy stood up and raised the other bodily from the ground; raised him as if he were of no account, right above his head, and then dashed him with all his force upon the floor.

And that moment, while he was engaged in the very act, the door was opened, and Miss Emily Macqueen came in—Miss Macqueen, who had been despatched upon a message by the Doctor, a

kind of duty that young lady was always ready to perform.

Jackson lay motionless upon the ground, Geoffrey glaring down at him. Whether he was satisfied with what he had done, or whether he intended to proceed to further extremities, history sayeth not, for before he had time to act, Miss Macqueen, springing across the room, raised her little hand and saluted him with as sound a box upon his ears as ever was given or received. Then she addressed him candidly as follows:—

“Of all the cowards I have ever seen, you are the most cowardly. If I had my way, Geoffrey Hazlemere, and was a big boy, I’d get the biggest stick that I could find, and break it into pieces beating you, and then you’d find out what it is to be bullied by a stronger than yourself.”

Then, turning to Jackson on the ground, her tones melted to the softest sweetness.

“Please will you let me help you up?” which in a half-dazed manner he let her do; “and please will you come a little while with me? I will do my best to make you well.”

Whether he understood her, is doubtful; he appeared not quite conscious of what was going on; but he suffered her to take his arm, and with eyes of soft compassion to lead him from the room.

Directly they were gone, Master Martin Maxted, who had been staring in open-mouthed amazement, gave vent to his emotions.

“Well, of all of the tip-top girls I’ve seen, if she’s not the tip-toppedest!”

“I don’t know about that,” observed Hazlemere, with a ghastly grin; “but I know I owed the Doctor something before to-day, and that increases the balance in his favour.”

CHAPTER VI.

BOLTINGTON'S OFFENDED.

It was half-holiday; the frost still held, not so keenly as before, but hard enough to put a stop to football; the boys were scattered here, there, and everywhere; the whole school, as was generally the case on such occasions, was in comparative seclusion; emptied of nearly all of its usual inhabitants, it seemed almost like a deserted building from the days of long ago. This was the case this afternoon; you might have paced through its endless corridors, passed through nearly all its rooms, and yet not found a single living soul; the sound of voices was entirely hushed; silence and desolation seemed to reign supreme.

Among the two or three who might have been found haunting the precincts of the school was Henry Boltington. This with him was a most unusual thing; as a rule, none more willing to rush into the open air, none more gregarious, none more ready to mingle with his fellows; but this afternoon, for reasons of his own, he chose to remain be-

hind, and enjoy the exceptional pleasure of his own society.

He was in his study ; not actually alone, for coiled up enjoying the luxurious comfort of an American lounging-chair, in the full glow of the ruddy fire, was Tom Jackson. A curious friendship had grown up between these two. It is to be noted how often, as by an unerring law of Providence, the physically strong find a lordly satisfaction in tolerating the society of the physically weak ; it was thus with them. Unconsciously Tom, who longed for nothing so much as strength and shape, looked up with a sort of awe to this giant, who was no unfit personification of youth, and strength, and beauty ; this giant too, who was so ready to hold out a companionable hand to him, and to admit him within the circle of his friends.

Boltington regarded the matter in a different light. Here was one, misused by nature, helpless, and alone—one who, while in one sense he would never be the equal of his fellows, in another bade fair to be infinitely their superior ; for with that quick perception which was peculiarly his, he perceived that in this ill-shaped lad had been placed a mind, a soul, which would have done credit to any giant the world has seen. So, while Tom looked up with reverence to Boltington in one direction, Boltington did him justice in another ; and as a result a curiously close friendship sprang up between the two.

One consequence of which was that Tom was given the run of the monitor's study ; a privilege

which he valued to the full, for the apartment which for the time Boltington had made his own gave ample evidences of its owner's disposition.

Boltington was rich; the only child of parents whose wealth was great. There were few things which gold could purchase for which he ever asked in vain. His study was proof enough of this: it was one of the sights of Dorrincourt. He called it the "Hunter's Home;" you would have thought you were in a hut of unsawn logs. The illusion was complete; you might have fancied that round you roared the monarchs of the primeval forests, that round you stretched the pathless plains. The walls were hung here and there with skins of savage animals, they lay upon the floor; on every side were weapons and trophies of the chase. And yet, in spite of all this rudeness, all this savagery, on every hand were ample evidences of the eccentric owner and his well-filled pockets. Luxury, not comfort only, was closely studied; the chairs, the boys declared, moved one to gentle sleep much quicker than the beds provided by the authorities; there were a dozen contrivances to save one trouble; prints, statuettes, bronzes, hung about the room; while those skins of many bisons hanging against the wall, formed but a curtain, which when drawn aside disclosed shelf after shelf groaning beneath the weight of many a precious volume. The bookshelves, by the way, formed the chief attraction in Tom Jackson's eyes.

Boltington was seated at the little table which stood in the centre of the room; an unusual cloud

was on his handsome face, and his brows were knit in troubled thought. For indeed it seemed to him that his lines had fallen in unpleasant places; Dr. Macqueen and he could not agree.

Things had been going from bad to worse. Dr. Graham had understood his pupil, had seen that behind that seeming thoughtlessness,—that careless waywardness, lay good qualities of no mean order. It is to be feared that he had been spoilt at home—not knowingly, perhaps; but before the error had been discovered the mischief had been done. He was now a brilliant, high-spirited, impetuous boy, who might be led to the world's end by any who had gained his respect and his esteem, but who turned like a tiger at bay on any who tried force instead of tenderness, or who scorned his prejudices instead of reasoning them away.

Here was a character difficult to deal with; here was a crisis in his life, that turning-point, which either led him up or led him down. Had Dr. Graham stayed, all undoubtedly would have gone well; he had won his heart, and with that his confidence as well. In the few words which he had been able to exchange with his successor, he had told him candidly that he himself regarded Henry Boltington as his most promising pupil, but that in other hands he might turn out exactly the reverse. And now that Dr. Macqueen was in his place, there seemed no little probability of the fulfilment of his prophecy.

Before him on the table lay a letter—a letter from

his mother ; a letter which mothers will write, and, thank God, do write ; very simple and very true, very foolish if you will, yet full of wondrous wisdom—half-fearful, yet full of trust. Dr. Macqueen, it appeared, had already thought proper to communicate to Mr. Boltington his opinion of one or two points in his son's character and demeanour ; and this was his mother's plea to be a good son to her, and as a son should be in his parents' eyes.

“What shall I say ?” he asked at last, after he had sat long in silence and in thought.

“What shall you say ?” repeated Tom, who had been watching him all the time, though he had feigned that his attention was absorbed by the great book held in his hands. “What should you say to a mother who loves you as does yours ?”

“There are different opinions about the matter,” said Boltington, half-bitterly and half-drily. “Each has his own ideas of what a good son should be. Of one thing I'm pretty clear, that it's no part of a good son's duty to put up with our friend Macqueen.”

“It is a good son's duty,” said Tom quietly, “to please his mother. She shows her love by pleasing him ; surely, the least she may expect is that he loves her as well.”

“Don't talk to me like that,” retorted Boltington, getting up and pacing to and fro, “as though the question began and ended there. That is not all ; when she knows all, I shall not be displeasing her by objecting to Macqueen's dictation.”

"From what she writes she seems to think you will."

Boltington uttered an exclamation of dissent, and then continued pacing to and fro in silence. Tom watched him for a moment or two, and then went on—

"Harry, just think a while. If you are not careful you will soon have gone so far there will be no use thinking then. If you like, don't look at it as if it were a matter in which the Doctor is concerned, but only as it concerns your mother."

He was about to continue, but Boltington broke in half-angrily—

"He as good as called me a presumptuous puppy—me, a sixth-form boy! And why? why, do you suppose? Just because I ventured to differ from him on a question on which I am sure that I knew best! Do you suppose Dr. Graham would ever have said such a thing?"

"Dr. Graham is a different person from Dr. Macqueen."

"Different! I should think he is!"

"But I am sure both mean equally well."

"Bosh! don't talk such trash to me! The days when a man can ride roughshod over a younger one, just because they happen to be master and pupil, are dead and gone for ever. Only wait till I have had that feed."

"Feed!" cried Tom, starting from his chair, letting the book fall unnoticed to the floor. "You

don't mean that you are going to give that supper all the talk has been about!"

"Don't I mean? But that is exactly what I do mean!"

"What will the Doctor say if a report of it should come to him?"

"My dear Tom, just understand me once for all. Dr. Macqueen doesn't go out of his way to make things pleasant for me, and upon my word and honour I won't go out of mine to humour him."

Tom, standing by his chair, stood looking at Boltington. Their eyes met; then with a quiet step Tom crossed the room, and putting out his hand, just touched the other's arm.

"Harry! Harry!" he said—there was an expression of great earnestness upon his face, and his tones were clear and low—"if you will do one thing to favour me, I will never forget it all my life. And don't think only that it is I who speak to you; it is as though someone else's words were on my tongue. For your mother's sake—if you like, for mine—don't give that feed to-night."

Boltington did not reply at once; he glanced down at the grave face turned up to his; then putting his hand upon his shoulder, half laughingly—

"How earnest you are! Why, you tiny Tom, I do believe you are more anxious for me than for yourself. Let me tell you you'd be pretty well disliked if it were known that I gave it up, and all because of you."

"That would be so new, I am so popular at present"—— began Tom bitterly. But just here a knock came at the door, which made him pause.

"There, that's fortunate," said Boltington, "just in the nick of time to stop you abusing yourself and me. Whoever you are, welcome! and come in!"

And as they turned to see who it might be, the door was opened, and Geoffrey Hazlemere came in. At sight of him Tom shrank from Boltington, drawing himself as straight as nature would allow; for there was no love lost between the two.

"Ah! how do?" said Hazlemere, nodding as he entered; "I heard that you were here, so I thought I'd come and see. I hope I'm not disturbing any confidences," with a sneer that was just perceptible.

"Confidences? not you!" rejoined Boltington, whose nature it was to hold out a friendly hand to all who wished for it. "I'm glad to see you; sit down, and let's hear what you have to talk about."

"Thanks, I won't sit; and the fact is I've nothing to say. I only came in a spirit of languid curiosity. I heard you had a little breeze with our friend this morning?" watching him keenly from the corner of his eyes.

"Our friend? Whom do you mean? Dr. Macqueen? He is no friend of mine." Then suddenly remembering it was no affair of Hazlemere's, and

that as a monitor it hardly became him to discuss it indiscriminately with every lower boy who confessed to curiosity, he checked himself. "It was nothing; one of those things, you know, which are not worth recollecting."

"Indeed!" Geoffrey paused, and watched him. "I heard otherwise. The story goes that he called you names, and that you are getting into his black books as fast as all the rest of us."

"What does it matter how the story goes?" said Jackson, taking upon himself to answer; "stories are always told of every one."

Hazlemere, before replying, looked at him as though he would have liked to have demolished him upon the spot; but in Boltington's presence such an attempt would not have done at all.

"I'm not aware that I spoke to you, and I certainly had no intention of inflicting on you the trouble of replying." This was said in Master Geoffrey's most waspish tones; recent occurrences were still very fresh in his memory.

"What's the matter?" asked Boltington, striking in. "Tom only made a remark which, if my opinion were asked, I should say looked very much like commonplace. What does it matter how a story goes? and aren't stories always told of every one?"

"What do you mean by a story? Do you mean a lie?" retorted Geoffrey savagely. "Do you mean that when they say Macqueen called you a puppy, and told you very plainly to be careful of your P's and Q's, do you mean that's a lie?"

“And supposing it's not a lie?” began Jackson, seeing Boltington's face flush in an unpromising manner.

“Will you shut up?” cried Hazlemere, turning round on him. “Look here, Boltington; you know very well that your friend there,” with a sneer, “is not mine; and if you've put him there to be your mouthpiece, I don't think it's in the very best form.”

“He's not my mouthpiece,” replied Boltington, more coolly than Tom expected. “But it seems to me that you've not come here in a very good humour, and more ready to make my grievances yours than mine.”

Hazlemere was silent, speaking, when he spoke again, in tones which Tom at once perceived were deliberately intended to put Boltington into a passion.

“You must excuse me, but it really seems to me that you are taking our *friend's*,” with emphasis, “little eccentricities with delightful meekness. Of course, in your present spirit of obedience you will never dream of having that little affair of yours we have all looked forward to to-night?”

Tom put out his hand to try and check the answer he saw rising to Henry's lips; but the effort was in vain.

“I will dream nothing of the kind! I shall have it all the more because I know he doesn't wish me to!”

“Harry! Harry!” pleaded Jackson.

“Listen, Tom,” said Boltington, putting his hand

heavily on Jackson's shoulder, and it was easy to see he was thoroughly in earnest; "you are right, and I am wrong, but I mean to have my way in spite of it; and since I don't want to fall out with you, don't you think you'd better leave me to my folly this once, and go?"

"Go!" repeated Tom, reading aright the meaning of his eyes, seeing more words were useless. "Go! That is the first time you—you have ordered me to go!" And before he could put out his hand to stop him, Tom Jackson had crossed the room and disappeared.

"Let him alone!" said Hazlemere, stepping between the door and Boltington; "say what you mean and stand to it. You don't want that child to make a laughing-stock of you. Boltington, if Macqueen had said half to me—if the tales are true, he said to you, I'd have—I'd have"—

"What would you have done?" asked Boltington, who had no great opinion of his friend's courage, and who was moreover stung by a sense of the folly of his own behaviour; "sat down with your tail between your legs, like a cur who has had a whipping?"

"No," retorted Hazlemere, "that is the sort of thing which, from all appearance, might be looked forward to from you. *I* should have tried to show him that, though a cur, I was at any rate no coward."

And, while a look came to his face as though he would have liked very much to have knocked his

friend Geoffrey down, Tom Jackson was alone in his dormitory, sitting on his bed. He did not seem to notice how cold it was—for there was no fire; there was something in his eyes very much like tears, and something on his face very much like sorrow; he was troubled for Henry Boltington.

“In her letter his mother said she prayed for him; I wonder if it would be any good if I did too?” So there and then he knelt upon the floor and tried.

That night there were high jinks in Boltington's study, which lasted both loud and long. Mr. Henry Boltington was entertaining a party of his friends in his own peculiar way—a way, it may be mentioned, more relished by his friends than by his neighbours on either side of him. Study was out of the question; uproar reigned supreme. Lewis Thelton's study was on one side of him, Dodwell's on the other. At last, in complete despair, the first-named young gentleman sallied forth to hear the opinion of the other. Dodwell, utterly discomfited, was stuffing his thumbs into his ears, in the vain endeavour to keep out the hurricane of sounds.

“What's to be done?” asked Thelton, when he found his friend was as badly situated as himself. “This is preposterous—I sha'n't have a word of my prep. ready for to-morrow. Who's he got in there?”

“An awful rabble!” replied Dodwell in accents of despair. “I don't know what's come to him; there's Hazlemere, and Stornell, and that young

Maxted, and I don't know who. They'll have the place about our ears if they don't take care."

"Of course he'll have to be reported?"

"I'm not so sure of that; let's go and hear what Otway says. You know if we do report him, in his present state of mind, a pretty state of things we may look forward to."

They went. Otway's study was some short distance off, but even there the din was distinctly audible. Soon all the monitors, with one or two exceptions, driven thither by the noise, were crowded in the room. George Otway, as senior boy, had, of course, the largest study, and in it they not seldom held their meetings.

"Of course there are no sixth-form fellows there?" asked Otway, when he found himself surrounded by his colleagues.

"I should think not indeed!" cried Lewis Thelton. "It's bad enough to have him there, without anybody else to make it worse."

"It's the most scandalous thing I ever heard of," declared Henderson, with his most indignant air. "The idea of a monitor behaving himself like that! What's it to be? A case of the sixth form reporting a sixth-form fellow?"

There was silence for a time; it was no easy question. Boltington was a friend of every one of them, great in the cricket and football fields, popular in every way. It would be no light thing to report him to the Doctor, especially as things stood now; it would place him on one side and

themselves on another; and while the present spirit existed in the school that meant more than might appear. Imprudent always, he would scarcely be prudent situated so. They guessed, even if they did not know, that there were more than one who would be glad to have Boltington on their side as against authority, to bring things to a climax, which would be as unpleasant as scandalous to all concerned.

While they were thus considering the matter, hesitating what to do and what to leave undone, unknown to them the matter was to some extent taken from their hands; for even while they pondered, someone was passing along the corridor, listening, with considerable surprise, to the hubbub and the din. It was Doctor Macqueen.

He advanced in silence till he reached the study door whence all the noise was coming; he hesitated, lingering on the threshold, as though doubtful what to do. Then, with sudden resolution, putting his hands behind his back, he walked quickly on, and passed from sight, muttering as he went—

“That is Henry Boltington’s!—Boltington’s! I might have thought of that—of course—of course. I shall have trouble with that lad; I feared it all along.”



"He hesitated, lingering on the threshold." — Page 86.

CHAPTER VII.

GEOFFREY HAZLEMERE'S BEST FRIEND.

“LOOK here, Mr. Hazlemere, I've got to have that money; I'm not to leave here unless I have it; that's what my instructions are, and my duty to my employer obliges me to carry them out. It's no use your talking; we've had so much of that that we're sick and tired of it.”

The speaker was a gentleman dressed in a long black coat, considerably the worse for wear, shining here and there so brightly that it would have almost been of service as a mirror; he was about the middle height, sparely built; his coat was buttoned almost to his chin, a scarf was twisted round his neck, and he wore a top hat which had probably seen as much service as his coat. He was not an agreeable-looking gentleman, his face was too long and thin, the lines were too cunning round his mouth, his eyes were too small and black and beady, and his nose was too large and too rosy at the tip. Not unnaturally he seemed cold; his hands were thrust into his trousers' pockets, his body was huddled together as if for warmth, and he seemed in a generally shivering condition.

They were standing at a corner of the cricket-field ; a bleak, biting thaw had set in, accompanied by a cutting wind, and under no circumstances could it have been pleasant to stand there, just where the wind was most unkind, up to their ankles in a couple of inches of snowy slush.

Geoffrey looked, as he very well might do, in an exceedingly bad temper.

“Why do you always come to me?” he asked; “it isn’t only I who have to pay. Why don’t you ask Stornell?”

“Don’t you worry yourself about Mr. Alexander Stornell; I should think you had enough of your own upon your mind without troubling yourself about him; I don’t forget him. But what I want you to do now is to mind your own affairs and settle up.”

“You know I can’t.”

“Then I go up to the Doctor.”

He turned, as though to carry out his threat and go up to the school, but Hazlemere caught him by the shoulder and drew him back.

“You’ll do nothing of the kind. Do you think I’d let you do that sort of thing beneath my nose? Not such a fool! Tell—tell Anderson I’ll come up to-night—upon my word of honour! I swear I will! --and I’ll make a final arrangement to pay him off, and stand to it.”

The gentleman in the shiny coat hesitated before replying, eyeing Geoffrey very keenly through his half-closed eyes. He did not seem to have so much

faith in that young gentleman's integrity as he might have had.

"Very well, Mr. Hazlemere, I'll give you one more chance; but mind you come, and before it's late; if you don't," with a pause for emphasis, "don't you expect to hear from us again till it's put in somebody else's hands."

"My dear fellow," replied Hazlemere in a burst of friendship, "don't you be afraid; I'll come safe enough, if only to share a glass or two of Anderson's very best."

The seedy gentleman seemed to pay no heed to the convivial suggestion thus conveyed, but without another word turned on his heel, and began to walk along the path—or what should have been the path—which led across the field. Directly his back was turned, the friendly look passed from Geoffrey's face with remarkable suddenness, and a very different expression came in its place—a bitter scowl; and clenching his fist, he shook it surreptitiously at the retreating stranger.

"Oh don't I wish," he muttered, "that we two were alone, and there was a nice, clean, muddy pond close by. If I didn't give you the best ducking you ever had in all your life, my name's not Hazlemere!"

"Holloa, Geoff!" cried a voice behind him, as he was indulging in this little expression of his feelings; "what's the matter with you? and who's that fellow there?"

Turning with a start, Hazlemere saw Tiny Maxted

and Maxwell Bromley standing close behind his back.

"Oh, only a beggar," he said, trying his best to look as though their appearance was a welcome one; "one of those sort of fellows, you know, whom it would do one's heart good to treat to a regular good kicking. What have you been up to?"

"We have been watching you two," replied Bromley, which was agreeable news; and Geoffrey tried to make it appear that he thought it so. "I say, he seems to be a particular friend of yours, from what we could make of it."

"A friend!" cried Geoffrey scornfully; "I like the idea of *his* being a friend of mine!"

Which he did very much, having the best of reasons for knowing that it was very much the other way.

He joined them in walking back to school, doing his best to turn away the laugh which they seemed determined to have against him; succeeding, too, to a degree which at least did credit to his powers of dissimulation.

When they reached the playground, they found many of the boys doing their best to enjoy themselves despite the unpromising condition of the elements—some snowballing with the half-melted snow; they had created a snow-fortress, and two parties were contending for the doubtful honour of its possession; others were rolling monster snowballs, which it required the united exertions of half-a-dozen of them to move; still more were

doing nothing except tramp up and down, stamping their feet to keep them warm, grumbling at the weather—which last in particular they were doing with might and main.

Among these discontented youths one was especially conspicuous—conspicuous first, because his figure was a striking one; and secondly, because his grumbling was so loud and long; this was the young gentleman who was commonly reputed to be Geoffrey Hazlemere's best friend, and whose name was Alexander Stornell.

Geoffrey Hazlemere's best friend! What attraction Hazlemere found in him puzzled the most ingenious. His appearance was a key to his character, and anything more unprepossessing than his appearance you would scarcely find. He was broad as he was tall, gigantic both as to height and build, thickset and coarse; his head and face were in sympathy with his body—evidences of the most remarkable physical strength, with an almost total absence of mental capacity.

In fact, one of the oldest, certainly one of the biggest, he was at the same time one of the most ignorant boys in the school. He was the terror of every master who was unfortunate enough to number him among his pupils; he could not learn—could not, if he would, and he never showed any inclination in that direction; his tastes, his appetites, were animal; he was a notorious glutton, astoundingly selfish, apparently dead to every noble feeling of the mind, slow in body as in brain; it

was only his stupidity which saved him from being loathed by all who knew him. As it was, while every one perceived that his imperfections obscured any good qualities he might possess, it was rather with pity than anger they regarded him, as being all the outcome of his stupidity.

And this lad was reputed to be Geoffrey Hazlemere's best friend! An odd friend for him to choose; odder still when it is remembered that Hazlemere was anything but deficient in mental power; indeed, he was supposed to be sharp as a razor, as quick at his books as the best scholar of them all.

However this might be—perhaps because it was—it is an undoubted fact that he had gained a most remarkable ascendancy over his friend Stornell; it was the old story of strength of body yielding to strength of mind—the clever pigmy reducing to obedience the strongest of nature's untrained forces. Whatever might be his motives, Geoffrey Hazlemere cultivated Alexander Stornell to an unusual extent—to a greater extent than any one else had any notion of, moulding him to his hand as clay is moulded by the modeller.

Leaving Tiny and Maxwell Bromley to their own devices, he advanced across the playground, and, thrusting his arm through the slouching Alexander's, without any kind of ceremony, proceeded to march him in the opposite direction to which he himself was going.

"I want to speak to you," Geoffrey condescended to explain in reply to a grumbling query of Stornell's.

"I've had too much of this slush already, so come indoors."

"What do you want to say?" asked Stornell, stopping short, and looking at his friend suspiciously with his heavy eyes.

"What do I want to say?" retorted Geoffrey in his spiteful way. "Do you want me to say it with every one looking on? What an idiot you are! you know well enough what it is, so come along!"

Whether Stornell did or did not know, he yielded with a very indifferent grace to his friend's persuasion, and suffered him to lead him where he would.

The place which Hazlemere selected was a sort of large cupboard, close by the chief entrance to the great schoolroom, used by the servants for storing brooms and dustpans, pails, dusters, and such-like implements of their profession. It was not a particularly lively receptacle, neither over warm nor over clean, while the only opening through which the light came in was a little grating over the door looking out upon the corridor. Into this secluded nook, much to his disgust, Geoffrey led Stornell, and closed the door behind them.

It certainly was not a comfortable meeting-place, and when Geoffrey, anxious that no sound of voices might rouse the curiosity of passers-by, took him to the extreme end, all among the pails, and brooms, and dust-pans, his disgust found vent in language the reverse of parliamentary. A few wandering gleams of light peeped down upon them, but with those exceptions all was darkness.

"Stornell," began Geoffrey, holding that young gentleman by his arm, "I saw that fellow from Anderson's again just now, and he swears that if there isn't something done at once he'll tell the Doctor everything; to get rid of him I was obliged to promise that we'd go up to him to-night."

"I won't go," replied Stornell, in the hoarse tones in which he always spoke. "I'll take my oath I won't."

"Oh, you won't, won't you?" returned the other; if it had been light enough Stornell would have seen a very unpleasant look upon the speaker's face; "then I say you will. Why will you talk such stuff? do you think I'll suffer because of you? If you say anything like that again I'll go straight to the Doctor and tell him all."

"If you do," replied his friend with equal courtesy, "I'll wring your neck for you."

"You'll wring my neck for me! you! You daren't so much as lay a finger on me! you—you coward!" with a concentration of scorn my pen cannot convey. "Listen to me, Stornell; one of these days you'll provoke me into telling a thing or two of you which will make you wish that you'd been never born; and as sure as I am living I'll do it too."

"Will you?" returned his friend in his surliest tones; "then you won't be living long."

"Bosh! don't talk such twopenny trash to me! Are you coming with me to-night?"

"I'm not going to be humbugged about by you," Stornell answered, after a pause, with his usual

stolidity; "and I won't make your business mine. It isn't me that Anderson's threatening, he knows I'm safe enough to pay; and I don't see why I should be kept out of my bed because of you, let alone the chance of being dropped upon."

"Are you coming with me to-night?" was all that Geoffrey condescended to reply.

"Why don't you go by yourself? Why do you bother me to come? You ain't afraid of going alone?"

"I'm going to the Doctor! I won't go alone, and you know the reason why; and as if I don't go, trouble's ahead, I fancy I can tell the tale better myself than anybody else can do."

And he moved towards the door as if he intended going to the Doctor.

"Come here!" said Stornell, seizing him by the shoulder. "I wish I'd never had anything to do with you, I shouldn't be in such a mess as I am now. I warn you that if I do come, and there does any trouble come of it, things will be twice as warm for you as if you'd let me stay in bed at home."

"Nonsense!" answered Geoffrey, satisfied now that he had gained his point; "as if anything would come of it! Never fear! I can see as far into a deal board as any one."

Lock-up in winter was at seven o'clock; bed at nine. By that hour every boy below the fifth form had to be in his room; fifteen minutes after, lights were put out, and the presumption was that

every boy settled himself upon his pillow, and, wearied with the labours of the day, sought sweet repose.

I say the "presumption" advisedly; the fact was not seldom the reverse; the conversation which followed, the tales which were told, the pranks which were played, the confusion which reigned generally—these things are, I fear, too familiar to most of you to be dwelt on here. Just suffice it to say that, as a rule, no sooner had the lights gone out, and the monitor on duty disappeared, than the occupants of the various dormitories made haste to show what, in their opinion, was the use of coming to bed.

As was the case to-night. The night before there had been one of those historical encounters the stories of which have been told and told again—a bolster-fight. The members of the fourth form being so numerous, had to be told off to sleep in several rooms, no one being nearly large enough to hold them all. The boys in one of these had issued a formal challenge to those in a neighbouring apartment, defying them to screw up their bolsters, and prove which was the stronger. It was one of the features of these encounters that they were practically endless; like a Corsican vendetta they were handed on, if not exactly from father to son, at least from one set of combatants to their successors; for instance, although the same rivals had met over and over again before, with the avowed intention of settling the disputed point as to which

was the superior force, it had never been settled yet; and, moreover, so fond did they seem to be of this charming exercise, that there did not seem to be the remotest chance of such a settlement being ever arrived at.

Last night prudence had dictated their leaving off before they were anything like satisfied, therefore it was with the liveliest anticipations of the combat being renewed exactly where it had left off that this evening they sought repose.

Under these circumstances it may be imagined that when a whisper went round that Stornell and Hazlemere intended to sally forth into the night, and would thus be prevented from figuring in the fray, much dissatisfaction was felt by those who had relied on their assistance.

"I never knew such a fellow as you, Hazlemere," declared Tiny Maxted, who was always prominent on such occasions; "you'll get yourself into hot water as sure as eggs, and us in it too. Why you want to go, and where you want to go, on such a night as this, goodness only knows."

"Then if goodness only knows," retorted Geoffrey, who was in no better temper than usual, "perhaps you'll take it for granted that it's no business of yours. I tell you that we shan't be long, and when we come back we'll be as ready to lend you a hand as any one."

"I'm not squeamish," said Maxwell Bromley, who was sitting on his bed with his knees up to

his chin, "but I don't half like this sort of thing. You're up to no good, I'm sure, and the sooner it's found out and put a stop to the better it'll be for you."

"It's very kind of you to be so anxious for our welfare," sneered Hazlemere, who by this time had dressed himself again, "but opinions differ."

This was about half an hour after they had come to bed, and very shortly they expected the battle to begin again. Both Geoffrey, who was snappishly inclined, and Stornell, who was morosely silent, were dressed and ready for the adventure. Geoffrey moved to a window and drew up the blind; oddly enough—considering what sort the day had been—the night was a glorious one; the moon sailed in her resplendence across a cloudless firmament; outside it was almost as light as day; there was every appearance of the thaw having been followed by a frosty night.

Below the window, some three feet beneath the sill, was the roof of the covered play-shed; their intention was to get down on that, and then to walk or slip down it until they reached the gutter at the bottom, by means of which they would lower themselves till they hung by their hands, and from that position drop to the ground.

The whole process was a tolerably easy one; the chief difficulty lay in not losing their footing on the roof, as such an accident would more than probably result in their being pitched in a

most undesirable manner head-foremost to the ground.

Making as little noise as possible, Geoffrey raised the window, and then, climbing on the sill, lowered himself on to the roof.

"Take care how you come," he said, when he had found his footing, "it's awfully slippery."

"Slippery!" growled Stornell, who followed directly after, "slippery!" — and then he stopped, not because such was his intention, but because he could not help it; for no sooner was he clear of the wall than, taking a false step, or miscalculating his distance, he suddenly swayed backward, and sat down with a crash where a second before his feet had been. Fortunately, it was no worse; it was a wonder, considering his weight and clumsiness, he did not go right through the roofing; as it was, he made enough noise to draw every one's attention to the fact that something unusual was taking place.

"What a thickhead you are!" observed Geoffrey, who had already reached the gutter, in an undertone. "Didn't I tell you it was slippery?"

"Thickhead!" retorted Stornell, who had been shaken rather more than was agreeable. "I'll thickhead you when I get hold of you."

The boys had crowded to the window to see them off; there was a suppressed titter at his misfortune. Tiny Maxted, who was in the front, was

about to say something, which the shaken Alexander would have thought anything but consolatory, when footsteps were heard approaching along the corridor, and, a moment after, some one opened the bedroom door.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK.

“CAVE!” cried some one at the back; and “Cave!” repeated Maxted, pulling down the window with a bang. Without troubling themselves to see who the intruder might be, the boys crowding round him turned precipitately, and made a rush for their beds.

Geoffrey, at once presuming that their flight was discovered, lost no time in lowering himself over the edge and dropping to the ground; while Stornell, never very agile or expeditious in his movements, entirely losing his presence of mind, came slithering from the top of the roof to the bottom, and then down to the ground, in a fashion which took him completely by surprise.

“Are you hurt?” asked Hazlemere, bending over the recumbent Alexander, who had fortunately tumbled into the centre of a heap of snow.

“Hurt!” he retorted, struggling to his feet; “what do you mean by asking if I’m hurt? Do you suppose that a fellow can go knocking himself about like that without feeling any the worse for it? What a lunatic I am! I wish I’d never known you and then it wouldn’t have come to this.”

“It’s no good our stopping here,” said Geoffrey, whose face looked very white in the moonbeams; “we shall have to make a bolt for it.”

And he himself set the example by rushing off across the playground, with Stornell hard on his heels.

Overhead, for some moments the boys were in a state of considerable perturbation. It would be no small thing if a master or a monitor had caught them in the act of assisting in such a doubtful business; at the very least the whole room would be brought into disgrace; so they settled themselves between the sheets, feigning the soundest slumber, and, under the impression that the eye of authority was on them, the profoundest silence reigned.

A silence which was broken by a voice saying, in accents of the most unbounded scorn,—

“I thought as much! We thrashed them so well last night, that it’s as much as their lives are worth to venture out again.”

“Bah! you cowards!” continued another voice. “Well, I must say that I thought you had more pluck than this! Give them a touch of the bolsters where they are.”

And before the unsuspecting youths in bed had any idea of what was going to happen, or how signally they had been self-deceived, a host of white-robed figures came streaming in, brandishing bolsters above their heads, and, while their victims were so taken by surprise as to be able to do nothing in their own defence, commenced a simultaneous attack on them.

Then for the first time they discovered that, so far from its being a master who had appeared upon the scene, their hereditary foes were upon them unawares.

Crash! dash! smash! came down the blows, resounding in all directions. Never was a surprise more thorough; there lay the boys, utterly at the mercy of their antagonists, who were not slow to take advantage of the opportunity fortune offered them.

"Give it them!" cried some one who seemed to be leading the attack; "give it them! let them feel that you've got muscles and arms, my boys!"

And they did give it them, in a way which threatened to knock all the sense out of their victims' heads, and their bodies black and blue. For some seconds they were too prostrated to do anything but endure; but then a feeling of indignation began to rise within their breasts.

Tiny Maxted, anxious to get out of the way of a too obtrusive bolster, which was playing on him like a drummer plays upon his drum, slipped on to the floor, and raised a cry of vengeance on their foes.

"Cowards!" he cried, "who do you call cowards now, hitting a fellow when he's down? To arms! to arms! my boys, and smash the hireling foe!"

And, by way of showing them how to do it, he caught up his own bolster and began an assault of the most violent kind upon the young gentleman who had recently taken advantage of his helplessness to make him smart so sore. It was the signal for a general rally. Each of his colleagues, driven to

desperation, slipping momentarily out of the reach of his remorseless antagonist, collected all his energies in a furious attempt to pay him back with interest. Then the battle began in earnest; the blows rained like hailstones on every side; they were too much occupied to talk. Never was a more desperate encounter seen by the most veteran warrior there.

Now was the time for a master to appear; he would have been unheeded now; the doctor himself would have had to announce his presence before they learned it for themselves. As for the matron's bolsters, it would have saddened the matron's heart could she have seen them then; too well she would have known that, whoever else might suffer in the fray, their case would be the worst.

"They're yielding! they're yielding!" shouted Tiny Maxted. "Now all together, boys, and we'll drive them out."

"Are we yielding?" returned his opponent, who was performing prodigies of valour; "don't you be so sure of that."

"Yielding!" answered Tiny, who at that moment with one dexterous blow forced his antagonist's bolster from his hand, knocking him down with another; "I should think you are."

That particular young gentleman appeared all at once to think so too; he seemed to have had enough of it, for the present at any rate; scrambling to his feet anyhow, receiving a final thwack from the unrelenting Tiny, he turned and fled.

It was the beginning of the end. Whether they

were fatigued by their own efforts, or whether the sense of injuries to avenge inspired the defenders' arms, certain it is that the balance of victory began to incline against those by whom the battle had been begun. Everywhere they were beginning to give way.

"Now then," declared the valiant Tiny, who was making his bolster tell in a new direction, "a long pull, and a strong pull, and a pull altogether, and we've done them yet."

Inspired by his words, his friends redoubled the energy of their attack; their foes made a gallant effort in response, but it was feebly carried out. It was impossible to conceal from themselves that the day was going against their arms; they were impeded by the beds, and their comparative ignorance of their surroundings. Farquaharson primus, with the eye of a veteran, perceived that the best thing they could hope for was a retreat with honour.

"Shoulder to shoulder!" he cried; "don't lose your heads, and take it easy to the door."

But it was one thing to command, another to obey.

Their attack had been a scattered one, each had made a rush upon his own account, and now those who had become in their turn assailants were trying their best to prevent them forming in a body. For some seconds longer they continued their attempt to maintain an orderly retreat; but it was vain; their opponents, perceiving victory within their grasp, were not to be denied; the retreat became a flight, the

flight a rout, escape was all they sought; and with a cry of triumph the defenders chased the last of the attacking party helter-skelter through the door.

There was a pause in the proceedings. The victorious warriors set about recovering their breath, and considering what should next be done.

"I fancy we've taught them manners," remarked Maxted, sitting at the foot of his bed, and wiping the perspiration from his heated brow. "Did you ever see such a mean trick in all your lives, setting on us when we were half asleep? Never mind, we've given it them enough already, and we'll give it them a little more before we've done with them."

"We'll show them once for all," said Bromley, who was on his own bed a little farther down, "that we're equal to any two of them, and that it's only like their conceit pretending otherwise."

"I'm no good," groaned Vincent, who seemed more low-spirited than might have been expected; "my bolster's burst to bits; it's like my luck! Whatever Mrs. Mackintosh will say is more than I can think! It's all that Blagrove's head! It's harder than a flint! It went bang, as though it were nothing else but paper."

"Never mind," said Tiny consolingly, "here's another! It's one some other fellow has left behind; we must get a needle and cotton, and sew

it up before Mrs. Mackintosh can get a sight of it."

"Well, it's no good our sitting here," said Bromley, after another pause, of which they took advantage to discover what injuries had been given and received. "We're not going to be satisfied with turning them out. They were kind enough to come to us; so the least we can do in return is to go to them."

"Hear! hear!" replied Tiny. "Are you fellows ready? Then give your bolsters an extra squeeze, and follow me. Now then, Phillips, aren't you ready?" to a young gentleman who was cramming his bolster to the size and consistency of an average brick. "Don't make a noise, they were on us before we knew it, so we'll do the same to them. Off we go."

And very gingerly, treading on the forepart of his foot, so as to make as little sound as possible, Master Tiny led the way; close behind him in Indian file came the warrior band. They were an odd sight; with only their night-shirts on, shoeless and stockingless, one would have thought they would certainly have felt the cold, but they showed no signs of it. Some of the faces were very grim and earnest, as though it were really a matter of life and death, and they were resolved to do or die; others were blazing and sparkling, in anticipation of the fun to come; more than one or two were absolutely on the broadest grin; while, I fear, there were few there who were not strictly

of opinion that bolster-fights were among the principal things which made school worth coming to at all.

There was not much space between them, and their bodies were inclined forwards as you see in the pictures red Indians stealing upon their prey. Now and then one warrior trod upon another's heels, an accident which generally resulted in the exchange of some slight amenities.

"If you don't take care, young Phillips, where you're coming to," observed Maxwell Bromley, on one occasion, to his young friend who was following him not wisely but too well, "I'll give you something which you don't bargain for."

"What do you mean?" retorted Master Phillips, "how can I help it? It's Vincent, who comes lumbering on my heels like a great bull."

"Who are you calling a bull?" inquired Howard Vincent, indignant in his turn. "If you call me a bull again I'll introduce my bolster to your head."

"If you fellows don't keep quiet, you can go on alone," struck in their leader at this point. "What's the good of my trying to take them by surprise when you keep on that senseless clatter?"

"It isn't I," returned Phillips, taking the accusation as his own, "it's Vincent here."

"What do you mean?" replied Vincent, on the point of shouting, "I never said a word until you called me names."

Fortunately, their near approach to the enemy's quarters directed their attention to other matters,

or it is possible the disputants would soon have used their bolsters on each other's heads, instead of on the foe.

To the right of them was one of the great staircases, at the head of which was a capacious landing, surrounded by the entrances to several of the rooms; on their left was a corridor, and at the end of this corridor was another landing, and another flight of stairs; here dwelt the enemy.

This being so, and as obviously their rear was entirely exposed, it was always deemed necessary to preserve their line of retreat by leaving one or two sentinels to watch for the approach of anything in the shape of a master or monitor, whose duty it was, immediately on the approach of such a one, to give their friends warning of the threatening danger; this was called keeping Cave! But to-night, so absorbed were they in other things, that they neglected this precaution; the result of which neglect, as you will see, was most disastrous.

The end of the corridor was reached; they were on the enemy's landing.

"Now then," said Tiny, "as quiet as mice."

And with inaudible footsteps he stole towards the bedroom door. They stood outside in a clustering crowd.

"Now," he said, "to give to them what they gave to us."

And with a sudden movement he flung the door wide open, and they rushed into the room.

And no sooner were half a dozen of them in, than something came tumbling with a tremendous crash from overhead, and before they had time to move, they were deluged from head to foot with ice-cold water.

There is a saying that "you can never catch a weasel asleep," and it was verified now. They might lay their cunning plans, they might steal on with velvet tread, but to take the enemy by surprise was beyond their power. They were every bit as wide awake as they were themselves; while one plotted, the other counter-plotted. They knew as well as if they had been told that an attempt would certainly be made to pay back their attack in kind; that even as they had approached by stealth, so would their opponents endeavour to advance on them; so they laid their little schemes for their reception. First and foremost among which was an ingenious arrangement by which four or five basins filled with water were placed over the doorway in such a manner that directly it was opened, they were sure to descend upon the person or persons coming in.

As was the case at present; when the gallant assailants found that the surprise was all the other way, and they themselves were saluted by an unexpected shower-bath.

"Won't we pay them out for this!" exclaimed the disgusted Tiny, down whose body the water was streaming in icy floods, "just wait till we get within reach of them."

But he was premature at least, for when the two sides did come within reach of one another, the meeting was nothing like what he had intended.

While they were still crowding in the doorway, and before they had recovered from the first shock of the unexpected waterfall, their assailants were upon them; before they could perceive their purpose a number of sheets were thrown over them, and they were enveloped in their folds. Then commenced a struggle such as was surely never seen before.

The whole efforts of the one side were concentrated in the endeavour to keep the sheets over the heads of the other, just as the whole efforts of the other were directed to getting them off again. The sheets were being rent to shreds, they heeded not; the blinded victims struck out right and left at their invisible antagonists, it was all in vain. Their bolsters were snatched from their grasp, they were thrown ignominiously upon the floor; and there they lay, while their triumphant conquerors tried their very hardest to pinion their arms and legs.

But two facts had escaped their notice entirely; the one, that no sentinels had been appointed to advise them of undesired spectators coming on the scene; the other, that the basins in their descent—not to mention their own proceedings—had made enough noise to rouse the seven sleepers.

All the neighbouring dormitories opened their doors, and their occupants issued forth to view the

scene; to them it was the most delightful thing imaginable to see the contending parties scrambling on the floor; and when one sheet after another was rent with an ominous rip from top to bottom, each was greeted with approving smiles, and other signs of the completest satisfaction.

So absorbed were they in this novel pleasure, that they had no time to notice that some one was approaching with quick footsteps up the stairs; it was only when he was in their midst that they suspected any one was near; then they turned and found the tutor of the fourth remove had caught them in the very act.

"Very well," observed this new-comer, in his grimmest tones—and the Reverend Charles Jenkinson could be very grim upon occasion—"very well, indeed! This is a pretty state of things—a state of things calculated to do credit to every one of you. Pray don't go," seeing that those who could exhibited a frantic desire to retreat, and were making off with unceremonious haste.

"Perhaps, gentlemen," he went on, with sarcastic emphasis, "when you have settled your little differences you will be so good as to explain if this is your idea of coming to bed. I must apologise for disturbing you; but my curiosity was so great I really could not wait until you'd brought the ceiling through."

And the Rev. Charles Jenkinson, with his hands under his coat-tails, surveyed the culprits with a bitter smile upon his face.

“The basins broken, I perceive; of course, it’s the least which could be expected; and the sheets torn into ribbons — it’s only natural. Pray have you disposed of the bedding, and broken up the bedsteads into walking-sticks? This is one of those occasions which are so eminently satisfactory to all concerned.”

And Mr. Jenkinson tried to look as though he meant it.

By this time the combatants were fully awake to the fact that some one besides themselves was on the scene; a shamefaced set they looked as they met the master’s eye; a more unpromising-looking group of young gentlemen it would be hard to find. Worst of all, they felt so miserably uncomfortable, as the immediate result of their little meeting, apart from the far more serious pains and penalties they might look forward to.

“When you are ready—when you are quite ready. Pray don’t hurry yourselves for me,” continued the sarcastic Mr. Jenkinson; the more indignant he was, the more sarcastic he became. “Perhaps those gentlemen who sleep in this room will retire into it, and those who sleep in some other will retire into that. You will hear of this again to-morrow.”

With downcast looks and uncomfortable bodies the gallant warriors returned from whence they came, Mr. Jenkinson bringing up the rear to see that they went straight to bed.

When they were once more between the sheets, damp, dirty, and disgusted, they were left alone to consider the situation.

“What a muff you were,” observed Maxwell Bromley beneath his breath to Tiny Maxted, “not to set some one to keep cave. We’ve all got into this mess through you.”

“What do you mean?” began Tiny; but he was interrupted by something very like a pebble being thrown against the window-pane. “Hollo!” he exclaimed with a groan; “there’s Geoffrey and Stornell! whoever’s going to let them in!”

CHAPTER IX.

RUNNING FROM THE DOCTOR.

WHEN Geoffrey Hazlemere and his friend Stornell found themselves alone in the open air, you will remember that their flight was hastened by the fear that their adventure was discovered, and they—literally speaking—were found out. So away they tore, striving to put as much ground as possible between themselves and any probability of pursuit.

It was not particularly pleasant travelling; on the contrary, it was about as unpleasant as it well could have been. Overhead the night was bright, the moon beamed from the starlit heavens; but under foot the ground was a mixture of mud, and slush, and snow.

“We won’t go along the road,” said Hazlemere, “but across the cricket-field.”

“We—shall—be—up—to—our—necks—in—snow!” panted Stornell, who was a heavy runner, and not over-fond of exercise.

“Can’t help it,” replied his friend. “That will be better than running into the arms of no one knows who.”

By this time they had reached the stile which led

into the fields; to reach the road they would have to bear round to their right, and then scramble through the hedge as best they could. This, however, Geoffrey had determined not to do. Before them lay the cricket-field, the rays of the moon giving it rather a desolate appearance, as they gleamed upon the wide expanse of snow; in more than one place it had drifted into wreaths which, running right across, gave it somewhat the appearance of a frozen sea with frozen waves; the only remnant of a path remaining was rendered anything but inviting by the thaw which had set in throughout the day. But Geoffrey was not to be deterred by unpromising surroundings; springing lightly over the stile, he commenced to make the best of his way across the field, Stornell, not too willingly, following close behind.

More than once they sank above their ankles; more than once they with difficulty saved themselves from falling headlong to the ground; but still they hurried on; and it was only when the greater part of the transit had been performed that they slackened speed. Then it was a remark of Stornell's which checked their pace.

"I say," gasped that young gentleman, struck by a sudden thought, "you—aren't going—through—the—avenue!"

"The avenue?" exclaimed Geoffrey, subsiding to a walk.

The avenue! It had never occurred to him that they would have to pass through that.

This same avenue had not a very attractive reputation; all sorts of tales were told of it; it figured in all the legends of the school. Whenever a young narrator wished to make his story unusually awful and blood-curdling, he dragged the avenue in; it was "The Ghost's Retreat," "The Demon's Haunt;" here, gossips said, the wicked abbot who, in the days when Dorrincourt was a monastery and not a school, earned unenviable notoriety for his various crimes, might be seen on moonlight nights walking up and down, mourning his past misdeeds. Here that celebrated knight who, once upon a time, lived somewhere hereabouts, would come, when the moon was at its full, a bloody sword held in his hand, to search for the villain who had slain his love. Why these eccentric individuals evinced such a curious partiality for the place, history sayeth not; it was sufficient for the dwellers in those parts that such was the case.

In broad daylight both Geoffrey and his friend would have laughed these things to scorn, but the present circumstances made the case peculiar. To begin with, they had neither of them particularly easy consciences, and an uneasy conscience is of all possessions the one least to be desired; they had neither of them altogether recovered from the shock they had received when Tiny shouted "Cave!" and in the last place, the scene was lonely, the night was cold, the moon uncanny, the hour late; and, what had perhaps as much

to do with it as anything else, neither of them had much opinion of the other's courage.

The place itself was, at such an hour, scarcely a lively one; in summer and in the daytime its native wildness made it an exceedingly picturesque and romantic scene; but this was not summer, and was not daytime.

At the end of the cricket-field was a sort of small plantation; in the centre of this the ground sank suddenly, forming what really was a dell, but was popularly called an avenue; this sank to a considerable depth; on either side were the banks and overhanging trees, which latter here and there grew so close together as to completely shade the path beneath. Now it does not require a lively imagination to perceive that such a place as this, in winter time, at night, when the snow lay thick upon the ground, was not exactly the sort of place which a nervous person would be likely to choose for a moonlight ramble, especially when to its natural peculiarities is added an intimate acquaintance with its reputation in the public mind.

Therefore it is little wonder that Masters Geoffrey Hazlemere and Alexander Stornell hesitated before plunging into its mysteries.

"Geoff," said Master Alexander, clutching that young gentleman's arm, "you're never going through that awful avenue?"

"Stuff!—awful avenue! What are you talking about?" answered Geoffrey, who was possessed of

more courage, and certainly more determination, than his friend; "you don't suppose I'm going back because of that? A nice sort of molly-coddle you must take me for!"

"But, Geoff, Geoff!" persisted the nervous Alexander, trying to get his arm through Hazlemere's, "'The Ghost's Retreat,' and 'The—the Demon's Haunt,' you know; and this is just the sort of night, you know, when they say that knight-fellow goes about with that awful sword of his, you know."

"Upon my word," replied Hazlemere, who, to do him justice, regarded Stornell and all about him with a contempt too deep for words, "of all the babies I have seen, if you are not the biggest! of all the curs, the very rankest! 'Ghost's Retreat' indeed! Come along! Don't stand there with your heart melting away as though it were made of butter!"

And holding the reluctant Alexander fast by the arm, he led him in the direction of the dell.

But when they reached the end of the cricket-field, and below them was the little winding path which led down to it, even he was struck by the perfect solitude and desolation of the scene. There was not a sound, save when the night breeze whispered through the rustling leaves; not a movement save when the shadows moved as the trees swayed to and fro. The moon cast half in shadow, and half in silvern glow; the snow gleamed white and cold. Nothing living seemed to linger in those

glades. Might something not living be lingering there?

"Oh! I say," groaned Alexander, who seemed to think there might, "supposing—supposing there's something there."

"Something there!" retorted Geoffrey, who had felt an eerie feeling creep over himself as he looked down upon the ghostly glade, the tones of gaiety in which he spoke being more assumed than real. "Well, you muff! supposing something's there! Supposing there's that jolly old knight with that jolly old sword of his! He's just the sort of fellow I should like to meet! Ghosts indeed! ha, ha, ha!"

But the sound of his laugh startled even himself. It was so strange.

"Don't!" exclaimed the valiant Alexander, who was shaking like an aspen leaf; "for the sake of goodness, don't! Supposing any—anything's really there, how do you think they'd like your laughing at 'em? Oh! don't I wish I'd never come! What a lunatic I am!"

"Lunatic! I should think you are to talk such utter balderdash!" said Geoffrey, whose complete contempt for his companion supplied him with fictitious courage. "Come along! You don't imagine I'm going to stop here till midnight because you don't happen to have any more courage than a cat!"

A naturalist would probably have told him that a cat who did not evince more courage than Stornell

did just then would have been an exceptional animal, and an unworthy specimen of the feline race. But Geoffrey was too excited to pick his words.

With a great show of determination he climbed over the stile and stood upon the other side. It was rather because the greater of two evils seemed to be the probability of being left alone than any other reason, which induced Stornell to follow his lead.

Below them lay the silent trees, the untrodden snow. Arm-in-arm, Stornell very white and very shaky, they descended to the dell. All was still.

"What's that?" asked Stornell, holding Hazlemere with both hands. "O Geoff! I say, whatever's that?"

And he looked as though he only needed a little more to bring him helpless to the ground.

"That?" said Geoffrey, with an anxious glance. "That's the wind whistling among the trees. It often does on winter nights."

So they went on again.

When they reached the bottom of the path, and were about to plunge into the shadow of the trees, they paused again, looking about them in rather suspicious fashion. Still silence, and roundabout and overhead a mysterious gloom.

"I say," observed Stornell, "is— isn't it dark?"

"What's the use of going on like that," demanded Geoffrey, with more courtesy than he had used before. "You make a fellow feel quite queer."

If he felt as queerly as he spoke, then he felt very queer indeed.

They entered the dell. The overhanging bank and the trees obscured the moon's bright rays. All was dark on every side.

"Did you see that?" inquired Geoffrey in a sepulchral tone, when they had advanced about a dozen steps.

"Wha—a—at!" gasped Alexander, holding on to Geoffrey as though he were the most precious thing in all the world.

"Tha—at!" answered Hazlemere; "something moving on the right."

Something moving on the right? Then if he saw something moving on the right, considering that it was so dark you were unable to see your hand in front of you, he must have been gifted with remarkable powers of vision. But perhaps folks are on rare occasions.

"Let—let's go on," said Stornell. "For goodness' sake do—don't let's get stopping here."

They went on, casting anxious glances on either side of them, looking for that something Geoffrey was under the impression he had seen. Now they stumbled over some unseen obstacle; now they stepped up to their knees in a drift of snow; now they ran full tilt against a tree. It was a change for the better when they were once more under the moon's clear light.

But even that light was not without its disadvantages. It made everything so plain, yet so uncertain; for the moon is the most treacherous of lamps. They could see, yet were doubtful what they

saw. Trees looked like giants; their shadows glancing on the snow took the shapes of stranger things. They started at they knew not what. All was fanciful and strange.

They were about half-way through the dell. For some time neither had spoken a word. They were oppressed and overpowered by the spirit of the place. They walked—crept rather—slowly on; they had not the presence of mind to hasten through. They feared to see, yet could not keep their eyes from searching for what might be seen.

It was as they passed the great oak-tree—the oak round whose stem the legend said the fairies had once a fairy ring—there, as they were passing this great oak-tree they saw something which made their blood run cold, and rooted them like statues to the ground.

Geoffrey saw it first. He knew not what it was; he was doubtful whether it really was something which he saw, or one more delusion of his mind. But then it forced itself upon him; it was too true. The thing was there.

The thing was there! He gave a low cry beneath his breath, and started back in fear. Then Stornell, following the direction of his eyes, saw what he saw too, and with an exclamation, half cry, half groan, flung his arms about his friend, and shrank in terror.

There they stood, motionless—senseless nearly, unable to move, or speak, or cry. What was this awful thing?

They could not say; they did not know. That increased the horror of their situation. It might be something, or it might be—no matter what.

There, just where the moonlight shone the brightest, was outlined a curious shadow. Was it shade, or was it real? It was not cast by tree, or shrub, or bank of earth. There were the legs, the body, the head as well. But it was in the form of what? They could not say.

They dared not look whence it might come. They dared not think. They only stared upon that shadow lying there.

How long they stood, how long they stared, they could not say. Time flies on awful wings in moments such as those. Hazlemere afterwards declared that he was just about to ask Stornell what he thought it was when—the shadow moved.

The shadow moved! Undoubtedly it moved, and with a movement towards them. By whatever thing it might be thrown, that thing was advancing towards them. They would have given all they had—no great sum, by the way—to have had the power to flee. But as yet it had not come.

Down came the shadow. It was moving down the bank. What should—what could they do? All was so still, all was so dense; they were so entirely alone when it burst upon their aching eyes; who knew not what might not happen?

Lower and lower, nearer and nearer it came. In another second they must see it, with or without their own consent.

They did—it was but for a moment; it was but one single glance. It was enough for them.

They turned and fled.

Fled through the dell as though the Evil One himself were at their heels! Fled, helter-skelter, anyhow, careless of nothing but that their safety might be secured in flight.

And as they flew, a sound rose through the air, loud and long, travelling over the country, awaking the echoes far and wide. And, as they heard, the faster waxed their flight.

It was only when they were right through the dell, and all its mystery was left behind, that they paused in their wild career, and then only because Stornell was so short of breath he could literally run no longer.

When Alexander stopped, Geoffrey stopped too. They were as hot as they well could be, panting like grampuses; and they took out their handkerchiefs to wipe their heated brows; they walked on for some time without exchanging a word, possibly because they had not breath enough for speech. Then Hazle-mere broke the silence—

“Well, you’re a nice sort of fellow! you’re a pretty muff! You’re a study for a coward! Did ever any one see such a cur before!”

“You’re the sort of fellow to talk!” retorted Alexander. “I know I wasn’t so bad as you! I shouldn’t have run away if you hadn’t done it first. I ran after you,”—which was true in a sense; “I wanted to stop you, but I couldn’t get the chance,”

—which was perhaps as remarkable a statement as he had made.

“You wanted to stop me!—you—!” a word did not occur to Geoffrey which seemed strong enough. “Bah! Run away from—a thing like that! Don’t talk to me!”

“Don’t talk to you! I’ll wring your neck if you don’t take care who you’re talking to!”

“Wring my neck? you! What! a fellow who bolts from a donkey, and is ready to sink into the ground with fright when he hee-haws! Yah! If ever you get home, ask your nurse to tie you to her apron-strings!”

With suchlike elegant discourse they beguiled the tediousness of the way.

There could be no doubt that that dreadful form which cast that awful shadow in the dell was a donkey. They had the evidence of their own senses in proof of it. That they had no doubt about. They had seen it with their own eyes, and with their own ears they had heard its melodious voice. The question in dispute was, why had they run away? They knew it was a donkey directly they set eyes on it. It was only when they knew it was a donkey that they flew as though Satan was at their heels. It is a question which has not, I believe, been satisfactorily answered to this day.

They found no answer to it then. They wrangled and squabbled all the way, pot calling kettle black; each laying his own act at the other’s

door. It was only when they reached their journey's end that they even momentarily ceased from quarrelling.

They had been walking for some distance on the high road, having probably had enough of short cuts across fields and through by-ways.

They were now entering the precincts of the village. A number of the villagers, simple folk, were ere this in bed and fast asleep, but here and there a light gleamed through a window-frame.

Down the straggling street they passed until what was apparently the end of it was reached. Here the cottages seemed to terminate. But a little farther on, lying back from the road, was a straggling building, where the inmates were still evidently awake.

This was the "Half-Way House," kept by Mr. Joseph Anderson, neither the inn nor its proprietor having the best of characters.

Here they stopped, hesitating a minute, and then advanced to the straggling building. The door was closed, although the sound of voices was plainly audible within; and Geoffrey was proceeding to knock with his knuckles by way of calling the attention of those inside, when, turning, he found to his amazement that Stornell, who a moment before had stood at his back, had disappeared. He was listening in astonishment to what was in all probability the sound of Master Alexander's footsteps retreating in all haste along the lane, when some one

moved to his side, and a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

“Who’s that?” he asked, taken by surprise.

He turned to look.

It was Dr. Macqueen.

CHAPTER X.

A SCENE IN SCHOOL.

It was the doctor; there could be no doubt of that; how Geoffrey wished there could! He would have been willing to sink into the ground and fade from sight for ever in that first moment of recognition. That is not seldom the inclination of guilty consciences when discovered in their guilt, but the ground refuses to open and swallow them up. Then a wild desire came upon him for instant flight; but the doctor's grasp was too firm upon his shoulder for any chance of that. Besides, what would be the use of it supposing he did succeed in getting free? it was not capture, but discovery—recognition he had feared.

The doctor's face, seen with the moonbeams lighting on it, was unusually grave and stern; there was a troubled look in his eyes Geoffrey failed to understand; and when he spoke, it was not, as he expected his speech would be, hard or angry, but subdued and gentle, almost as though he hesitated what to say.

“Was there,” he asked, “was there not another?”

Hazlemere, who had recovered from the first shock of fear, with that instinct of self-preservation, that

generosity which was peculiar to him, immediately jumped to the conclusion that if he were to tell the doctor who had been his companion he might manage to throw most of—if not all—the blame upon Master Alexander's shoulders.

With this laudable intention he was about to commence a voluble explanation as to how it was all Stornell who had led him into all kinds of trouble, and if it had not been for him he would never have thought of such a thing at all, and if he might only be forgiven this time upon his word of honour he would never do anything again, when the doctor cut him short, he having got no farther than the words,—

“Yes, sir, there was, sir; it was”——

I am afraid he was going to apply some uncomplimentary epithet to his friend Stornell, when the doctor stopped him with a movement of his hand.

“Silence!” he said, in a very different tone of voice to that which he had used before, “I won't listen to you now.”

There was a pause, and then the doctor spoke again, this time in a manner more familiar to him.

“Very good, sir, very good indeed! you young reprobate! If you want to tempt the gallows, pity I should baulk your wish; perhaps you've some friends inside this—this abode of decency and grace.”

“No, sir,” replied Hazlemere, seized with a new fear, and not particular as to telling the truth, “I never saw the place before, sir; it was all that”——

He was about to make another attempt to drag in his friend Stornell, but again the doctor would not hear.

“Oh, the first time, the first time. Hum! you’re the boy who likes cigars; the first time, eh?”

He paused, never moving his glance from Geoffrey’s face. That young gentleman, whose cue was penitence, tried to look the picture of humility, and did his best to summon tears to his unwilling eyes.

“When you’ve had enough of standing still and catching cold—I daresay you like catching cold as much as smoking—perhaps you’ll come away.”

And, still with his hand upon his captive’s shoulder, he turned, and commenced to march him along the lane.

This mode of progression was the reverse of pleasant; in the first place, it is distinctly humiliating to be dragged along as though a policeman’s hand was on your shoulder; and in the second, the doctor being distinctly the shorter of the two, took nearly two steps to Geoffrey’s one, so that to keep up with him Hazlemere had to incline slightly sideways, and to change step every minute or so.

Feeling this distinctly uncomfortable, he mildly suggested that if the doctor would release his hold he would not make the slightest effort to escape. To his surprise this was the answer thundered back at him,—

“Let you go! you impudent young vagabond!”

Geoffrey winced; it was said loud enough for all the world to hear.

“I would as soon think of taking my hand from off your shoulder, or trusting to a word you say, as I would of hopping over that hedge there! A *boy*, a young BOY,” with emphasis, “who smokes cigars and frequents public-houses at this hour of the night, needs some one to keep a tight hold on him for his own sake, if nothing else.”

After this expression of opinion, shouted rather than spoken, Geoffrey deemed discretion the better part of valour, and held his tongue. So they pursued their journey in such fashion as the doctor chose.

Bitterly did Geoffrey regret his folly—to use a mild word—then; that walk alone was punishment enough to last his whole life long. It was very cold, he had neither scarf, overcoat, nor gloves to keep him warm; he had only a thin coat on. The doctor, who was muffled to the chin in wraps of every kind, was physically incapable of walking fast. This was bad enough, and Geoffrey was soon half-numbed with cold; but to make it worse, not only did the doctor entirely ignore the dire discomfort of his position, but he himself was so heated by the exercise that every twenty yards or so he pulled up short to wipe his perspiring brow, and at each stoppage, totally regardless that Hazlemere was ready to cry with cold, he poured on him such a flood of sarcasm and scorn that, as he afterwards said, half-a-dozen thrashings would have been better than any single word of it.

But everything must have an end, and so had that

memorable journey. When they reached the school, the doctor would not go round to the private entrance, of which he had a key, but went to the great hall door, pulling the bell and plying the knocker with sufficient noise to alarm everybody in the place. The consequence was that, when the door was opened, there was a small crowd assembled to do honour to their reception, masters, monitors, and servants, in the background being the dainty figure of Miss Emily Macqueen, who was possibly not very regular in her goings to bed. This was perhaps the bitterest pill of all.

“I’ve brought this boy,” observed the doctor, addressing the wondering crowd—“I’ve brought this boy home from a public-house—a boy who smokes cigars of course likes public-houses—and I’m not going to lose sight of him till he’s in bed.”

And he did not either; he marched him upstairs while they watched and wondered, and never removed his hand from off his shoulder till they were in the dormitory again.

There the boys had been expecting his arrival with no small sensation of alarm.

Stornell, as we know, had managed to beat a retreat, and it was Stornell who announced his presence by throwing a pebble at the window almost directly after Mr. Jenkinson had left them to their own reflections. With some difficulty they had admitted him, only to find that he was so overcome by what looked very much like fear, and so worn out by the exertions he had made, that he was

incapable of giving any explanation of the reason why Geoffrey had not accompanied him. This explanation, however, was sufficiently supplied when the doctor brought him in as the policeman brings the thief who has tried to run away.

It need, perhaps, hardly be said that, although every boy in the room was wide awake, and listening with ears wide open, every eye was closed, and they feigned the soundest slumber. Therefore it was with no little relish that they heard the observations the doctor addressed to Hazlemere as he ushered him to bed.

At the end, when he was undressed and prepared to go between the sheets, he said something of a different kind.

“If I were you,” he said—and they were surprised at the sudden earnestness with which he spoke—“if I were you, before another minute of this night has passed away I would kneel down in prayer to God, praying as never you prayed before; praying that you may never be found again where you were found to-night—praying that you may be no more led into temptation in the days to come; for you have been guilty—have sinned—have taken one step down the road, the bottom of which God grant you may never see. Give me your hand.”

He let him take it rather than give it him. They were standing by the bedside then, while the boys listened with hearing unnaturally keen—

“God bless you, Geoffrey Hazlemere, and make

you a better boy, so that you may do Him honour when you are a man."

Then, without waiting to see whether Geoffrey did or did not follow his advice, and kneel in prayer, he turned and went.

The boys kept perfect silence for a minute or more after he had gone, watching to see what Hazlemere would do.

He stood by the bedside, as though doubtful what to do, his head bent slightly forward, and his body in an attitude of hesitation; then with a sudden gesture he drew himself upright, and, clenching his fist, shook it at the door through which the doctor had disappeared, muttering something beneath his breath which was not exactly kindly.

At this, Tiny Maxted, who slept in the bed next to his, could keep still no longer. Half-sitting up in bed, he murmured in accents of mellifluous tenderness—

"Poor Geoff! poor Geoff!! poor Geoff!!!"

And while an expression of fury transfigured Master Geoffrey's countenance, he discovered that there had been undesired spectators of the little scene between the doctor and himself, when he heard all round the room, in different sharps and flats,—

"Poor Geoff! *poor Geoff!* POOR GEOFF!"

Whereat the last remnant of good humour which was left to him fled into thin air.

"You're a pack of idiots!" he cried, in language which was not precisely courteous, "and I don't care

that for every one of you," snapping his fingers in a rage.

"I say," inquired the sympathetic Tiny, "I hope he hasn't put out your collar-bone? I never saw any one treated so unkindly in my life."

"What must your feelings be!" continued Maxwell Bromley, in the same charitable strain. "Fancy being hauled along just like a common thief."

And Hazlemere writhed as he remembered the walk along the lane.

"Geoffrey," put in Stornell, whose fearful curiosity got the better of his weariness, and who spoke in even hoarser tones than usual, "what's he going to do to you? Do you think he saw me running away?"

At the mention of his running away there was a laugh from every one, as though the idea of flight was most comical.

"If you say another word to me," gnashed the frantic Hazlemere, "I shall say and do things which you'll be sorry for, so if you take my advice you'll hold your tongue."

With that oracular threat he plunged between the sheets, and try how they would, not another word could they get out of him.

The morning which followed was noticeable for a scene occurring in the sixth-form classroom which, coupled with other matters on which we shall dwell in their due places, directly led up to those events which made that term a famous one.

The day dawned with rain and mist; the frost

died in the early morn, and as the darkness faded the light was ushered in by a melancholy thaw. The day was as dull as the circumstances marking it were distinctly the reverse.

It must be remembered that there were several young gentlemen who awoke to consciousness with uneasy consciences. Geoffrey Hazlemere, who had causes for anxiety enough and to spare; Stornell, who, ignorant of how much the doctor knew of his share in the overnight transactions, was yet afraid to ask; the whole occupants of the two rooms who had wrought such deeds of daring with their bolsters,—these, it is not necessary to remark, had every reason for hoping things would go off pleasantly, yet fearing they would not.

It was observed from the commencement of studies in the monitorial classroom that the air, so to speak, was charged with electricity. There was something they could not understand in the doctor's manner, something which, as Boltington—with scant respect—afterwards put it, was more exasperating than ever. And this manner of his they noticed was particularly trying to Henry Boltington.

To all appearances there was little doubt that so he intended it to be. Why, they were at a loss to comprehend; but he seemed determined to make him conscious of a sense of his displeasure. This Boltington himself was quick to see; indeed, although—as he declared later—he was unaware of anything he had done which deserved such treatment, it would appear that he had been guilty of

some grave fault, with which the doctor was acquainted, and which he was resolute not to overlook.

This, and the sense of his injustice, fired Boltington's hot temper, and the result was a scene deplorable on all accounts.

From the beginning the master and the pupil were evidently at cross-purposes, but the scene to which I am specially referring had risen in a doubtful passage in the morning's lesson. Otway, Dodwell, and one or two of those whose knowledge was generally the most accurate, were beaten, and could make neither head nor tail of it; it passed from one to the other until it came to Henry Boltington. Now, Boltington, as was not too commonly the case with him, had the lesson at his fingers' ends; once or twice already he had surprised his colleagues by his unusual knowledge, and not only his colleagues, but seemingly the doctor more than any one.

The way in which he had got up his work seemed to have a curious effect upon the headmaster. More than once he had dropped unpleasant hints, and indeed seemed almost suspicious as to the means employed to enable him to make so good a figure in the class. This galled Boltington exceedingly; this fact was that Tom Jackson and he had spent a quiet evening together overnight, working their very hardest to get up their several tasks. The idea, therefore, the doctor appeared to have, that he had taken advantage of some dishonourable assistance in the preparation of his work, when the

fact was so very much the contrary, irritated him more than he would have cared to say.

The passage in question, therefore, having passed Otway, Dodwell, and the rest, came down to him, whereupon, with flushed face and flashing eyes—the consequences of his irritation—but without the slightest hesitation, he proceeded to give a remarkably clear and correct translation. There was perfect silence when he had finished, the doctor regarding him with a curious expression in his eyes.

“Well, Master Boltington,” he had an odd, old-fashioned way of prefixing “Master” when addressing the sixth-form boys, “that’s good, very good; so good as to do you credit. You are possibly aware that that is almost word for word the version given by a more eminent translator than yourself; possibly that is a coincidence. It is odd to find that so good a rendering should have been stolen by another before it”—he paused—“occurred to you.”

There was an undercurrent of meaning, of insinuation, in the doctor’s words; at least so it seemed to those who heard, in particular to Boltington.

He looked up with a face flushed fiery red, and speaking in a tone which, as Dodwell remarked, gave them all cold shivers down their backs, asked—

“Do you mean to insinuate, sir, that I have used a crib?”

They could not make out the doctor’s face. A look of indignation passed over it, as he looked back upon the lad; there was an ominous threat in the

tightening of his lips, as he replied in a manner which, so far as they could perceive, was entirely without warrant on his part.

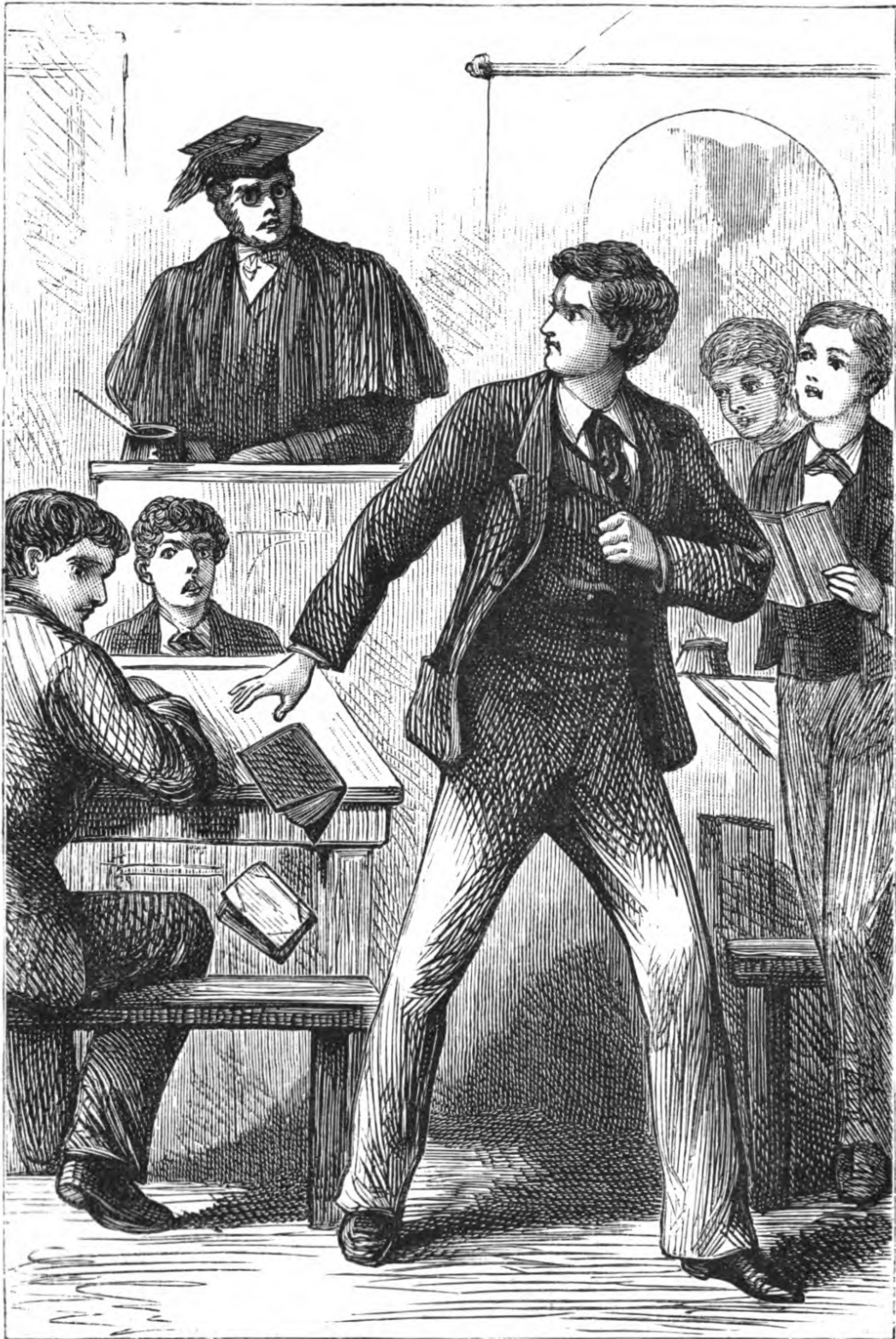
“Suspect you—a monitor—a young gentleman in the sixth form—of anything so base! Is it possible? Such as you would not dream of baseness—of tempting a younger one to sin. Doubtless you would consider it an insult,” with cutting sarcasm, “if an imputation of aught dishonourable were charged to you.”

Boltington from fiery red had become as white as a sheet; the boys were staring at each other in bewilderment; there was mystery in the air; a bombshell seemed to have fallen in their midst, which might explode they knew not when or how. What was the matter? And what had he done? In tones, whose intense calmness they felt rather than knew veiled a hurricane of passion, he replied—

“Dr. Macqueen, if you have anything to say to me, you will be so good as to say it out. It is not the action of a man—whether it is befitting a gentleman, I leave yourself to judge—to insinuate charges you dare not make.”

To their amazement—almost to their terror—Dr. Macqueen came upon him with a thunderclap of rage, very much as he treated Hazlemere the night before.

“You dare to speak to me like that!—you!—you!! Boy, how dare you stand before your Maker so?”



"Flinging his books with a crash upon the desk, rushing from his seat he dashed from the room."

—Page 141.

“Dare!” returned Boltington, whose passion was lighted by the other’s; “it is not I who do not dare! It is not I who am the coward! I dare speak what I feel; you feel what you dare not speak!”

“You impudent young vagabond!” cried the doctor, springing to his feet, apparently aghast at the boy’s presumption—you will remember you have heard these words from his lips before—“I don’t know whether to be more amazed at your impudence, or the wickedness it hides.”

“Wickedness!” stormed Boltington, in his turn springing to his feet. Those near him put out their hands to keep him down, thinking to restrain him within the bounds of prudence, but he turned upon them like a lion in a fury:—“Leave me alone! how dare you lay your hands on me!” and he used his own with such effect that two or three of the monitors went toppling on the floor. Then, turning again to the doctor, “Wickedness!” he stormed, “if you were half your age, and anything like a match for me, I would make you eat your own words, even though they choked you in the act.”

He was beside himself with rage; the doctor, seeing it, instantly perceiving his error, regaining the command of his own temper, said, with a quietness which gave new dignity to his manner, and new power to his words—

“Boltington, leave the room, and retire to your own until I send for you.”

Flinging his books with a crash upon the desk,

rushing from his seat he dashed from the room, more like a bull afflicted with temporary madness, than any more rational being.

Without, he met some-one advancing in the direction he was going—a little boy; it was Tom Jackson.

“What is the matter?” asked Tom, frightened at his looks.

“Tom,” cried Boltington, catching him up, and lifting him into the air, “he called me wicked! wicked! I must write and tell the mother that I was trying to be better, but have turned out worse instead! A pleasant sort of tale to tell! This is a fit reward for diligence!”

And he rushed on, leaving Tom to think it over.

CHAPTER XI.

A PROMISING YOUNG GENTLEMAN.

GEOFFREY HAZLEMERE was troubled with an uneasy conscience. He had cause enough for being so. Wherever he looked the outlook was a most unpromising one. Without having in any way fulfilled the purpose which had taken him to "The Half-Way House" the night preceding, he was threatened with all the unpleasantness of discovery. In no direction did consolation seem to offer. On the one hand was the doctor, on the other various difficulties into which we will not too particularly inquire.

The only loophole through which hope might enter seemed the possibility of being able to shift as much of the blame as circumstances might allow on to his friend Stornell. Geoffrey Hazlemere was not heroic—he was not heroic in any sense, either moral, mental, or physical. He was always ready to sacrifice a companion in folly, if by so doing he could save himself. Honour was a quality of which he was entirely ignorant. Supposing two lines of action, one an honourable, the other dishonourable, both leading, or seeming to lead, to the same end, he

would have been ready any day to choose the baser one.

His tastes were low, his paths tortuous; he had a certain amount of intellectual power, all of which was concentrated in the wrong direction. He was a coward, and mistook cunning and double-dealing for clever policy.

So when word was brought him that the doctor wished to see him in his study, his pallid face grew more pallid still. Beads of perspiration, which in him were inevitable signs of the extremest agitation, stood on his forehead. In a half-hearted fashion he took out his handkerchief, and wiped them off with nervous hands.

There was a look in his small black eyes as of one who would harm you if he could, and hates you because you fill his guilty soul with fear.

Beneath his breath he vowed that if by the sacrifice of Stornell any portion of the storm which he saw threatening could be turned aside, without the slightest hesitation should that sacrifice be made.

On the way he met his friend. Master Alexander was loitering about with the evident intention of intercepting his progress. His state of mind was every whit as pitiable as Hazlemere's—two gallant youths!

As Geoffrey came along, he slouched forward, and caught him by the arm.

"Geoffrey," he whined; "Geoffrey, you won't tell him it was I?"

Geoffrey stopped, and glared at him like a wolf





"The doctor looked up as he came in, and kept his eyes fixed on him."—Page 145.

upon some creature he would like dearly to attack, but dare not for his life!

“Won’t I tell him?—won’t I?” he hissed in a sort of senseless fury. “Wait till I get the chance, and I’ll tell him it was your fault all through!”

With a sudden movement he flung off Alexander’s hand, hurrying on before he had recovered himself sufficiently to call him back. So Master Alexander was left to reflect on the oft-quoted proverb concerning the honour which exists between two thieves.

Geoffrey found the doctor in his study, his arms resting on the writing-table and crossed in front of him. Not unnaturally, with a quick, keen glance, he endeavoured to read the signs of the times by noting the expression of his master’s face. But he found it was beyond his power—more than he could do. He was puzzled. There was a look as it were of pain,—he could not understand at all. He was ignorant of the scene which had so recently taken place in the monitors’ classroom.

The doctor looked up as he came in and kept his eyes fixed on him. But beyond that he made no acknowledgment of his entrance.

Geoffrey was in no fit state to bear with ease so keen a scrutiny of his appearance. He shuffled from foot to foot, he wriggled his head from side to side, he looked up and he looked down, but the doctor never swerved in his glance. It was more than he could stand. The doctor seemed determined not to speak; but to keep him waiting, trembling, shivering there.

So at last, driven nearly to desperation, in quavering accents he ventured to suggest—

“If you please, sir, they told me that you wished to speak to me.”

The doctor gave no answer.

He might have been temporarily dumb. He still kept his keen glance fixed on his young friend and never moved a muscle!

“If you please, sir,” he repeated, somewhat louder, as though he thought it just possible that the other might not have heard him, “they told me that you wished to speak to me.”

But still the doctor said never a word.

Just when Hazlemere was beginning to think that he must certainly make a run for it, for he could stand this merciless inspection not a minute longer, the answer came. But it was hardly the kind he had looked forward to. That was one of the peculiarities of the new headmaster, one could never be sure of the humour in which he would be found. Now he seemed in a dreamy reverie, as though his thoughts were elsewhere.

“They told you that I wished to speak to you,” he repeated, as though mechanically. “Oh, they told you that I wished to speak to you. Indeed! And what did they say I wished to say?”

Geoffrey looked at him, surprised almost into courage. What did he mean? Was the doctor in a dream? Hardly. Yet when he spoke again he took him entirely aback. This was not the sort of

thing he had expected by any means; there was a strange new sweetness in his voice.

“Geoffrey?—Geoffrey Hazlemere?” It was as though he were saying the name over to himself. “Are you wholly bad, my boy? Is there nowhere a longing for a better part? Come, tell me, what was the fashion of your home?”

Geoffrey was so staggered by the question that he had not a tongue to speak. But that did not seem to matter; on went the doctor, still in the same dreamy, contemplative reverie.

“None of us are wholly bad. We are made for God, not made for sin. Like an organ, on which many notes are dead, our fingers wander along the keys; not a sound, until at last one note is struck which is sweet and full of melody. Is it so with Geoffrey Hazlemere? Find out—find out the one note, and play on that till one and then another is alive, and all unite in harmonious strain.”

He paused, while Geoffrey listened open-mouthed; he was beginning to wonder whether the doctor united to his other peculiarities a weakness in his intellect. But he was mistaken; Dr. Macqueen was hale in mind and body too, as he showed by reverting to the subject which was principally occupying Hazlemere's mind. The change from his dreamy wanderings to the abruptness of his usual manner was a sudden one.

“Well, so have come—you've come. It's no good your pretending that you don't know what I have to say to you, because you do; you've practised

too much deception already, without adding to it now."

He stopped, and Geoffrey began trembling afresh, putting on a look which he intended to suggest the humblest penitence.

"I know who was with you," continued the doctor; and Geoffrey wondered if that were so why Stornell was not standing by his side; "and it is because I know that I treat you as I am about to do—dependent, that's to say, upon your own behaviour. There's no excuse for you. I don't excuse you. You're bad enough; yes, boy, you're bad enough; but your—your accomplice is worse than you."

Hazlemere stared; how did he discover that? He felt that in this there was something he did not understand.

"A boy—a senior always influences his juniors. Boys are simpletons; where the big one goes, the little ones always follow. Geoffrey Hazlemere, why did you suffer him to lead you astray?"

Hazlemere was so entirely at a loss to comprehend whither the doctor's words and thoughts were drifting that, almost unintentionally, the words slipped from his lips—

"I don't know what you mean!"

"Don't know what I mean!" thundered the doctor, with a sudden change of tone, rising from his seat. "How dare you, boy! Was or was not that Henry Boltington who went out with you last night?"

“Henry——!” gasped Geoffrey, and then stopped short.

In an instant he perceived the doctor’s error, how he had fallen into it he had no idea; presumably he had mistaken Stornell’s size and figure, as seen in the uncertain moonlight, from the back, and in the distance. And the same instant he saw, or thought he did—how he was mistaken, events soon proved—how that error might be turned to his advantage. It is probable that had he had a minute for reflection he would have hesitated before taking the step he did; but before that minute came the step was taken.

“Do you hear me?” repeated the doctor, attributing his not answering to another cause; “was or was not that Henry Boltington?”

Still Geoffrey did not speak. If he had known what had happened in the sixth-form room, if he had known how the doctor’s suspicions had found expression there, he would have felt as though he had something to guide him, and not as though he were plunging blindly into the dark.

It was this suspicion, this almost certainty that it was Boltington he had seen with Geoffrey Hazlemere, that had made the doctor so incredulous as to the opportunity he had had for the due and proper preparation of his work, for the monitor’s work could hardly be finished till long after the juniors had gone to bed.

But of all this Hazlemere was ignorant; he did not know that so scandalous a scene had occurred

already; but he did know, or might have known—having the best reason for being acquainted with the general terms existing between the master and his pupil—that an answer in the affirmative, apart from other considerations altogether, would, in all probability, completely blast Boltington in the eyes of Dr. Macqueen.

But the only thought then in his mind was that if the doctor imagined that he suspected Boltington with cause, it was evident from his manner that the great proportion of the blame would be shifted from himself on to the senior boy; what a relief that would be, only he could tell.

With that natural quickness which was peculiar to him, a plan entered his head by means of which he hoped to screen himself and yet hide his treachery from Boltington; and this he immediately proceeded to put into practice.

“I don’t think, sir, you ought to ask me such a question,” he stammered, trying to persuade the doctor that the idea of discovering a companion was repugnant to his nature. “I—I—if you please, sir, I don’t think I ought to tell.”

“Oh, you don’t think you ought to tell,” replied the doctor, grimly watching him; “you don’t think you ought to tell, indeed, brave boy! And you don’t think such an answer tells me all I want to know, sly fellow! honourable lad, not to confess who it was who led you into sin.”

Geoffrey writhed at this; but the doctor, who saw his manifest uneasiness, mistook altogether the

cause of it; he had no notion that this young gentleman was really playing a part which was to lead from one misunderstanding to another. Poor though his opinion was of Master Hazlemere, he had no suspicion how much poorer it ought to be.

With a dexterity which discredited him, Geoffrey led his master from one quagmire to another.

“Sir—sir,” he began, “if I tell you all, promise me that you will not say a word to—to Boltington. O sir! promise me that you will not say a word to him!” and the young gentleman tottered forward, clasping his hands in front of him in earnest supplication. “It—it was not all his fault,”—which was very kind of him—“it was mine as well; but I—I shouldn’t have done it if it hadn’t been for him. But O sir! O doctor! if you will forgive him this once—this once only—if you will not tell him a word that I have said, I promise you—I swear to you that I will never do anything again!”

There was such pathos, such pleading, such feeling in Geoffrey’s voice, that the doctor was fairly surprised; his appearance was as one whose whole heart was in his words, every muscle in his body was quivering, his agitation was so extreme that it almost seemed as though he would fall helpless to the ground, the tears—for with much difficulty he managed to call out his tears at last—the tears were streaming down his cheeks; so heart-breaking was his appearance, that the doctor momentarily feared that a hysterical fit would over-

come him. He himself was touched by the boy's condition, and endeavoured to soothe the excitement which mastered him.

"Come, come," he said, "be easy, boy; this will not do, you will make yourself ill if you don't take care."

"No, no," cried Geoffrey, in a positive scream this time, startling the doctor not a little. "I can't be easy—I can't—I can't! Promise me that you will not say a word to him?"

And he evinced every symptom of hysteria.

"Come, Geoffrey Hazlemere," said the doctor authoritatively, determined to calm the boy's excitement, and little thinking how easy that process might be made; "I say, this will not do; be still; command yourself. Do you wish me to treat you like a child? This comes of smoking; destroys your nerves, makes you like a baby in long clothes."

And under the influence of the doctor's words Hazlemere gradually calmed down. But still he was not himself; in a sort of whimper he kept repeating beneath his breath—

"Promise me—promise me—promise me you will not say a word to him."

Finally, the doctor promised him—or what was equivalent to it; so his end was gained. The doctor's thoughts took this course: Supposing he did not promise, supposing he straightway charged Boltington with his delinquency, what good might be expected to accrue from it? Doubtless—so he

argued—Boltington already knew he was acquainted with his character, his fault; if he went further in the matter he would be compelled to punish him; and he remembered Dr. Graham's words, not harshness but forbearance, not punishment but forgiveness, was needed with Henry Boltington. No, the mere fact that he felt that he was understood, and yet unpunished, would possibly soften his heart, persuading him to improve in the time to come.

Again, there was Hazlemere to be considered—so there was, but not in the sense Dr. Macqueen imagined; that weak, meek, penitent, sensitive young gentleman might be won by gentleness, lost by severity. If his plea were granted, if Boltington were pardoned, he must be pardoned too. Who knew what effect tenderness would have upon his future conduct? Who indeed! So the doctor thus delivered himself—

“Boy, on two conditions—two conditions, I'll attend to what you say. One—one, Geoffrey Hazlemere; just you listen attentively to what I am saying,” and the doctor held up his finger warningly, it being an observation unnecessary to make, for Geoffrey was listening with might and main; “I want you to give me your promise, solemn promise, that you will do your best to steer clear of this sort of behaviour in the future.”

Geoffrey's lips were open in a moment.

“Yes, sir. O yes, sir! I swear”——

“You will do nothing of the kind!” stormed Dr. Macqueen. “How dare you talk to me like that?”

Is that the sort of language you have been taught to use?"

Geoffrey was humble instantly.

"I promise—I promise solemnly that I will try to behave better in the future, sir."

"Very well, you promise—you have promised, mind. I shall enter it in my notebook, where it will stand to charge you if ever that promise is forgotten."

Geoffrey tried to look as though such a thing was impossible with him.

"And the second condition is, the second"—and up went the doctor's finger again—"I want you to promise me that you will have as little intercourse with Henry Boltington as possible. Mind, I should prefer your having none at all; and I shall consider that your promise conveys the understanding that whatever intercourse you are forced to have with him will be as good as none at all."

Geoffrey hesitated. This he had hardly bargained for; but since he had one foot upon the road there was no use in turning back, so he promised that as well.

"Good," said the doctor, scanning him once more from head to foot; "very good. There is no excuse for you. I don't excuse you; but I expect you to live in the future, and not in the past, and make that future as different from the past as it well can be."

"And you won't say anything to Boltington about—about last night, or—or anything I have said to

you?" timidly inquired Hazlemere, whose thoughts journeyed in a very different direction to the doctor's.

"I shall say nothing to him, nothing whatever, on the past; the future is in his hands and yours; and that is more than he deserves or you either. Now go."

And Geoffrey went.

In leaving the room, and while walking along the passage which led immediately from the study, his demeanour was meek and penitent—he looked the model of all that a well-conducted young gentleman ought to be. But when he passed through the door which divided the doctor's private room from the remainder of the school buildings, his appearance changed at once. Drawing himself to his full height, an evil smile came to his face, and snapping his fingers, he executed a figure which I believe is called the "double-shuffle." Then, thrusting his hands into his trousers' pockets, he strolled along.

"Well, of all the old sillies I ever heard of, if he is not the silliest! Boltington!—the idea of its being Boltington! Ho, ho! did any one ever hear of such a thing? Well, I never thought I should get off scot-free like this."

And humming a pleasant little song, he went along with a sweet smile upon his face. To look at him you would have thought that he had just come from a delightful little meeting, at which he had behaved as a boy of honour would, and that his heart was glad at the thought of his own probity.

But something which took place a few steps farther on put a different complexion on affairs.

A boy came running along the corridor, holding a letter in his hand.

“Hazlemere!” he cried, “Hazlemere! Where’s Geoffrey Hazlemere?” Then, finding him: “A seedy-looking fellow gave me that for you, and told me to lose no time in giving it.”

Geoffrey took it, and the smile faded from his face; the letter was probably as “seedy-looking” an epistle as the individual who delivered it. The boy—a little one—ran on, and left him there; having executed his commission, he was void of curiosity. Geoffrey opened the letter with trembling hands and read it through; and as he did so he turned ghastly pale, leaning against the wall as if to save himself from stumbling.

There was something in that letter which made his heart sink down into his boots.

Meanwhile, the doctor in his study was thinking over the interview just over, and the subject which had been touched upon.

“I fear,” he said, “I fear there is something wrong with that boy Boltington—radically wrong. Graham was mistaken. There must be something radically evil in the lad who deliberately tempts a junior as he has done.”

CHAPTER XII.

DOUBLE-DEALING.

HAZLEMERE put the letter in his pocket, and, in a more uncomfortable frame of mind even than had been his before going to the doctor's study, passed on. His cheeks were ghastly pale, his lips were trembling, there was a fallen-all-to-pieces look about him, very different to that merry mood in which he had been so recently indulging. At the end of the passage he came upon Stornell, who had probably been waiting his arrival. Alexander had his own causes for anxiety, and when he saw the expression of Geoffrey's countenance he immediately concluded that the worst—whatever that might be—had happened, and had he followed the bent of his own inclinations he would have promptly turned tail and run away. But even he had sense enough to see the folly of such a course—to fly from he knew not what! So sidling up to Hazlemere with much perturbation, he endeavoured to discover how the land was lying.

“Wha—what did he say to you? You didn't tell him it was me? Has he found it out? I say,

Geoffrey, you don't know what a state I've been in. Tell us everything!"

But to his surprise, somewhat to his alarm, Geoffrey turned on him white hot with passion—

"You be hanged! and I wish you were! I will not tell you a single word!" Then, a sudden thought entering his mind, he caught Alexander by the arm, and still in the same furious way, "Have you got any money?" he asked. "Don't tell any lies to me, or, as sure as you're alive, I'll make you pay for it! Have you got any money?"

Stornell, astonished at this attack, wholly unprepared for such a question, looked the bewilderment he felt, and stammered back—

"Money! what do you mean?"

"What do I mean!" cried Hazlemere, stamping his foot, and speaking like one possessed, "you thick-skulled idiot! have you got any money? Don't you hear me asking you?"

"I hear you," replied Stornell doggedly, not over-pleased at Hazlemere's manner of addressing him; "I'm no more a thick-skulled idiot than you. I haven't got any money; and if I had, I'd take good care that none of it got near to you."

"Would you? then I'll—I'll"— He did not say what, but his looks supplied the blank completely.

"I tell you I haven't got any; you know I haven't as well as I do, so how can I give it you?" continued Alexander. "I never came near such a

fellow in my life! I wish I had never had anything to do with you, then I shouldn't be in the mess that I'm in now. Why can't you answer a question civilly? I don't keep badgering you; it concerns me as much as it does you what the doctor said to you."

But Geoffrey was paying little attention to his remarks; his thoughts were occupied by other things. Without attempting an apology, before he had done speaking he had pushed him on one side, and hurried past, leaving him, if he chose, to address vacancy.

"You're a pretty sort of fellow!" bawled the outraged Alexander after him. "I wish I had never had anything to do with you, then I shouldn't be in the mess that I am now."

But Hazlemere went on unheeding; along the corridor, through the open door, across the playground, and into a fives-court, where there was just then no one to interrupt his solitude. He had no hat, and it was not inviting weather to be out without one—no scarf, no overcoat, no gloves; but he did not seem to heed the cold. To and fro he passed, to and fro, across, and across again; his movements, hurried and restless though they were, were not able to keep pace with the reflections which were flooding through his brain.

"If he fulfils his threat," his thoughts were running, "and the doctor hears what he has to tell, after what has taken place this morning, it will mean expulsion, sure and certain; expelled, for such a

cause, I dare not—dare not go home to father! What would he do to me? It would break his heart, and ruin me! No! it must not be; the money must be got—shall be got, or I'm a greater fool than I've been taken for!"

And Geoffrey increased his pace almost to a run, throwing his head about in a fashion which would have surprised beholders. For a lad of sixteen he seemed to have had curious experience of the world.

"How's it to be got? that's the question! I will drag Stornell down with me, safe though he thinks himself! If I sink, he sinks too. He could have got the money all along, if he chose to ask for it! It's different with me; his father's rich, while mine's as poor as Job—starves himself to send me here to school!—ha, ha!" and he laughed as though the idea were a merry one. "And then there's Boltington; if that hunchbacked beggar works on him so that the doctor finds out the lie I've told, it will be as bad as this—this would be," with that evil smile of his. "But if I know Boltington, and know myself, I'll lead him to something different to that, Boltington—why!"—and he stood quite still.

Then he began to walk about again, but more slowly than before.

"Why, he—he's got plenty of money; every one knows that. Why shouldn't I—I—borrow it?" and he shivered from head to foot, as though the idea of asking for a loan were an appalling one. "It's in that desk of his—I know where he keeps

it; it would be nothing to him—nothing—nothing to him; and everything—everything to me.”

And he shivered again, in the same curious fashion, and looked about him like one in mortal terror of a spectator's eye; and yet he was only thinking of a loan!

At last he left the court and went indoors, moving in a nervous way which was unusual in him. As a rule, his demeanour was bold and rather boastful, self-asserting than anything else; but now he seemed possessed with an odd desire to avoid folks' eyes. Past the fourth-form study he went, meeting hardly any one, showing anything but an inclination to address those he did, past that portion of the building which was appropriated to the lower boys, towards the sixth-form studies. When he was fairly on his way, and had nearly reached the first of them, some one came sharply round the corner from the schoolroom, with the apparent intention of going the same way he himself was going; it was Tom Jackson.

They met in such a way that, before either knew the other was coming, they were face to face. At sight of Hazlemere Tom stood still. In Tom's eyes there was never anything very pleasant in his appearance, but now there seemed something more unpleasant than usual; he shrank back from him with a movement of instinctive fear; there was something which startled him in his face, something he would have been unable to explain by any eloquence of words; a look, as it were, of evil.

When he saw Tom, Geoffrey's face assumed an extra shade of pallor; with a sudden spring he caught him by his shoulders, and pinioned him against the wall; then he looked at him—looked at him with a look Tom did not forget for many a long day after. A hidden passion was in his glance, and a strange fury round his lips, as he held him against the wall, and fascinated him with the tale that was in his eye. Then, in a very low voice, but very slowly and very clearly, he asked—and there was something in his voice which frightened Tom.

“Where are you going to?”

“I'm going to Boltington,” said Tom, trembling, he hardly knew at what. Geoffrey did not answer for a minute, but fixed him with his eye; then he said—

“You're going to Boltington's? Then I say that you're not—not! You're too much at Boltington's as it is, always sneaking in and out. If I were he I would not have it; who knows if it is safe to trust you?”

This he said very quietly, as though he were choosing his words, but with an undercurrent of meaning Tom could not understand.

“What do you mean,” he asked indignantly, “about it's being safe to trust me?”

“Never mind what I mean,” returned Geoffrey coldly; “perhaps you know as well as I can tell you; we shall see one of these days what the value of my suspicions is. Just now—just now, little

innocence, you go back; I don't choose to have you about when I'm engaged with Boltington, whether he trusts you or not. I'm not so easily to be imposed upon, so understand me."

And, taking one hand from his shoulder, he turned him round, and pointed down the corridor, the way which he had come.

Puzzled, frightened, he knew not at what, bewildered by Geoffrey's words and manner, half-unconsciously he obeyed him, and walked away in the direction pointed out. Later he was to perceive only too clearly what Geoffrey's meaning was.

Left to proceed alone, Geoffrey watched him pass into the schoolroom, and then went on again; that unpleasant smile of his had reappeared upon his lips.

"That was a lucky thought," he muttered, "little beggar! It's just possible that one day he may regret that he was so fond of honouring our friend Boltington! If—if anything should—should go wrong," and that old strange shivering came back to him, "I can always say I suspected him all along."

When he reached Boltington's door his behaviour was peculiar; instead of knocking, as was his wont, and asking to come in, he looked up and down, and round about, and everywhere, to see if any one were watching him. Then laying his head against the door, he listened for any sound within; apparently satisfied with the

result, he withdrew slightly, and again looked round to see who was watching; then grasping the handle, he turned it gently, and pushing it, found that the door was locked.

“Confound it!” he muttered angrily, “if the fellow hasn’t gone out, and taken the key with him.”

But “the fellow” had done nothing of the kind, as was soon plain enough, for, while he hesitated, footsteps were suddenly heard within—some one came striding towards the door—the key was turned—the door flung open—and Boltington stood before him, holding the handle in his hand.

This was a disagreeable surprise to Geoffrey Hazlemere—how disagreeable he knew alone; he had fondly hoped that he should have found Boltington not there; the discovery of his presence was disappointing. It only needed to look at him to discover how it was that all had been so still; the disorder of his dress gave the required clue; he had plainly been lying down.

As indeed was the case; he had rushed there when the doctor dismissed him from the room, inflamed with excitement, exasperated at the injustice of his treatment. Locking his door, he proceeded to brood upon his wrongs; from end to end and from side to side of the room he rushed, upsetting any inoffensive article which might obstruct his progress, turning the whole room topsy-turvy—a word which would serve as a very fair definition of the state of his own mind; everything

was pictured in the blackest colours ; there was no adjective too strong to apply to this doctor's conduct, none too powerful to describe his own ill-usage. On the floor he flung himself, and on the couch—in no position could he rest still ; his dress, generally so remarkable for the way in which it set off to advantage his splendid figure, was all untidy, his hair was ruffled ; in short, the condition of his dress and the condition of his room were both first-rate indices to the condition of his mind.

More than one had already asked admission. George Otway had been, and Dodwell ; Tom Jackson had been more than once ; but he had refused it to one and all, scorning sometimes, indeed, to pay any heed to their demands, reiterated again and again. It was only another freak which induced him to open now, disappointing Geoffrey Hazlemere not a little.

“ What do you want ? ” he stormed. “ Am I to tell you over and over again I want to be alone ? What's the use of having a private room if every one thinks he can intrude on you ? ”

Geoffrey stared at him in open-mouthed astonishment ; you will remember that he was still in ignorance of the scene which had occurred. His first idea was that Henry Boltington must certainly have gone mad ; never had he seen him looking such a spectacle before. His hair was in a tangle, his coat was all awry, his waistcoat was partially unbuttoned, his tie was streaming loose, his collar

was undone, his eyes were bloodshot, he certainly bore no slight resemblance to an unfortunate who had lost the even balance of his mind. There was at least excuse for that being the first thought which occurred to Geoffrey; but a moment's consideration showed him he was wrong; and then, with his natural quickness, he guessed how the ground was lying, and at once resolved to use the opportunity to his own advantage, or what he imagined such; little dreaming that he was that morning beginning to lay the train which, when lighted, was to explode the mine of his own follies he was so anxious to conceal, and work more mischief than had ever entered into his philosophy.

"Do you think I wish to intrude on you?" he replied, while Boltington glanced at him as though he would like to knock him down. "Pooh! there's little enough to induce me to intrude myself on you! I only came to find out what new fit of humility was causing you to seclude yourself from the public eye."

"Hazlemere," thundered Boltington, in a voice which made Geoffrey more uncomfortable than he would have cared to show, "if you have come to chaff me, I would advise you to clear out while you have a whole bone in your body."

For a moment Geoffrey was half inclined to take his hint and take himself away; but with a sort of impudence which sometimes looked like courage, he determined not so easily to be driven from his purpose.

“Nonsense!” he said coolly; “why should you wish to break my bones? Have they done any injury to you? My dear Boltington, you seem in one of those moods in which you are unable to discriminate between friend and foe—one of those moods in which you would not like to be held accountable for the words you use.”

And in the calmest manner possible he stepped forward, taking Boltington so completely off his guard that, without intending it, he moved aside to let him in. When in, with the same air of cool assurance he strolled across the room, and, taking up his stand before the fireplace, with his hands clasped behind his back, surveyed the scene.

“What a comfortable state the place is in! What have you been doing, going in for a universal smash-up of your property? Hum! an elegant apartment for a Christian.”

This was said in tones of polite sarcasm, describing a state of things exactly the reverse to what was actually the case. A more inelegant apartment either for a Christian or any other person would be hard to find; the furniture was upset in all directions; the ink was spilt upon the floor; the room was chaos. What he chose to consider as Geoffrey’s sneers fired Boltington again; hitherto he had been standing at the door, surprised at his visitor’s off-handedness; but now he shut it with a bang, and strode back into the room.

“Upon my word,” he declared, “you’re an impertinent beggar! I told you that I didn’t want you

in; and if you suppose I'm in a mood for trifling, you never made a greater mistake in all your life."

"I'm not liable to such mistakes," replied Geoffrey, raising his eyes, and with some difficulty managing to keep them fixed steadily on the other's face. "I should say you were in anything but a mood for trifling; you've been trifled with enough already."

"I've been trifled with! what do you mean?" And Boltington advanced angrily towards Hazlemere.

"You don't want to bully me because some one has bullied you?" said Geoffrey contemptuously, not blenching before the other's threatening gestures. "How courageous on your part! Mr. Boltington is getting brave."

Boltington looked as though he would like to annihilate the audacious speaker on the spot; but with a great effort he checked himself, and Hazlemere went on.

"I suppose you have been having a pleasant little conversation with the doctor, and that is at the bottom of your valiant mood. Perhaps he has been using all the strong language in the dictionary, and you never had the courage to say a word in reply to him." Then, with a change of manner which was as instant as it was astonishing, he laid his hand upon the other's arm, hissing out, "Boltington, what a fool you are!"

But he had made a mistake in spite of his maintaining that such mistakes were accidents to which he was not liable, if he imagined that he could say

what he liked, and with impunity; for, directly the words were out of his mouth, Boltington seized him by the shoulders, and began shaking him so violently and so long that he began to feel as though he were nothing but a bag of sore and aching bones.

“Fool!” cried Boltington, handling him as though he were but a doll. “Fool! Do you want me to murder you?”

Then, satisfied that he had done enough for the time being, he released him and let him fall upon the ground; where Geoffrey lay motionless for a minute or two, in a state of some uncertainty as to whether he was alive or dead. Then, with much discomfort, he pulled himself together, and began to raise himself from the floor; having attained an upright position, he proceeded to find out which bones were broken and which were whole; then very gingerly he tried to shake himself into some sort of order, looking up sideways at his antagonist. Boltington, who seemed to have forgotten he was there, was pacing up and down, and to and fro, chafing like an angry lion. The sight of him did not tend to make Geoffrey’s feelings any easier.

“Thank you!” he said in a surly fashion. “That was so worthy of you; it is just your style to half-murder some one who cannot help himself; but you dare not open your lips to any one who is anything like a match for you.” It had possibly slipped his memory that those in general were characteristics of his own.

"I warned you," said Boltington, swinging his arms like pendulums, and shaking the room with his stride. "I warned you to beware what you were saying, for I was in no mood for trifling."

"You warned me!" snapped Geoffrey, whose valour had certainly got the better of his discretion. "Yes, you warned me! I know you warned me! Do you think I care for your warnings? I don't care for you, or anything you say or do either."

"Then you've no cause for grumbling!" shouted Boltington. "It would have served you right if I'd half-murdered you! I told you to clear out while you had a whole bone left in your body."

"A whole bone left in my body!" smiled Hazlemere, the only possible explanation for whose conduct was, that he only imperfectly understood his friend's temperament. "I'd like to see you break a bone in my body! I said you were a fool, and I say you are a fool again; and I don't care"——

What he didn't care he was never able to say, and for reasons which follow.

"Look here," said Boltington; "I told you I didn't want any one in here, and I didn't; so since you came in your own way, you shall go out mine." And, lifting him bodily from the ground, he carried him towards the door.

"Leave me alone! leave me alone!" cried the struggling Geoffrey. But Boltington paid no heed. Opening the door, with amazing strength he flung

him through the air some distance down the passage, where he fell with a heavy thud to the floor.

“And don’t you ever,” said Boltington, as he fell, “come into my room without an invitation.” And banging the door, he locked himself in.

CHAPTER XIII.

STOLEN.

GEOFFREY lay where he fell; the fall had been no laughing matter. To be pitched head-foremost as he had been on to an oaken floor is not one of the pleasantest things in life. At first he lay half stunned, under the impression that it was night, and a myriad dancing lights were flashing through the gloom; fortunately for him he had come face downwards, so that he had been able to use his hands so as to some extent to break his fall; if he had come right upon his head, the consequences might have been more serious than at present.

A lad of sixteen, or thereabouts, cannot be thrown about in passages like a cricket-ball without others in his immediate neighbourhood being made aware that something unusual is going on. The noise in Boltington's study caused by his eccentric proceedings, and the way in which he chose to shout all his observations at the top of his voice, had already intruded itself upon the occupants of the surrounding studies; and when the door was first banged open and then banged to, and Hazlemere was tumbled out like a sack of coals, those same occu-

pants began, not unnaturally, to wonder what was going on. So the first thing of which Geoffrey became conscious was that the whole line of sixth-form doors were being opened by young gentlemen curious to discover what was the noise about.

"Hollo!" said Dodwell, who being nearest was first upon the scene, and who was surprised to find Geoffrey reclining in so uncomfortable a position. "Hollo! what's the matter now?"

"Looks as though you'd been in the wars," put in Thelton, who came up with something very like a grin playing round his lips; for somehow Hazle-mere was not popular with the upper boys. "What was all that din about?"

"I thought," observed Beau Henderson, who looked languidly surprised that any noise should have the impertinence to trouble him, "that the place was coming down about our ears. It's rather a pity that we can't have a few minutes' quiet even in our own rooms."

"Pity!" went on Thelton, still with that hardly sympathetic grin of his; "it's disgusting! I should like to know what's the meaning of it. If lower boys think they can turn the place topsy-turvy under our very noses, we are coming to a pretty state of things."

And they crowded round in a curious group, none of them offering a helping hand. It never seemed to occur to them that it might be Geoffrey's misfortune rather than his fault, or that he needed sympathy instead of blame. There he lay, still

half stupefied; and there stood they, looking on; looking on, too, with the eyes of anything but good Samaritans.

“Oh! oh!” groaned Hazlemere, rousing himself to the consciousness that there was no good to be derived from lying there. “I don’t believe I’ve a whole bone left in all my body.”

“That’s very sad,” said Louis Thelton, who had his own reasons for not liking Master Geoffrey, “very sad indeed. But I can’t quite see what business that is of ours; nor can I see at present what business you have to be in the sixth-form corridor.”

“Be still, Thelton,” here interposed George Otway, coming up at the back, and pushing his way in front. “What is the matter here? How is it you’re here, Hazlemere? and what was that noise about?”

But the answer came from an unexpected quarter.

Otway was bending over Geoffrey, half doubtful whether or not any serious injury had been done to him, when Boltington’s door was opened at their backs, and Boltington himself came out.

This created a diversion, as they turned to look at him; and Hazlemere, whose estimate of his friend had altered very materially during the last few minutes, began to groan afresh, possibly under the impression that some new attack was about to be made on him.

“I can tell you what the noise was about,” said Boltington, who was still in a towering rage, and who looked as though he would like to quarrel with

the whole of them. "If anybody wants to know, it was I! I made the noise, and I shall make it again whenever I please. That young beggar came into my room when I told him not to; and as he wouldn't walk out, I pitched him out; and that is the whole of it. If anybody wants any further explanation, I shall be happy to give it him."

This he said as though he were saying, "If anybody wants to fight me, I shall have great pleasure in obliging him."

"Then you will allow me to remark," said Beau, nettled at the other's tones, "that it is somewhat unfortunate that you should be so wholly regardless of the feelings of others. It will be a novelty at Dorrincourt if one monitor goes out of his way to increase the discomfort of the others."

"What do you mean?" demanded Boltington. "Do you think I care for you, or all of you?"

"Come, Boltington," said Otway, in that quiet way of his, yet which was so powerful to command respect because so quiet, "this is not what we expect from you. Henderson only gave expression to a feeling which is the common possession of us all. We can hardly think that any one who sits on the sixth form can be willing to cut himself off from the rest of us!"

"What do I care what you think!" stormed Boltington, who seemed bent on putting himself in the wrong. "What do I care for all your thoughts? Let me tell you that if you make the slightest interference in

affairs which concern myself alone, it will be the worse for every one of you!"

And with that, pulling a cap out of his pocket, he strode away, tramp, tramp, along the corridor.

"Our friend seems in a nice humour," said Dodwell mournfully; "very nice indeed. I expected every moment that he would challenge us to fight him in a crowd."

"I wonder how much of it has to do with you?" asked Thelton, surveying Hazlemere with anything but friendly eyes. "If you had kept yourself in your proper place it would not have happened. It would serve you right if we were to give you a good sound flogging,"—which was a very charitable suggestion, considering how much Geoffrey had gone through already.

But they were none of them in a mood just then to temper justice with discretion.

"Come, Thelton, that will do," said Otway. "Now, Hazlemere, if you're sure that your bones are not all broken"—which was quite sarcastic for him—"perhaps you will rouse yourself."

Thus adjured, with his most injured air Geoffrey got up, trying to look as though he did so with the greatest difficulty; though in reality the damage done to him was, from a schoolboy's point of view, nothing at all, and certainly much less than might have been expected.

"I thought," he said, bound to say something which would explain his own idea of the situation, "I thought that monitors were supposed to put a

stop to bullying. I didn't know they went in for it on their own account."

"Then you thought wrong," said Thelton, with a suspicious gleam in his black eyes. "For if you don't remove yourself to some place where your company is in more request than it is here, in two seconds I shall be impelled to a course of action which, in your impartial eyes, will look very much like bullying indeed."

As he was fully aware that Thelton never threatened more than he intended to perform, he possibly began to think that it was about time for him to retreat from a neighbourhood in which he had received such very different treatment to what he had deserved. So, looking not unlike a dog who has his tail between his legs, he retired—not so gracefully perhaps, as might have been desired, but much more quickly than he had come.

"There is something about that fellow," said Thelton, directly he was gone, "which always sets my nerves on edge. He is always so insinuating when it serves his turn, and always so much the other way when he is sure that nothing else will do!"

"I have noticed, too," remarked Dodwell, who was not without a shrewdness of his own, "that whoever he favours with his companionship is never improved by the connection. And whenever a fellow gets in bad books with us or with the doctor, you will always find that Hazlemere has been, or is trying to be, a friend of his."

"I have not been much in love with Boltington's

proceedings recently," observed Beau trenchantly; "but I am inclined to forgive him all when I consider that he has pitched the fellow head-foremost from his room."

"I don't like to hear you making fun of it," said Otway, as they laughed at this. "It is anything but a joke to me. That scene in this morning's class has put me in anything but a laughing mood."

And with that they all turned and began to walk slowly towards their several rooms.

In the meantime Geoffrey, in no agreeable frame of mind, was considering the matter from a point of view which was his own.

His expedition to Boltington's study, whatever its purport, could hardly be called successful. Whatever else might have taken him there, he had certainly not gone in the anticipation of being thrown out again.

With a very sour visage he brooded over his hard fortunes, and with a very doubtful face he passed his hand over those parts of his frame which had met with most injury from their contact with the floor.

"He might have broken every bone I had! A deal he'd care! I never saw such a brute in all my life! He might be mad, and I believe he is half cracked! I don't believe I shall be able to sit down for a week, he's made me feel so sore! Never mind—never mind; I'll be even with him yet, or my reckoning is wrong! Oh my head! If he'd split my skull, it's only what might have been expected!"

And he put his hand up to his head, looking very savage at the thought of it.

Just then two youngsters came running up, and seeing him standing there, not heeding or not noticing the very apparent signs of the temper he was in, pulled up, and spoke to him.

"I say, Hazlemere," said one, "the fellows are going to play 'King Cæsar.' Will you come out and have a game? Maxted told us to send the fellows out."

"Come along," said the other; "it's awfully wet and a wretched day. But anything's better than sticking indoors and baking by the fire; and I'm sure this corridor is precious cold. Come out, and set the blood going in your veins; you look as though you wanted warming."

But the way Hazlemere received their mild request took them by surprise. To begin with, he laid a hand upon the shoulder of each of them, and held them firm. Then he glared at them in a way there was no mistaking; and finally he opened his mouth to speak.

"How dare you! how dare you, you young brats, come cheeking me? I've long had my eye upon you two. You're the most impudent young beggars in the place! I've let you off over and over again before to-day. But you've tried it on once too often now. How dare you say that I want warming? I'll soon show you if I do! And how dare you tell me that Maxted told you to send me out? It'll be very nice if I'm to be ordered about by such as you—a—

very—pleasant—state—of—things,—indeed,—and when—it—comes—I’ll let—you—know!”

And between each word he commenced bumping their heads together, bruising them against the walls, spurning them with his feet, and giving vent to his feelings in a way which was agreeable to himself in exactly the same proportion as it was disagreeable to his young friends. In vain did they declare that they were quite innocent of any crime; that they had no idea of “cheeking” him; that they had never done so before. A defence was the last thing he was inclined to tolerate, so the more they pleaded innocence the more he bumped and bruised them, until they were crying with all their might, and he was tired of the exercise, when, bestowing on them a parting kick, he let them go, bidding them, in effect, to go and sin no more.

“And let that be a lesson to you,” he observed with a virtuous air, “in the future to be careful how you behave. There’s nothing so disgusting as an impudent young beggar. You’re new boys, so I’ve let you off easily. But if you’d been in the hands of anybody else, he’d have thrashed you within an inch of your lives.”

So saying, he turned upon his heels, and left them to stay there or go and cry elsewhere, as it might please them. Into his pockets went his hands, and a pleasanter look came on his face; he felt he had done a deed which did him credit, one at any rate satisfactory to himself, if to nobody else. On he went, till he came to the fourth-form study; it had

several occupants already, so he only peeped in and went out again. He was in no mood for company; his thoughts were running on his visit to Boltington's study and what had taken him there.

"Why should I not go back?" was the question he was asking in his brain. "He has gone, and the chances are there will be no one there—no one, anyhow, who can interfere with me. If Thelton, or any of those fellows, find me there, I can only say that I have lost my handkerchief, and come back to look for it; they can hardly do anything to me for that," and he grinned at the thought of it. "If nobody does find me, why—why"—he paused; then the old shifty, slouching look came back. "I'll try it, anyhow."

So he retraced his steps again, and turned in the direction he had come. The two youngsters were still lurking about, drying each other's tears, sympathising in each other's sorrows, and Geoffrey grew savage at sight of them. They were brothers, and their mother, curious soul, had brought them up tenderly, nurtured them in the lap of love, and then committed them to Dorrincourt, doubtful whether or not their training was the sort to adapt them for the place.

"Get off!" said Geoffrey angrily; "don't stand howling here! Do you suppose that this is the place for such a noise? Run for your lives, or in half a minute you won't have much life worth running for."

In accordance with which gentle hint they turned

and fled, taking their grief to some place where they might indulge in it without intruding on Geoffrey's lofty sense of what was right. Then, left to himself, he pursued his way.

This time Boltington's study was empty, there could be no doubt of that. Nor did he meet anybody in his way to ask unpleasant questions, or doubt even more unpleasant doubts. The door was shut, but was not locked; he paused outside for a moment before he touched the handle, hearing and eyesight both alert; the slightest sound—the pattering of the rain against the casement, the whistling of the wind around the walls—made him tremble as if with ague, and set his teeth chattering in his jaws. But reassured at last, he laid—very gingerly, and with curious nervousness—his hand upon the handle, and tried if it was locked; not so. Carefully he turned, and trembling if it creaked ever so little; then, opening the door about a foot, he put his frightened face inside to see if there was any one there. The room was empty, that was plain; unless somebody was hiding, which was hardly likely, the coast was clear. Reassured again, he opened it a little wider, just wide enough to admit his body, and through the aperture he stole inside; and directly he was in, with a quick and stealthy movement he shut it again behind his back.

Then he surveyed the situation.

“I wonder,” he muttered with chattering teeth and faltering tongue, “I wonder where he keeps it now.”

Round the room he looked, still remaining motionless where he had entered; the surroundings bore visible signs of the owner's late occupancy. Geoffrey noticed that the hearthrug was ruffled where Boltington had shaken him and let him fall. Then passing from one object to another, his eyes lighted on a desk which formed one of a various collection of articles on a bookshelf in the corner; it was a despatch-box, in Russian leather, dark green, and round the brass handle on the top was graven "Henry Boltington." At sight of it Geoffrey's eyes glistened, though his face, if possible, grew more pallid than before.

"That's it," he said, with an odd catching of the breath between the words, "that's it;" and moved in the direction of the bookshelf on which it stood.

When he reached it he turned his face towards the door, white as a sheet, shaking so that he had to rest his hand upon the shelf to aid him to stand. Then, quite sure that he was unobserved, he turned again and laid his hand upon the desk.

"Suppose it's locked," he said; but it was not; Boltington was far too careless a young gentleman to lock his desk. If you had pointed out his carelessness, and suggested to him the propriety of such a course, he would have stared at you in surprise. The most unsuspecting of youths himself, it never entered into his mind to conceive that there were others who did not share his perfect trustfulness, or, indeed, were unworthy of his trust; so, owing to an act of carelessness, or trustfulness—call it what you will—

certainly not to be commended, Master Geoffrey Hazlemere found that the desk was open.

He himself was surprised at this, and more surprised still when he discovered what the contents were; in the principal partition were gold, notes, and jewellery, probably all Boltington's most intrinsically valuable personal possessions. Geoffrey stared at the higgledy-piggledy collection in amazement.

"What a mule he is!" said this discriminating young gentleman. "It would serve him right to lose it all, but I won't go so far as that, I think—yes."

And he took out five sovereigns, counted them in his palm, then slipped them into his waistcoat pocket. Then taking up a small bundle of bank-notes, he fingered them with covetous fingers.

"I'd no idea the fellow'd all this tin; why, he must be made of gold. I—I'd better not take one of them, it isn't safe—what's that?"

There was a noise behind, some one was coming along the corridor; he turned, the notes still in his hand, with a face of agony; the door was entered, and before he could make an effort at concealment, Tom Jackson entered. At sight of him he started back in terror, and the desk came crashing to the ground.

But the explanation of how Tom Jackson thus came in the very nick of time needs a chapter of its own.

CHAPTER XIV.

BOLTINGTON TO THE RESCUE.

WHEN Jackson, on his way to Boltington, was met by Hazlemere, and unceremoniously turned back by him, he retraced his steps unwillingly enough towards the fourth-form study. Two or three young gentlemen were there—Howard Vincent for one—engaged for the most part in doing punishment. Vincent had some lines to translate, which appeared to him quite untranslatable. He had appealed to every one in the room for aid and sympathy, but in each case had met with small encouragement; so in much disgust he had thrown the book upon the floor, and declared the thing was vain. Under these circumstances Jackson was welcomed with avidity, for his comrades had already learned that, while he had a much better head upon his shoulders than the majority of themselves, he was at the same time generally willing to lend assistance to any one who might be in difficulty or despair.

But just now Tom was in no mood for turning Latin verses into English, whether good, bad, or indifferent; so Vincent's petition met with slight response.

"No," said Tom, "not now; I'm in no humour for it now, but I daresay after hours, if you like, I'll see what I can do for you." Whereupon the petitioner waxed wrath.

"After hours!" he exclaimed, with biting scorn. "A nice sort of fellow you are indeed! after hours! Why I've got to show up half of them before next class, and there's not one done as yet, and never will be if I have to do them all alone! After hours! Yes, a nice selfish sort of beggar you are; and I've known it all along."

Which was unjust of Howard, as Tom, with a somewhat doubtful smile, pointed out to him.

"The other day when I did that Virgil you were sticking at I thought you said I was the most generous brick you'd seen; but I cannot do it now," putting his hand up to his head, "other things are on my mind. If Mr. Griffiths asks you why they are not done, say I was selfish, and lay the blame on me."

With which small shot he left the room, and Vincent to his own devices.

"Lay the blame on you!" shouted Howard after him; "yes! I like the idea of that! I don't believe you could translate them if you were to try, and that's at the bottom of it all."

But, unheeding, Jackson went his way out into the playground, for, unpleasant though the weather was, he felt somehow as though he would like to be alone. But it would have had to be very extraordinary weather indeed to have kept the boys indoors;

no matter how the skies might seem, or what the state of the ground might be, some of them would be sure to brave the elements; if they did not actually favour the open, then they would take shelter beneath the covered shed, and there keep in full going such games as the space permitted. So, finding that here no solitude could be had, in an abstracted frame of mind Tom wandered on, and left the playground in the rear.

Any weather less inviting for a country stroll would have been hard to find. All was damp and dismal; a fine rain was falling, and the ground was like a swamp beneath the feet; but, apparently blind to his surroundings, he clambered over the stile, and began passing over the cricket-field. He had not taken many steps, however, before this state of things began to dawn on his imagination; splash! went his foot into the centre of a muddy pool, and stuck fast in the ground.

"This is nice," he observed, when he had got it out again, and had taken stock of the bespattered condition of his garments; "very nice indeed; but I suppose, as I'm in for it, it's no use turning back again. Besides, somehow I feel as though I should like to make myself as miserable outside as I am in. Harry!—Harry Boltington, you'll have it all to answer for if I catch cold!"

And he sighed, for he was in no laughing mood.

So he went on. Every other step or so he stepped into a pool, and splashed himself up to the chin. In a very short time he looked as dirty—if that was

what he meant by looking miserable—as he could wish, and there was every prospect of his catching a charming cold into the bargain; but still he wandered on.

At last he was across the cricket-field, and had reached that portion of the hedge where, in summer time, the trees cast such grateful shadows; now they looked damp indeed; stripped of their leaves, their quivering branches acted as so many rain-conductors, each concentrating a little rivulet of rain, to drop upon whoever might be so foolish as to take up his stand beneath. This Tom quickly discovered for himself, for, misled by the hope that they would afford him some semblance of a shelter, he found that one such streamlet was trickling down his back, and a second down his nose or in his eyes.

“This won’t do,” he remarked, struck by what to an ordinary observer would have been evident before; “a shower-bath is better than this.”

He turned to see if in some way his position might not be improved; and, as he did so, exclaimed beneath his breath,—

“Why, who on earth is that? and what’s the fellow doing on such a day?”

On the other side the hedge was that dell which has been spoken of before, through which Geoffrey Hazlemere and his friend Stornell had that pleasant moonlight walk of theirs. Just below him, to the left of where he stood, was a little reedy pond, covered over with stagnant green, and surrounded by a fringe of flags. A figure, going through some

curious evolutions on its edge, was the cause of his exclamation—the figure of a boy, who, outwardly, was even in a more dire state of mud and misery than was Tom himself. He was apparently in chase of something, for he was jumping and hopping about in the slimy water in a style which was possibly more beneficial to himself than to his clothing, and could hardly have been satisfactory to a careful mother, if one such had been by to see.

Tom watched this young gentleman in silence for a moment or two; then——

“Why, it’s Leo Mason!” he exclaimed. “Whatever can he be doing there!”

And, being curious to learn, he went down to see. Just then Master Leo came to signal grief. Jumping hither and thither, not wisely but too well, paying little heed to such obstacles, he caught his foot in the tendril of some plant, and went flat upon his face.

“Good gracious!” cried Tom, “he’ll be drowned!”

And he rushed down to lend a helping hand.

But there was no fear of that; there was small chance of drowning in such a place, as Mason quickly evidenced by scrambling up almost as fast as he went down. On his regaining his perpendicular, the sight he presented was an amazing one.

Covered from head to foot with slime, green in colour, and not nice in kind, it would have been difficult for a stranger to have discovered what sort of animal he was; his face was completely hidden—there was not a square inch of him which did not bear witness to his fall. Struck by the comical side

of the disaster, Tom's moodiness in an instant fled, and he burst into a peal of merry laughter; which was the first revelation of his neighbourhood Mason had. Though it could scarcely be a laughing affair to him, he could not but own that it might have its humorous side in the eyes of others; the idea of which so tickled him that he too burst into a roar of laughter, half-choking as he tried to keep the water from running into his mouth.

Wading to the bank, standing where it was tolerably high and dry, the other side of the matter struck him forcibly.

"What are you laughing at?" he snapped, not pleased at Tom's continued mirth. "I daresay you think it very funny, but I don't see the joke at all."

"I—I won't laugh"—then off he went again. "But if you only saw the sight you look—and to see you go down like that! What were you looking for?"

"For newts, and a tadpole or two; but I daresay for all I know they're squashed as flat as pancakes." And producing a more than doubtful-looking handkerchief, he displayed some choice specimens of the newt and tadpole tribes.

"But whatever do you want them for?" inquired Tom, who had no notion of the direction in which the other's tastes might lie; "and why do you come out for them on such a day as this?"

"What do I want them for, you gander?" answered Mason, with his severest air; "why, for specimens of course. And whatever sort of day should I come

and look for newts and tadpoles, stupid, if it wasn't like this? It's just the sort of weather I've been wanting ever since we have been back."

"Oh!" said Tom drily. He thought that if that were so, then Master Mason's tastes were singular indeed. "But what are you going to do with yourself? You can't go back like that?"

"Why can't I go back like this?" inquired Mason, who seemed bent upon agreeing with nothing Tom might say. "I'd look at home, if I were you; you don't look as though you'd come out of a handbox recently. What are you going to do with yourself? because you can't go back like that, you know."

"I'm not so bad as you," replied Tom, surveying himself ruefully, and acknowledging to himself that that was saying very little after all. "I haven't been jumping about in a pond, and falling down in it."

"No," retorted Leo spitefully, "you haven't even that excuse; you haven't sense enough for that!"

"Sense enough for what?" suggested Thomas, with a wicked smile? "for falling down in it?"

"No," cried Leo, almost shouting in his indignation; "nothing of the kind. I came out to increase my knowledge of natural history."

Tom grinned at this.

"But to look at you, I should say you came out to make mud pies, and eat them after making them."

"Well," said Tom, whose conscience troubled him, "I'm afraid it does look like that, but I assure you

it's nothing of the kind ; the fact is, I don't know what I did come for, but I've been strolling about and muddying myself from top to toe for nothing at all."

"There!" cried the naturalist triumphantly; "didn't I say you were a gander? and your own lips prove it's true!"

Tom, who did not at all see that the best of the argument was on Mason's side, was about to make a rejoinder of some kind, when a little incident occurred which took them unawares. They had been so engaged in their own affairs that they had not noticed an individual who was approaching through the dell with his hands in his pockets, his face downcast, and a general appearance as though fate was hard to him. He was not a pleasant-looking gentleman; his hair was suggestively short, his head was bullet-shaped, his small eyes were keen, yet shifty, his face an evil one. He was strong enough, and broad enough, and would have been tall as well if he had held himself upright; but he had that ungainly slouch which is peculiar to those who like to loaf, but think work much more disreputable than dishonesty.

This gentleman, directly he caught sight of the boys, stood still and paused a moment, as if for consideration; then his eyes twinkled; then, giving a keen quick look around, he advanced so stealthily that before they suspected he was near he was at their elbows.

"If you please, gentlemen," he observed, in the

professional whine of his class, "I haven't done a bit of work these three months and more," which possibly was true, "and I haven't had a bit of bread atween my lips for seven days a'most," which undoubtedly was not; "and I'm nigh to starving, gents; perhaps you've got a copper or so to help the poor?"

Whilst he was speaking he was casting sharp, almost threatening glances from one to the other, as though he was mentally calculating how much they might be worth.

"What are you doing here?" asked Mason, who had a shrewd suspicion of the sort of person he was dealing with. "Do you know that this is private property? What right have you to trespass here at all?"

"What right?" replied the man, with an ugly scowl, "no right at all, except the right of a man who's starving; but perhaps a young gent like you takes no account of that. How much are you going to give me to go off again?"

"How much?" said Mason, staring the unprepossessing stranger full in his unprepossessing face; "not a penny. I'm not in the habit of paying trespassers for doing me the favour of removing themselves from where they have no right to be."

"Oh, you ain't, ain't you? Then look here, my young gamecock, just you stow your gab, and out with the shiners!" retorted the gentleman, with a very sudden change from his former whine

to the slang of the thief and professional black-guard.

“What do you mean?” inquired Leo, still cool, but somewhat pale. “Do you suppose that you’re going to frighten me into giving you what I do not choose? I tell you what the magistrates will give you if you’re not off pretty quickly, and that is a month in the county gaol.”

“They will, will they? and I daresay you’d lend them a hand towards doing it. I don’t want no more of your palaver, so”——

And making a sudden movement forward, he thrust his knuckles between Mason’s collar and his throat. Quick as lightning, Leo swung his handkerchief containing the newts, tadpoles, and other treasures through the air, and brought it right in the ruffian’s face.

“I’ll murder you for that!” the fellow hissed, half blinded by the mud and slime; and he set about what looked very much like doing it. Forcing him backwards, stooping down, he bent him across his knee, and, compressing his windpipe with all his force, bid fair to strangle him.

But he had not reckoned for Thomas Jackson. That young gentleman, rightly judging that they were unequal in regard to strength, caught up several handfuls of rank and pungent mud, streaming with water, and commenced flinging them in the fellow’s face. This was more than the man—or indeed any other man—could stand. The aim was correct and true; being not three feet dis-

tant, Tom could scarcely miss. The reeking stuff went into his eyes, his mouth, his nostrils even. He very soon looked uglier than he had done before.

“Leave off, you young imp!” he shouted, “or it will be the worse for you.”

But opinions differ, and Tom’s inclined the other way. Instead of leaving off, he redoubled his attack. The man’s attention at any rate was diverted from Leo Mason. Half blind, nearly choked, in a fit of passion, he sprang up to put an end to Tom, and it would probably have gone hard with him had not a new actor appeared upon the scene.

This was Henry Boltington. Still red-hot with rage, he had set off, as Tom had done before, to wander he knew not whither and cared not where.

The sound of voices had attracted his attention, and, very opportunely for the boys, he discovered the trouble they were in.

Personally he was charmed; a disturbance was the very thing to suit his mood.

With a grim smile upon his face, he came striding down the bank twelve miles an hour.

“I’ll teach you,” began Boltington; and before the fellow had recovered from the surprise of his appearance, out went his left hand right in his face, and the man went staggering back. “You thundering scoundrel!”—out went Boltington’s right, and the man went flat on his back—“to treat Dorrincourt boys like that!”

Overwhelmed with astonishment, the man lay quite still for a second or two where he had fallen, as well he might. Then, very slowly, he began to get up again.

When he had regained his feet he surveyed his antagonist from top to toe, owning that he was a very fair specimen of boyhood; but he was by no means inclined to take such treatment like a lamb.

"I tell you what," he growled, with a tendency, not unreasonable under the circumstances, towards cautiousness, "for about two pins I'd knock you all to bits."

"Would you?" answered Boltington, calm all at once, and haughty as you please. "Then I'll tell you what, for no pins at all, and without troubling you with any questions, and so giving you an opportunity for telling lies, I'll pitch you into the pond, and you may pitch yourself out again if you can."

"You lay a finger on me!" threatened the man.

"Lay a finger on you!" cried Boltington, with tremendous scorn.

And stepping forward, putting into play an old trick of the wrestler's art, he caught the man beneath the arms, closed with him, lifted him right off his feet, and threw him head-foremost over his shoulder into the pond behind. The expression of his face Mason afterwards declared, as he passed through the air, was as good as a play. The trick was evidently new to him; and the idea that a lad like Boltington

could so use a man of his age and build was astonishing to him.

"Won't he drown?" asked Tom, as they watched him struggling to get out again.

"Drown!" exclaimed Mason, "not he! It'd be a good thing if he did; but the fellow's too evidently born to hang for there to be any chance of drowning him."

"He will be all right," said Boltington, quite the monitor again. "You two youngsters had better go up to the school, and change every rag that you have on. I never saw such spectacles in my life; you're a disgrace to the place! And look here, Jackson, when you've washed and made yourself look decent, go into my study, and wait till I come in."

"I say, Boltington," pleaded Mason, "don't send us off like that. If that fellow's going to have a mill with you, let's stop and see it out."

"Have a mill with me!" cried Boltington; "what do you take me for?"

By this time the man had scrambled out again, looking much more miserable even than when he came.

"Now then, you fellow, if you've got any sense in that thick head of yours you'll make off while you can; here's half-a-crown—no, here's five shillings for you. And the next time you meet a boy from Dorrincourt, just remember politeness is the best thing after all."

"You're a strong'un," said the man, pocketing the

coins with a curious look in his eyes. "Tell us now, how did you do that throw of yours?"

"Tell you?" replied Boltington, surveying him benignantly; "well, if you come up one half-holiday and ask for Mr. Boltington—Mr. Henry Boltington, I'll show you how it's done; it's as easy as A B C when you know how."

"Thank'ee," said the man, with a ghastly grin; "but I'd sooner you showed me on some'un else, so that I could play it on some other fellow."

"You're a pretty villain, on my word!"

Then, turning, he saw Tom and Leo listening, with eyes and mouths wide open.

"Now you two youngsters, why aren't you off an hour ago? If you're not off double quick I shall make it warm for you."

They needed no further urging, but, turning right-about face, made off as hard as they could tear.

"That's just like that Boltington," said Mason, as they tore along. "Why didn't he give me that five bob instead of that brawny villain? It's a pretty thing if a man's to get well paid for nearly murdering us."

"It wasn't that," said Jackson; "it was because Boltington nearly murdered him."

"And serve him right, too!" said Leo the dissatisfied; "it's the very thing I wanted to buy a specimen box for my new butterflies."

When they reached the school they went straight up to their dormitories, and, having washed and

changed their things, came down to join the ordinary world again—Mason to his specimens, and Tom, as Boltington directed, to his study; and that was how he came upon Geoffrey Hazlemere in the very nick of time.

CHAPTER XV.

TOM JACKSON IN A RÔLE OF HIS OWN.

THEY stood face to face; Tom with a look difficult to understand—frightened, amazed, pitiful, all at once; Geoffrey trembling like a reed, white as a sheet, the fallen desk close to his feet, the banknotes in either hand.

Tom was the first to speak.

Very quietly, and while Geoffrey's eyes were fixed on him as though he were some dreaded spectre, he moved to the door, turned the key in the lock, and dropped it into his trousers' pocket.

At this Hazlemere, making a great effort to control himself, said, or endeavoured to say, something in expostulation; but the attempt was vain, his utterance was choked, and the sounds he made were not words but gibberish.

"I hope," said Tom, in tones so quiet, so completely unruffled by any appearance of outward emotion, that they were surprising to himself, "that Harry will not come yet."

But the words conveyed a sudden fear—an added fear, to Geoffrey; if Boltington should come! With a great effort he gained somewhat more mastery

over himself, and, glancing aside as a thrill he could not overcome passed over him, he turned his face again, and looked at Tom with defiance in his eyes.

"What do you want here?" he asked, doggedly, between his teeth.

Tom made no reply; he only looked at him. There was silence—that silence which is more eloquent than speech. Then, in tones which were clear, and sweet, and gentle, so sweet and gentle that they sounded stranger to Hazlemere than any violence could do, he said—

"Geoffrey, what have you done?"

It was no reproach, it was simply a cry of pity, as though Hazlemere had met with a mishap which was no fault of his; and years afterwards he remembered that that was the first time Tom had called him by his Christian name. But he was in no mood for softness yet.

"Nothing," he replied, still doggedly; "what do you want here?"

"Geoffrey," said Tom, for the second time using his Christian name, "I am so glad I came; it is good for you, and for me as well. Were"—his voice trembled—"were you going to steal?"

"No," answered Hazlemere, though the contents of his hands still bore witness to his guilt, "I was not."

Tom crossed the room, and pointing to the bank-notes in his hands—

"What are those?" he asked.

"Leave me alone!" cried Hazlemere, raising his

hand to strike the other; "what business is it of yours?"

"Geoffrey!"

It was said much more in sorrow than in anger, and the senior's hand dropped slowly to his side.

Without another word Tom knelt upon the floor, and commenced to pick up Boltington's desk and replace its contents. Hazlemere looked down at him, stubborn still, but at a loss to understand this unexpected gentleness. Quietly Tom proceeded with his task, setting the desk upon a table, and putting the things back one by one; when he had almost done—

"Give me those," he said, and turned to Hazlemere.

Understanding, Hazlemere gave him the notes he held in his hand, and Tom put them back among the other things.

Then, having finished, he turned again.

"What more have you?" he asked.

"Nothing," returned Hazlemere, vainly endeavouring to meet the youngster's straightforward glance.

"That will not do," said Tom; "are you sure that that is true? Geoffrey, we must not misunderstand each other now. Better be true to me, and I will be quite true to you. If you have nothing, I am sure you would prefer to turn your pockets out upon the table, and let me see."

"Turn my pockets out!" gasped Geoffrey, getting black in the face, and trying to work himself into a

rage; "turn my pockets out? What do you take me for? Do you think I'd"—

"Geoffrey!" came Tom's voice, sweet and gentle; and Hazlemere was still. It was almost like the voice of conscience speaking in his breast. "If you are not quick, Boltington will come; and you know that in the mood which he is in he will treat you worse than I."

There was a pause again.

Hazlemere was struggling with himself. Then, very gingerly, he put his hand into his waistcoat pocket, hesitated, and—brought out three sovereigns. These he handed, anything but gracefully, to Tom.

"Take them," he said, "it was only a loan. I would have paid them back again."

"Is that all?" asked Tom, paying no heed to his excusing words, but looking him straight in the face with those bright eyes of his.

Hazlemere made no reply.

"Is that all?" he asked again.

"No," cried Geoffrey angrily, taking out a fourth sovereign and flinging it on the table, whence it rolled upon the floor; "take them all! Take everything I've got! Perhaps you'll ask if I'm my own directly! Perhaps you'd like to strip the coat from off my back?"

And he made a movement as though to strip it off and hand it on to Tom.

But Tom paid no heed. He went to where the sovereign had rolled upon the floor, and, picking it up, brought it back and put it with the others in

the desk; then, closing it, he turned to Hazlemere again.

“Geoffrey,” he said, “will you do me a favour I am going to ask of you?”

“Do you a favour! Yes; a likely sort of fellow you are to do a favour to! I—I’d like to break your head for you! Are you going to tell Boltington about it all?”

“Not a word. It is a secret between us two. And, Geoffrey, I am sorry you should think so hard of me. But perhaps one day you will change your mind. It is not a great favour I am going to ask. You see I’m a poor, deformed, weakly sort of fellow, and if I want to get friends I must get them a different way to everybody else, and—well, Geoffrey, will you tell me what you wanted money for?”

“What I wanted money for?” Hazlemere turned red, and shuffled. Tom’s eyes were so frank and friendly, his voice so pleading and so kind, that he was puzzled what to say. “What I wanted money for? What does everybody want it for, I should like to know? It’s a want common to others besides myself, I fancy.”

Tom looked at him reproachfully. That was not the answer that he asked.

“That is not it,” he said. “There must have been some great want not common to others to make you—make you steal! What was it, Geoffrey? Tell me now.”

And he laid his hand upon the other’s arm, looking up at him with eyes which were full of pleading.

Geoffrey was uneasy. How to answer such a question he did not know; how not to answer it was harder still. He did not think that anything could have affected him as did Tom's voice and eyes. He shuffled from foot to foot; turned first red, then white; stammered in his speech; and at last it all came out.

How it was he did not know; nothing had been further from his thoughts at the beginning, but here he found himself quite unintentionally telling Tom the story, every word.

Tom listened patiently, only speaking now and then when he saw the other wished for him to speak.

It may be safely said that for the first time for many a day Geoffrey told the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. He could not lie with those clear eyes bent on his face. How it was he could not say; but it seemed as though they gave him strength to resist temptation.

At length the whole miserable tale was told, and Tom knew as much of it as he himself.

"Then," said Tom, when he had finished, "you want five pounds?"

"Yes," returned Geoffrey, with flaming cheeks and downcast eyes. "You see I do! What will become of me if I do not get it? and where am I to get it from? Do you know? I—I almost feel inclined to knock you down, and take the money in spite of all, and run away for good; for I am done for whichever way I stand."

“No,” said Tom, “don’t do that; don’t take the money, and don’t run away for good. Stay here, will you, till I come back again?”

“But,” asked Geoffrey, frightened all at once, “where are you going to? And suppose Boltington should come and find me here?”

“Trust me,” said Tom, in that quiet way of his, “all will be well. If Boltington should come, tell him that I asked you to stay here for me. I shall not be long away.”

Before Geoffrey could offer any more remonstrance, even had he felt that way inclined, Tom was gone. He moved quietly away, with something very like a smile on his face, leaving Geoffrey to wait till he came back again.

Those few moments during which he remained alone were moments which would never be forgotten. There are such in the lives of all of us. He was torn by conflicting emotions—fear for Boltington’s return, shame at his discovery to Tom, sorrow, or something very like it, for the part which he himself had played.

The scales fell from his eyes and he saw how things really were, saw that honour is the path to safety, that he whose actions meet with the approval of his own conscience is stronger than the strong.

He was sorely troubled in his mind. In some strange, subtle way he understood that Tom’s was the nobler part; that he was superior to himself; that hunchbacked, deformed though he might be,

there were things worse than physical deformity, just as there were things better and more beautiful than the shapeliest person a lad can have.

He was not kept waiting long. Such thoughts were just beginning to dawn clearly on him when Tom came back again.

Hazlemere was standing by the table, one hand upon the board, the other by his side, in an attitude of doubt and much dejection. The shouts of boys playing in the covered shed, defying the elements as best they might, came through the window at his back. There was a heavy cloud upon his face, a cloud which Tom, for reasons of his own, by no means grieved to see.

"Do you know," he said, advancing across the room, "I'm not a rich fellow. Rich! I should think I'm not indeed!" and he laughed at the thought of it; a sweet, musical laugh was that of Tom's. "But I'm a miser," and a quizzing look came in his bright eyes. "I'm one of the most sordid misers possible. I do believe that when I become a man I shall be famous for storing up my money in all the old stockings I can beg or borrow," and he looked gravely comical at the thought of it; "and therefore it happens that I always have a stock laid by. Here's five pounds," very abruptly all at once, and thrusting his hand into Hazlemere's astonished palm. "I've a first-rate eye for the main chance; this is one of those investments which return me interest of the kind I value most, like,"—and as he spoke the words, his voice was even

sweeter still—"like casting my bread upon the waters, to find it after many days."

Hazlemere looked at him, then looked at what was in his hand. Five sovereigns lay glistening there. He was amazed. It passed his comprehension wholly. What was the meaning of this thing? He could only look and stare. At last stammeringly he said—

"I—I don't understand. What do you mean by this?"

"Mean? What should I mean?" asked Tom. "Ah, Geoff!"—Geoffrey had become Geoff already—"there's only one thing meant when money changes hands, that it hastens quickly to its spending. It cuts me to the soul that it must be. It always does hurt misers to part with their bright glittering gold, even though they know they are investing it to good advantage."

But Hazlemere was puzzled still. He fixed his eyes on Jackson's face, so that he might clearly read his meaning. It was so bright and cheery, so rare a smile played on its surface, and shone from his bright eyes, that he was more bewildered still.

Was this a gift to him? A loan under such circumstances was almost equal to a gift! And what prompted such an act?

Tom read his thoughts before he could shape them into words, and spoke again—

"Geoffrey, we have not been friends as yet. Will you take that money from me as though I were a friend? Please do! You want it more than I.

And—and," then very shyly, "will you shake hands with me, and say the bargain's made?"

In a maze of wonder Geoffrey put out his hand and took Tom's small palm in his. Not a word was spoken as they closed in a fervent grasp, though in that moment in their hearts a bond was sealed whose terms were by their lips unspoken.

"Tom," said Geoffrey, and what sounded suspiciously like a sob nearly choked his utterance—"Tom, you're not the sort of fellow I took you for at all!"

Then, without another word, he rushed, rather than walked, out of the room, and left Tom there alone.

"This," cried Tom directly he was gone, and not seeming to think his mode of going strange—"this is the sort of thing worth living for. Hunchbacked though I am, I don't think life is half so dreary as once it seemed to be."

But almost before the words were from his mouth, before he could move from where he was, the door was opened wide again, and, turning, to his surprise Hazlemere came running in.

There was no mistake about it now, he was fairly crying. Spluttering through his tears, he came up to Tom and said—

"I—I'm a regular brute; no end of it! I took five sovereigns and I—only gave you four."

And, to Tom's supreme astonishment, he dropped the fifth gold coin, damp with suspicious moisture, into his hand; and, as precipitately as he entered, turned again and fled.

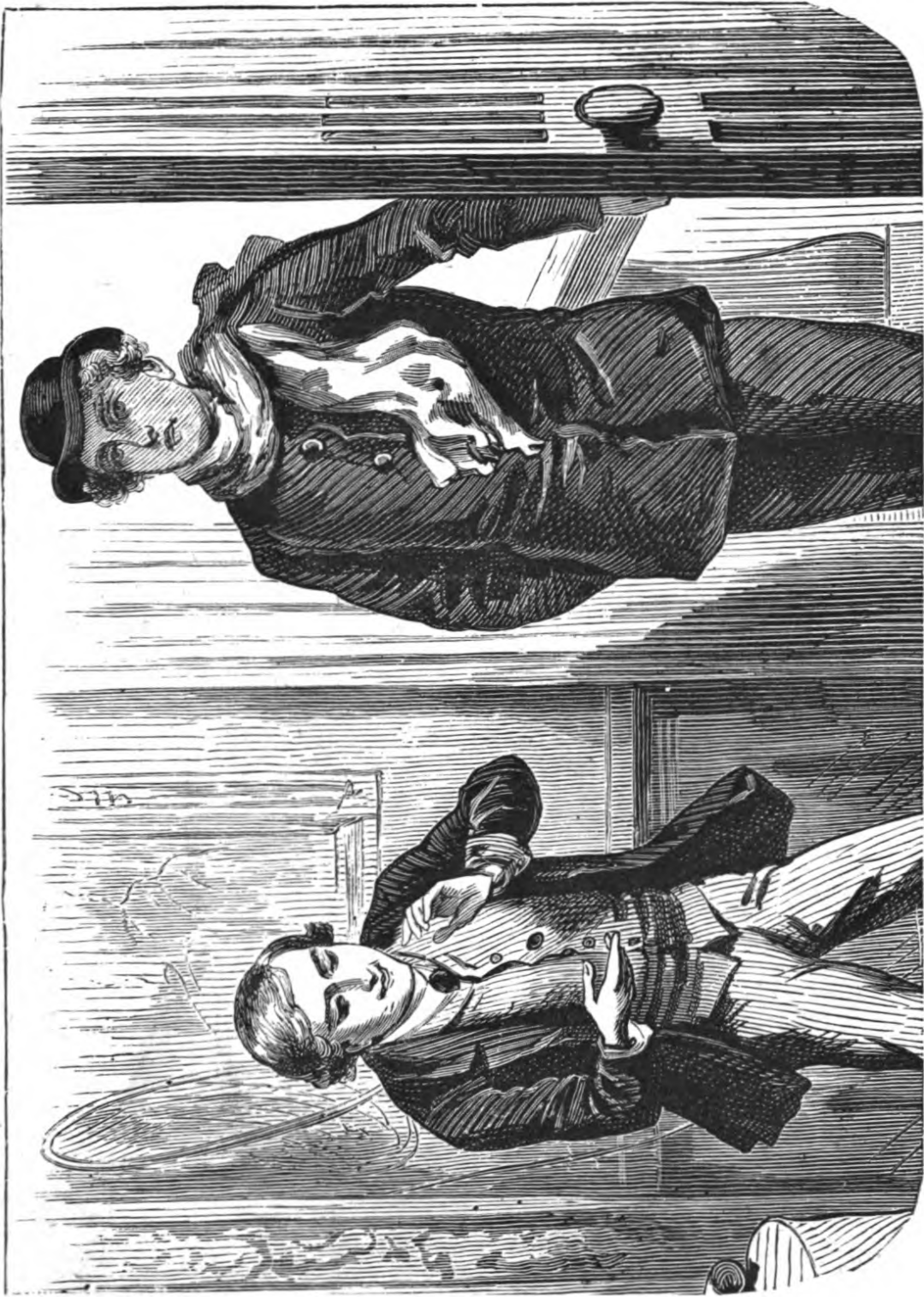
Tom stared at the sovereign, turned it over two or three times in his hand; then what sounded remarkably like a low whistle came from his lips, and his own eyes grew damp at sight of it. He even spun it up into the air and caught it as it fell!

“This is very good! this is good indeed! There is something in him after all, which I was too thick a blockhead to find out before! It just shows what an idiot I am!”

While he was engaged in tossing up the sovereign and catching it as it fell, smiling all the time as though it were the pleasantest occupation the world could show, Boltington came in. Tom was taken unawares; he had not expected him just then, or possibly his conduct would have been sedater; as it was, Boltington came on him just as he was in the middle of what was a decided chuckle, and stared, not unnaturally, at the unusual demeanour of his youthful friend.

“Well, this is very satisfactory!” he observed sarcastically. “Pray what are you doing there? playing pitch-and-toss for sovereigns?”

Now Boltington was just then hardly a reputable object to grace a room. To begin with, he was muddy from top to toe, had only just returned from his little excursion in the fields, and had not yet had an opportunity to wash his face and hands. But even that could hardly excuse Tom's being so exceedingly disrespectful to a monitor. Wholly regardless of the other's observation, he continued



“While he was engaged in tossing up the sovereign, and catching it as it fell, Boltington came in.” — *Page 210.*

tossing up the sovereign, catching it again, laughing all the time, even while he said—

“Yes, playing pitch-and-toss with sovereigns; a charming recreation, isn’t it? I never thought of it before, but now I’ve found it out I shall keep at it all the day. Do you know”—suddenly ceasing operations—“do you know whose sovereign that is?”

“Whose sovereign?” asked Boltington, wondering at this free and easy demeanour on the part of one who was so much his junior. “I should presume, just for the sake of argument, and in the charitable supposition that you haven’t stolen it, that it is yours; and what’s more, judging from your way of going on with it, that it’s the first you saw in all your days.”

“That’s just the joke of it,” said Tom, laughing in his face; “it isn’t mine at all, it’s yours.”

“Mine!” he cried, staring all the more; “this is interesting information! And pray may I inquire how you come to be playing pitch-and-toss with other people’s sovereigns without mistaking them to be your own?”

“Ask no questions,” answered Tom, shaking his finger sagely at the outraged monitor, “and you’ll be told no fibs. And let me tell you, Mr. Henry Boltington”—turning sharply on that gentleman—“that your conduct is the most shameful I ever knew! surprising, sir! How you, a monitor, and one supposed to have arrived at something like years of discretion, could dare to leave your desk unlocked and open, when its contents are so valuable as is

the case with yours, amazes me. It would have served you right if I had taken every farthing in it instead of only the sovereign, which I now call you to witness I put back again."

And, under his senior's nose, he laid the desk open on the table, and replaced the sovereign among its fellows.

"You're a nice sort of fellow!" declared Boltington, taking up his stand before the fire; "you're a pretty sort of chum! This comes of tolerating juniors about the place! It's rather a novelty for you to bully me; but keep it up; oh! keep it up if it pleases you! May I ask if you've gone cracked; I mean, of course, more cracked than usual?"

"I believe I have gone cracked," said Tom, shyly all at once, and moving to the giant by the fire. "Harry—do you know Harry, I believe this is one of the happiest days I've known; I've made friends with Geoffrey Hazlemere."

"You've"—cried Boltington, and stopped short as though he could say no more, his eyes even wider open than before. "Upon my word this is a pretty state of things! *You've* made friends with Geoffrey Hazlemere! And aren't you the fellow who told me in that tragic way of yours, 'Never let him be a friend of yours, for he'll never do you anything but harm!'"

"Yes, but I've changed my mind since then," said Thomas softly; "we all do change our minds at times, you know—even you, upon occasion,"—Boltington looked fierce at this; such occasions

were common things with him. "No matter why, but we are friends, that I know."

"Well, I think I'll go and wash my hands," returned the other, surveying the state which they were in. "It's quite plain to me that you've gone cracked. I've suspected it was coming on some time, but I never thought it was so near as this. I suppose that as you're all at once so thick with Mr. Hazlemere, you'll want to consort with him, and cut me quite adrift. Very well, only I never heard of a monitor being cut by a fourth-form boy before."

"Don't talk such nonsense, Harry; if I were big enough I'd box your ears for you."

"Perhaps," said Harry grimly, "if I were to lift you up, you could do it then."

Tom laughed, he was in a laughing mood, and answered almost in a whisper,—

"I will be friends with both of you, and will honour you with my society just as I have always done before."

"This is gratifying news—*most* gratifying news, is what I ought to say. And if at any future period you should change your mind again, and break with Mr. Hazlemere, and should be in want of some one to treat him to a licking, pray rely upon my services."

But Tom laughed; he was not thinking then of breaking with a friend so newly made.

CHAPTER XVI.

*THE RESULTS OF READING HISTORY—TINY MAXTED'S
FIRST-RATE IDEA.*

OF all ill-used persons in the world—and how many are there such?—boys are the most ill-used of all. Any rational person will see this for himself at once; it is even too plain for demonstration. If anybody falls in ill-luck's way, it is sure to be a boy; if anybody's merits, transparent to himself, are obscure to the world, they are sure to be a boy's; if anybody is found doing what should be left undone, and not doing what should be done, it is still sure to be the father to the man. His is indeed a grievous fate; all the crosses are laid upon his back. No wonder he finds it hard to bear them.

Why—the average young gentleman driven to desperation by the sense of many wrongs, asks you—why is it that I, a boy, am always in hot water? It is plain that this is so; anybody with a pair of eyes will see it is the case. I'm always in a scrape, always down for punishment, always in black books with somebody or other. This state of things, he would maintain with martyred air, is scandalous. It certainly does seem hard that a boy is not a pri-

vileged being—that he is not allowed to do exactly what he pleases, but that he is always sure to fall foul of some eccentric individual, whose ideas are diametrically the opposite of his own.

These remarks are prompted by a sense of the deepest sympathy for a section—a very considerable section—of our friends. In short, Tiny Maxted and many of those nearest and dearest to his bosom were smarting under a stern conviction that injury had allied with tyranny to make their lives a wilderness and barren. The cause of it was simple to a fault.

It will be remembered that not long ago there was a grand field-night, when Greek met Greek, and when came the tug of war; briefly, there was a bolster-fight. It need hardly be pointed out that such a combat necessitated the breaking of some dozen rules or so, and flying in the face of constituted authority to an extent surprising, say, to the parental mind. Bolster-fights, strange to say, were not looked upon with favour by the powers that were; and this for several reasons. In the first place, boys are supposed to go to bed to sleep and not to fight; in the second, such meetings were not of the most peaceable kind, and quietude did not reign supreme; in the third, no matter who else might suffer, the bolsters suffered most; and as the bolsters were the property of the authorities, they not unnaturally took a kindly interest in their adventures.

Mr. Jenkinson had come upon the scene, not, for

them at least, at the moment when his presence was most to be desired. He had caught them in the very act, had marked the culprits for his own, and as was to be expected, having noted down the names in full, laid the list, with a few added observations of his own, upon the doctor's desk. This being so, they might be pretty sure that they would hear of it again; this they did not doubt, but, none the less on that account, they looked forward to the hearing with anything but favour. Two days went by, and, for some reason or other, there was nothing said; perhaps something else occupied the doctor's mind; and they almost began to think that for once at least they had got off free.

But if they thought so they were disagreeably undeceived; "No such luck!" as Maxted would have said. On the morning of the third day, and just as they were congratulating themselves that really nothing would be said or done, their hopes were shattered to the ground. A long list of the offenders was quietly read out in school, and to each young gentleman was allotted an imposition of a length and quality which made him sad at heart indeed.

This was hard to bear. The ground had thawed, so that football was possible again; there was every prospect of something like fine weather close at hand. Just at this auspicious moment—just when there was a chance of outdoor exercise once more, came this crushing blow, this appalling imposition, which would, in all probability, occupy them for more than one half-holiday to come.

"It's perfectly disreputable!" cried Howard Vincent, wounded to the soul; "disreputable!—that's what it is! just as though a fellow can't do what he likes without—without this wretched stuff to do!"

"Yes," went on Maxwell Bromley, taking up a higher strain, "and just as though we weren't sent here for exercise—not for our heads only, but our bodies too. It's swindling, that's what I say it is! as though bolster-fights weren't the finest exercise a boy can have."

"Yes," commented Farquaharson, commonly called "The Ghost," in that grimly quiet way of his. "I should say that a bolster-fight was about the finest exercise, look at it how you may—for the bolsters, that's to say."

"What do you know about it?" demanded Bromley fiercely. "Doesn't it expand the chest? and isn't that exactly what it ought to do?"

"Yes, it does expand the chest; and it expands the bolsters too."

"It would be a good thing if it expanded your chest for you," retorted Bromley, who always had a shrewd suspicion that Farquaharson was making fun of him; "anything more like a chicken's I never saw."

"What's the good of you two going on like that?" asked Vincent cogently. "What good will your squabbling do to any one? I say it's disreputable, and I don't care who hears me. I'll say it again!"

"I know what I shall do," declared Bromley, with much determination, "I shall write home." That is a favourite threat with some young gentlemen; with an air of the firmest resolution he repeated, "I know what I shall do; I'll write home."

"I would if I were you," advised Farquaharson civilly; "they'll be so glad to hear from you. If you haven't a stamp let me lend you one; and if you're short of pens and paper I'll sell you some on tick."

"Look here," stormed Bromley, who was by no means getting cooler by degrees; "if you don't take care what you are saying I'll make you pay for it! I'm in no humour for your chaff, so just you understand it once for all."

"Birds in their little nest agree," here struck in Farthingale, who was generally quiet in society, but was no better on account of that, "and why not brothers in misfortune? Still, if you would like to fight we should be happy to make a ring for you, and see the matter out; it would be quite a novelty to see a ghost going it like one o'clock."

This conversation, if such it could be called, was carried on in the fourth-form study. Morning school was over, and the culprits were gathered there with the avowed intention of doing what a too hard fate determined must be done; but it is more than doubtful if any one of them, or if they altogether, had at present done a line. Talking is a pleasant thing; the discussion of grievances—and is that not the birthright of every freeborn Englishman?—more

pleasant still; but it requires proof to show that such a course of procedure tends to industry.

To the impartial observer these young gentlemen were scarcely philosophical; they failed to see that, as the tree falls so must it lie—that if they chose to disobey, they must reap the fruits of disobedience. They felt that they were wronged, they thought that fate was hard on them, and they were quite sure that an imposition was not a thing they liked at all. These things they nourished in their bosom. There was discord in the air; one or two things recently had shown the way the wind was blowing; the boys, or some of them, were in a curious frame of mind; there was one of those crises at hand which periodically do occur in all societies, whether great or small. And it fell to Master Martin Maxted—Tiny Maxted, as they were wont to call him—to lay the train, and then apply the fuse to it, which produced—well, what it produced we shall see.

It all came from reading history, that is the most curious part of it; for it must be confessed that Tiny was not prone to reading, and when his tastes did lie that way, history was not what he loved most to read. The study of his fellows, the story of their lives from age to age, the lessons taught by their successes, and by their failures even more, had few charms for him.

But, in some way or other, possibly in the ordinary course of work, he had lighted upon the “History of France”—that part of it which tells the burning tale of the Revolution of '92. This fired his imagination

—little wonder that, but it fired his imagination in a way which could scarcely have been counted on. One certainly does not read history to bring about the state of mind which came to him. He brooded over it, pictured it in his mind's eye, conceived, or thought he did, a clear conception of the actual scenes and their surroundings. He was fired by it—carried away by it; nothing he had ever heard or read of Dick Turpin, Claude Duval, or the Pirate King, so fascinated him as the tales which history told of Mirabeau, Danton, Marat, and Robespierre; these were studies from real life, these lived and did—and did, what deeds! the others were but dreams of fiction. He was like a boy possessed; he carried that history about with him wherever he might be; the ordinary pursuits of life had lost their interest for him; such things as King Cæsar, prisoner's base, football even, were subjects of his sublimest scorn; the French Revolution was the only thing in life for him.

The first outcome of this condition of his mind was, that he resolved to write a play. Play—by the way, Tiny's Play should have a capital P. To fully comprehend all which this intention meant, its grandeur, and its daring, one must clearly understand what were his qualifications for the attempt. He was no scholar, that he owned himself—indeed he was rather proud of it than otherwise; "musty books" he had hitherto despised, now he wished it had been otherwise; of his spelling we have had a glimpse before—without a dictionary there were very few dissyllables with whose orthography he

was quite at home; his writing ran with his spelling hand-in-hand, they were good alike; at blots he was perfection, there were few young gentlemen who could give up a dirtier exercise in the full belief that it was clean; without lines he was like a ship without a helm at sea, lost entirely; he would begin his first line at the left-hand top corner and end it at the right-hand bottom one. But these were things beneath consideration, trifles light as air; what cared he for such obstacles as these? He would write a play, that was resolved; so he wrote a play—or at least, he tried to.

It was to be a tragedy, of that he was quite clear; comedy was not his vein, and farce was not to be imagined. But the title puzzled him—what should the title be? He tried a number; “Marat the Murdered Man, and the Murderer of Many” took his fancy hugely; but then he considered that such a title would be too confined for him; all the actors in those days of discord he meant to bring upon the stage, and all at once, from Mirabeau to Bonaparte, and from Lafayette to Talleyrand. The title would not do; he tried another, “Ruin and Revolt, or the Rage of Revolution;” but finally he decided on a third startlingly different to the others in idea and execution, “A Few Scenes from the Page of History, namely, the Revolution in France; a Tragedy, in Blank Verse, by M. Maxted; Dorrincourt, March 9, Anno Domini, 187—.” Tiny’s spelling is not copied here. That was a title which meant anything in general, but nothing in particular, and he thought that it would do.

But he found that it would not. He wrote one scene, in which Louis XVI., Jean Jacques Rousseau, Marat, Robespierre, and Bonaparte, all talked at once; and then he decided that he had had enough of it. They got to fighting—he found that he could not keep them from each other's throats; the spectator may say "No wonder," but he perceived that such behaviour interfered with his ideas. Before he had done a page, Louis had murdered Rousseau, who, rising from the dead, announced that Marat was just the man he wanted; while Robespierre and Bonaparte were both at daggers-drawn. It was only when he discovered that all five of them were dead and weltering in each other's gore, that he laid down his pen; then he concluded that writing plays was not his line.

He tried a novel next, and, if possible, his novel was even a more striking production than his play. There was a depth of originality which was refreshing to the most jaded mind. The opening scenes were laid in the backwoods of North America. Here lived the Pirate King—after all, the Pirate King would crop up in all Tiny's notions of romance, whether historical or otherwise, though why he should live 1000 miles from anything in the shape of water, and equidistant from the haunts of men, is difficult to understand; here wandered Julius Cæsar—Tiny was some distance from '92—who explained that he had a dream to tell. The Pirate King, as in duty bound, listened silently, while Julius Cæsar went on to observe that he had dreamed of nothing

in particular—a mysterious affair entirely—when all at once he was interrupted by a tremendous clap of thunder, and a vivid flash of lightning; and all at once backwoods, Pirate King, and Julius Cæsar fled, and the scene was France in 1792.

This was all very striking; but here Tiny came to grief. Having hopped at one bound from Julius Cæsar and the backwoods of North America, to France in 1792, not a step further could he go; it was not surprising that he was exhausted after such a leap. He racked his brains, he tortured his imagination, but nothing else from his inner consciousness could be evolved. This was trying, and perhaps humiliating too. It was hard, after so promising an opening to find himself stuck fast. He did think of undoing that clap of thunder and that lightning-flash, but on reflection it seemed to him that it would be difficult to tell the state of France if the scene were altogether laid abroad.

So the novel was a failure too.

The only question now was, what should he do? It was quite impossible that the fine frenzy he was in should only end in smoke. It struck him that if he confided in some dear friend some good results might come of it; so he sought out Howard Vincent, and told the tale to his—it must be owned—unwilling ears; he even proposed to give him a sample of his tragedy, and read him a chapter from his novel, but his unappreciative friend vetoed the idea with scorn. They almost fell out at this.

“Just a bit,” said Tiny, beginning to pull his

tragedy out of his trousers' pocket, "just to see what sort of stuff it is."

"Not a bit!" answered Vincent; "do you think I don't know what sort of stuff it is without you telling me? I'm not such a simpleton as that!"

"How can you tell?" asked Tiny, with an injured air. "I've never done anything of the kind before."

"No," replied his friend, with much decision, "and I hope you never will again. A tragedy indeed! I don't believe that you can even spell it."

"That's all you know of it!" returned Tiny, who had found it in the dictionary, and with much pain and trouble had got it well by heart. "Besides, if you don't like the tragedy, have a chapter from the tale instead," inserting his hand in his other pocket and bringing out the manuscript, which outwardly, at any rate, did not look promising.

"I tell you that I won't hear anything at all," said his friend indignantly. "What do you take me for? an idiot? A pretty one I should be to listen to such stuff as yours."

And before Tiny could endeavour to persuade him further he turned upon his heel and strode off, at five miles an hour or more.

"Yes, a pretty sort of one you must be!" cried Tiny after him, as he retreated. "How do you suppose they found out what sort of fellow Shakespeare was till somebody listened to what he'd written?"

He consoled himself by getting two very small boys, who were not long from home, and screwing

them into a corner, and making them sit down while he read to them all there was to read. Long before the end they were dissolved in silent tears—they were sad at heart; this was not the sort of thing they had expected when they came to school, such suffering was hard to bear. When he discovered that this was their opinion, Tiny left them in dungeon deep and dire, concluding, with a prophet and philosopher, that there are so many millions of people in Great Britain, mostly fools, and that he alone, probably, formed the small minority.

It was while he was in this frame of mind that he received his reward for bolster-fighting—that punishments were meted out to the heroes in the fray. This started him on a new line of thought entirely; an idea germinated in his brain which was a striking one indeed. Why, he asked himself, should he endure this thing? was this not tyranny? What had history to say to this? Did not the teaching of his own favourite epoch especially apply to such a case as this? He became excited; he was fired anew; he resolved to apply his historical learning in a way which no historian, we presume, ever knew of its being applied before.

“I tell you what,” he cried, the very first half-holiday when they were grumbling at the imposition which kept them in—“I tell you what, this is the sort of thing which we should not endure!” and he thumped his hand upon the desk with unexpected energy. Hitherto he had been unusually silent, so this sudden ebullition took them by surprise.

“I quite agree with you,” said Farquaharson, in his dry way; “that sentiment is exactly mine. But the worst of it is that we have to endure it in spite of all.”

“Why?” asked Tiny excitedly. “Are we slaves, or are we free? are we Britons or are we—are we,” he was going to say “dogs,” but it occurred to him that it would be hardly apposite; so he changed the sentiment, “all are equal before the law!”—what he meant was scarcely clear, but misty notions of liberty, equality, fraternity, were flooding through his brain—“and I say—I say it is in distinct opposition to the genius of the age!” He had read that sentence somewhere, and thought it was a splendid one.

“Hear! hear!” cried Bromley, rattling his ruler on the desk, and wondering if Tiny had suddenly become weak in the head; “that’s the sort of thing, my boys.”

“I say—I say,” went on the orator, while the others stared at him amazed, “that despotism is the slave of anarchy”—he was mixing up his metaphors, but as nobody understood what he meant any more than he did himself, there was no harm in that—“and sedition clogs the chariot-wheels of slavery! I say—I say, let us combine, let us rise in our strength! and show the iron hand of tyranny that liberty, though dormant for a thousand years, shall rise at last and flood the world with tears! *Vive la guerre!*”

And springing upon the desk, waving his papers

round his head, he led the way, though none of them understood in the least what he was talking about, in three tremendous cheers.

And that was how, for the first time, Tiny Maxted applied the principles of '92 to the classic shades of Dorrincourt.

CHAPTER XVII.

MEETING IN FOURTH-FORM ROOM.

THE idea took root at once; when were boys not ripe for mischief in any form? But it soon assumed shapes and proportions Tiny had never bargained for. How often is it not the case that the originator of a movement finds it taken out of his hands, and in those of other hands driven to a conclusion which he had never intended for a moment? Tiny's views were theoretical. Like many a theorist before to-day, he had talked nonsense which he had never meant in sober earnest; to make his preaching practice was far from his intention. But his friends, particularly two of them, looked at the matter through glasses of their own, and the more they saw of it the more it took their fancy; these two were Gerard Farthingale and Maxwell Bromley. Farthingale had been reading of the Winchester rebellions, and the story had tickled him amazingly.

"Mack," he said to Bromley, a day or two after Tiny's outburst in the study, "those were first-rate times at Winchester. Do you know that in 1793 they took possession of the schoolroom, and barred everybody out for three days running."

"No," said Bromley; "did they?"

"They did. Just think of it! what splendid fun! I've always thought a barring-out must be one of the grandest things in life."

Farthingale spoke dreamily, for he was a quiet, contemplative boy.

"It's so poetical; like those fellows at Thermopylæ, or somewhere else, holding the pass against the world. There's nothing like rebellion after all, you know."

"Except the wiggling afterwards; shouldn't we get it hot. Talk about rods in pickle, I guess we should soon be pickled boys."

"But we wouldn't let them thrash us; we wouldn't let them lay a hand upon us; we would combine, you know, and show them right is might. If we were to stand side by side we should be a match for any one."

"Fun!" snuffed Bromley, who was before all things practical, "I daresay! I heard that sort of thing before, but I know I'd sooner run from the doctor any day than fight him! Then look at the sixth; why they'd take us singlehanded."

"The sixth would be on our side, I know; and I know one or two who'd be ready to join us now. Besides, do you think they would dare to hang back while we were pressing on?"

"You've been talking to Maxted!" cried Bromley, when he said this; "that's just the sort of thing he's fond of saying! Dare! wouldn't they dare! I like that! You'd find who wouldn't dare when it came to the point, my boy."

"I did not think," said Gerard mournfully—he was a melancholy youth—"you were afraid."

"Afraid! I'm not afraid of you! I'll fight you any day with pleasure! Besides, who says I'm afraid? I didn't! If you've made up your mind for a lark, I am with you, only we're sure to get a wiggling; and when it comes, you see if you like it any more than I do."

"Mack," said Gerard tragically, "you will be true to me? you will show them that rebellion is alive once more? Give me your hand and pledge yourself to join in a conspiracy."

"Boo!" returned Bromley, with small respect for the romance of the thing; "bosh and balderdash! What's the good of shaking hands? If you're in for a lark, I'm in too; if you're afraid I shall tell tales, you'd better not let me have anything to do with it at all."

"I will trust you," declared Gerard, fixing his solemn glance on him, "without a pledge; you will be true to me, and together we will raise a dust about their ears which shall not easily be laid again."

But Bromley spoilt the situation by laughing in his face. Gerard was pained at this, but though he looked his feelings he did not speak of them; his was the poetic nature, or he thought it was, and he inclined to think that he was a conspirator born and bred. These two worthies sought out Tiny, and having found him—

"Maxted," began Farthingale in his dreamy way,

“we wish much to speak to you; we feel that you are one with us—in inclination, in aspiration, and in truth.”

“Eh?” said Tiny, who, afflicted with a mania for talking bosh himself, always suspected anybody else who talked it of poking fun at him. “You’d better not try that on with me, you know, or you’ll regret it soon enough.”

“Try what on?” asked Gerard, at a loss to understand. “I only said that we feel that you are one with us in inclination, in aspiration, and in truth.”

“Then if you say it again,” cried Tiny indignantly, “I’ll punch your head for you.”

“But I thought you were,” persisted Farthingale, quite failing to see what irritated Tiny. “Aren’t you one with us?”

Maxted looked at him very doubtfully, strongly suspecting the part which he was playing, and then at Bromley, who was wreathed in smiles.

“What are you grinning at?” he asked in amicable tones. “If you’ve come to take a rise out of me, you’re mistaken, both of you, for I’m in no humour to stand chaff, whether there are twenty or two of you.”

“I do believe Farthingale’s as big a lunatic as you are,” explained Bromley politely. “He’s got a lot of rubbish into his head like that stuff of yours, and it will come out whether he wants it to or not. The fact is, he’s in for a lark, and he wants to know if you’ll be in it too.”

“What do you mean?” asked Tiny, still doubtfully.

“Rebellion,” went on Farthingale mysteriously, “that is what our meaning is; rebellion, rank and ruthless.”

“I’ll,” began Tiny again, meaning to say, “I’ll punch your head for you,” in the full persuasion that Farthingale still was poking fun at him; but Gerard would not let him go on.

“In short,” he continued quickly, “a barring-out.” He paused, so as to give full effect to his words. “That is what we propose, a barring-out. It was in the belief that you would join in such a movement which induced me to say that you were at one with us in inclination, in aspiration, and in truth.”

He could not forego these fine words of his, however Tiny might grow black at sound of them.

“A barring-out!” repeated Tiny, staring at the arch-conspirator. “You don’t mean to say that you propose that we should have a barring-out at this school here?”

“Undoubtedly I do, here—at Dorrincourt. Almost every other school in England has had a barring-out, and we have not had one. It is not too late to have one now. There has not even, as far as I can learn, been a regular rebellion; now an opportunity occurs which may not recur again.”

This he said as though a “rebellion” and a “barring-out” were indispensable appendages of every educational establishment of reputation.

“But,” asked Tiny, who did not see things with

the same eyes at all, "however can we manage it? Supposing we were found out?"

"Supposing! We must be found out, or what's the use of having one at all? Do you suppose William Tell feared discovery when he was in revolt? No, he rather gloried in the deed which honoured him."

"But William Tell was different; he was a man, and we are boys."

"Shall we not be men some day? Will it not be good training for our manhood to imitate their virtues now?"

But Tiny was doubtful still; all Gerard's eloquence could not persuade him. The French Revolution was all very well in theory, and he would preach its tenets, whether understanding them or not; but a barring-out!—a barring-out was a different thing entirely.

Bromley had much more weight with him than anything Farthingale could say. The "lark" of it—that caught his humour. So long as it was looked upon wholly as a "lark," he had not the least objection; but directly Gerard tried to give it a serious complexion it frightened him completely. Finally, in Bromley's spirit—though still not very eagerly—he joined in the conspiracy, and the three soon set the ball of discord rolling to a lively tune.

They began by calling a monster meeting—as large a one, that is to say, as the fourth-form room would hold; they drew a list of names up privately, and asked the owners of every one of them; all

without exception came. There were members of every form except the sixth—a motley gathering, not the most studious members of the school by any means—curious one and all to know what was in the wind.

The meeting was held one half-holiday after football time. Some of them were still in costume; not very cleanly spectacles they looked—wet, hot, and muddy; others, more decent in appearance, were almost indecently inclined for fun. Bromley's eyes, quick to catch the spirit of his fellows, saw there was mischief in the room, and that the audience was disposed for anything but reverence.

“Take care what stuff you talk,” he whispered to Farthingale while the boys came streaming in. “If you and Tiny go in for any of that high-flown bosh of yours, you will find things go anything but pleasantly.”

“How so?” answered Gerard somewhat mistily. “You need not fear; however high the storm may foam, you will find me ever ready to breast its rage.”

To which Maxwell said, “Bosh!” with much asperity. He rather began to wish that he was out of it. Nothing he objected to so much as being made a laughing-stock; and he very strongly began to think that however reverent a gathering might be, they could not but laugh at the sort of language his two colleagues were so fond of using; and how irreverent this meeting might reasonably be supposed to be, he knew too well. But, in a degree at any rate, he was mistaken in his fears.

When all were in, and the room was fairly packed, Tiny, as had been arranged, turned the key, locked the doors, and, putting the key into his pocket, came to the top of the room, where a table had been placed, with three or four chairs round it. The objects of the meeting had been revealed by the three conspirators to two more friends for reasons of their own, but with those exceptions all were in the dark as to why they were called together. They were pretty silent at the opening; there they sat or stood—for there was by no means sitting accommodation for the whole of them—close together in all sorts of attitudes, all with a look of expectant or amused curiosity upon their faces. As had been arranged, Tiny opened the proceedings; he stood with his right hand upon the table; his rising was greeted by a stamping of feet and clapping of hands, but he was not put out by that. In a low voice, and coolly enough under the circumstances, he said—

“It’s the proper thing, you know, at this sort of thing, to elect a chairman. I therefore propose that Bromley takes the chair.”

Gerard at his side stood up and seconded; and, amidst a storm of cheering Bromley gracefully glided to the wooden seat specially reserved for the honour of his occupancy. As was to be expected, the cheering continued till the boys had had enough of it, which took some time of course; and then they condescended to hear what the chairman had to say. Giving them a good look round, so as to fix them with his eye, off Maxwell went at speed—

“Gentlemen,” his eyes twinkled as he used the word, “we’re all friends here—jolly companions every one—and it’s perfectly understood that whatever passes here is for ourselves alone. If there’s anybody present who objects to keep a secret, let him up and out with it, otherwise I take it for granted that you all promise to hold your tongues. Is that so, gentlemen?” Immediately there arose a stentorian “Yes!” and a great clapping of hands. What can be more charming to a boy than an opportunity to make a noise? “Thank you, I thought as much. Then it is understood that all are pledged to secrecy. This being so, anybody who tells tales to any one will be sent to Coventry, and otherwise promptly punished as the law directs.” There was a laugh at this, though they did not understand exactly what he meant. “Now, gentlemen, I have the pleasure of introducing to you my friend—our friend—Gerard Farthingale, who has something to say to you on his own account.”

This was the critical moment, and Maxwell knew it was. If they took Gerard’s observations ill, then all was over at the start, there would be no conspiracy for them; if, on the other hand, he could be induced to talk something approaching common-sense, there would be at least a chance of their scheme becoming a reality. He got up in that quiet, dreamy way of his, and laying his folded hands upon the table, looked down the room at them. He was slightly built, with a white, almost girlish face, and great black eyes which always

seemed wandering in the land of dreams; he always spoke in a gentle voice, seldom raised its tone, was careful in his choice of language, and dwelt slightly on each word; outwardly, just the boy to please a maiden aunt; inwardly, a perfect firebrand.

“ We have come together to conspire ”—this he said as though he were saying, “ We have come together to take tea ”—“ to show that the boys of long ago are still the boys of now. Tales are told of gallant feats which boys have done. Once upon a time they were a power in the land—and why not now? Are those days past for ever? have we become the shadows of what once we were? Not so; we boys are still the gallant boys of once upon a time; we only need an opportunity to show that this is so. This opportunity arises now; we are dissatisfied with the powers that be; our headmaster is not equal to our desire; we will therefore declare our grievances. To do this we must organise; unity is strength; the bundle of sticks is true to-day. We propose that a secret society is formed, to be called ‘ The Secret Society for our Safety and Salvation; ’ a code of laws must be drawn up, a committee chosen, and by that committee the members must be ruled. Secrecy must be observed by all; the names of members must never be revealed; the committee especially must be surrounded by the seal of silence. The main object of the society may be broadly stated to be the promotion of rebellion: we must revolt. Every other school has had a barring-out—we have not had one. This defect must be repaired ere long.” He paused

for a moment, and then, with a curious mixture of metaphor, went on, "Rebellion is like the rock which, towering over the valley far below, falling from its base crushes creation with a single blow. A barring-out is to rebellion like a storm is to the wind; without the wind a storm is not, but with the wind a storm rises in its majesty and rage, and assumes proportions which disturbs the universe in its deepest depths, and makes a hero and a man."

Here Farthingale sat down; a tumult of discord followed his resumption of his seat. There could be no doubt whatever that of what last he said none of them made head or tail; but it sounded very fine, and, coupled with what had gone before, roused them to an enthusiastic pitch.

"This is the sort of thing," whispered Bromley to Gerard as he sat down, rubbing his hands as he noted the noise they made; "we're getting on like a house on fire."

Tiny followed next; his oration was of an altogether different kind to Farthingale's, though quite as difficult to understand.

Tiny never could keep cool for long; even when making a commonplace remark it was his custom to shout it out. Now, before he had got fairly through two sentences, his arms were going round like wind-mill-sails, he was red in the face, and bawling as though he were addressing ten thousand people in a building of the most capacious size.

"I tell you what," he began, in that peaceful way of his, no less remarkable for logic than for noise,

the French Revolution still running in his head, "where there is no equality there is no liberty, and where there is no liberty there is no law, for law is based on right. Tyranny exists to-day, but to-morrow it is gone; and though the iron red-hand of impotence may crush the nation in its baleful clasp, the volcanic fire still smoulders on, and the lava bursting from its boundless bed must flood the world in flames. This is obvious."

There was a tremendous roar at this; of course they saw the point at once.

The orator went on, redder in the face, and louder still—

"Equilibrium upon its equipoise must gravitate towards the eternity of time; it is written in the sky. As surely as the stars shine in the cycle of the mind, so surely shall the world at last, trampled beneath the tread of tyranny, burst from its billion bonds to illuminate the spheres in blood. To every man of sense this needs no demonstration——"

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Farquaharson at this point, rising in his place, "but why to every man of sense does it need no demonstration?"

The orator stopped short and glared at him; totally unable to favour such a question—or, indeed, any other—with a reply, his soul waxed dark within as he suspected the interrogator of poking fun at him.

"I have always understood," continued Farquaharson, in his gravest tones, "that the actual circumstances were the other way. If by the conglomerate-

tion of atomic particles in the terrestrial regions of terrific space rhetoricians argue the union of the immutable, then how is it that three times four equals twice fourteen is a proposition Euclid never proved?"

His hearers were all upon the grin. Tiny was on the point of boiling over, his fists clenched with the instinctive intention of using them instead of arguments, the very strongest language trembled upon his lips, when Maxwell, whose desire was above all things for peace, deftly interfered with words of wisdom.

"Our friend Farquaharson misunderstands entirely"—there could be no doubt of that; the difficulty was to find a person who did not—"Maxted simply rose to second the resolution"—if so, then he did it in a way which was entirely his own. "The resolution therefore which I have to submit is, that, in the opinion of this meeting, it is expedient that a secret society be formed, to be called 'The Secret Society for our Safety and Salvation.' Those in favour of the resolution say 'Ay,'"—there was a shout of 'Ays;' "those who are not, say 'No,'"—there was not a single reply. "I congratulate the meeting on the resolution it has passed. Our time being short, the next business I imagine we should take will be the formation of a committee, to consist of five—a secret committee, you understand. The names upon my paper, and which are to be submitted for your approval, are, I find, as follows:—Gerard Farthingale, Martin Maxted, Harry Bligh, Clifford

Farquaharson, and your humble servant, Maxwell Bromley. Now, the election should, I think, be a unanimous one; if any present disapproves he should be heard; therefore I have to ask whoever objects to the election of all or any one to hold up his hand in sign of it."

There was not a sound, and not a hand was raised.

"Then I declare that the five just named are duly appointed your committee. In the name of my colleagues and myself I return my thanks. Farquaharson and Bligh, may I ask you to come up here?"

The two young gentlemen came to his side.

"At a future meeting—of which due notice will be given—we propose to submit a code of rules for your consideration, and also a book in which every member will sign his name, pledging secrecy and obedience to the laws. That, gentlemen, concludes the business we intend to take. And now any question you would like to ask we should be happy to answer to the best of our ability."

And immediately there was a buzz of conversation in the room, while everybody did his best to have light shed upon a subject on which he was still not a little in the dark.

And that was how Tiny's studies in French history led to the formation of "The Secret Society for our Safety and Salvation."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A VISIT TO "OLD GREGORY."

THE "Secret Society," as Tiny Maxted idiomatically phrased it, was getting on "like a house on fire." The members already numbered more than half the school, and some very pretty notions were rapidly gaining ground. Every boy of a mischievous or erratic turn of mind liked the scheme immensely; there is something grand in belonging to a "Secret Society." Not a few of their elders are attracted by the halo of romance which hangs round any movement which pretends to secrecy; no wonder the boys were carried away by it at once.

The management, as had been arranged, was entirely in the hands of the "committee;" and not only so, but very few of the members were initiated into the mystery of what that committee might be doing; there was a circle within a circle, a secret within a secret. While the committee met and debated, and schemed and plotted, the members generally were told only as much of what was passing through their minds as it pleased those mysterious young gentlemen to tell. That they were doing, or were about to do, something, was

understood; there were visible signs of this at times, signs of various kinds; stealthy whispers went round the school—whispers which were directly prompted at headquarters; documents of the most extraordinary kinds were found in desks, purporting to come from no one in particular, and couched in language which could only be deemed peculiar. Once, one memorable morning, in every desk throughout the school was found a printed bill,—a small handbill, about six inches long by about three in breadth. The paper was not of the best quality, nor was the printing conspicuous as being a fine specimen of the printer's art, but the contents—the contents were of a kind to make you stare.

A facsimile is given below:

"THE DIE IS SEALED! TYRANNY SHALL EXIST NO MORE! SLAVES ONCE, BUT NOT FOR EVER! PREPARE, FOR THE MOMENT IS AT HAND! SPEECH IS SILVER, BUT SILENCE IS GOLDEN! UNITY IS STRENGTH! BE REDY WHEN THE SIGNAL COMES, AND THE DAY IS OURS."

It will be noted that, while the type was striking the language was eccentric, and the spelling the printer's own. It was not surprising that this strange document created excitement in the school. Nobody could make head or tail of it; no one had the faintest notion what the meaning was—and that was the pleasantest part of all. The more you puzzle a boy, the more you interest him—that is to say, as regards everything except his lessons; woe betide the teacher who does not make them plainer than A B C.

But there were two persons who were puzzled and interested too, and who were not intended to be either. It may certainly be taken for granted that one of them was meant to be kept in the dark entirely—and that was Dr. Macqueen.

It can hardly be supposed that those mysterious committeemen wished the doctor to be aware of their existence even; but be that how it may, by some hand or other a copy of that very handbill was laid on the headmaster's desk, just where his eye would be sure to light on it when he took his place for morning school.

It amazed him not a little. He took it up and read it through, and turned it over, then read it through again. What was it all about? He slipped it into his pocket, as a problem to be considered afterwards.

In the privacy of his own study he studied it again, and the more he studied it the more it struck him by its singularity.

"I like the spelling," he chuckled, with his grimest chuckle; "it's excellent. The fellow who set up that had left his spelling-book at home; 's-p-e-a-c-h' for 'speech'—clever fellow! and another 's' for 'silence!'—the softer it is the more it pleases him. He has a spite against the 'a's,' or why he should leave it out in 'ready,' and put an 'e' instead in 'signal' he alone can tell. 'The Die is Sealed!'—hum! Is it? That's very interesting, to be sure. 'Tyranny shall exist no more!'—hum! I thought the last of the prophets was dead and buried," and

he stroked his nose and thought of it. "‘Slaves once, but not for ever!’ Indeed! there’s something about that which sounds very fine. ‘Prepare, for the moment is at hand!’ That may be said generally of any moment; but the question is, is it an allusion to any moment in particular? ‘Speech is silver, but silense is golden:’ Ah! it would not be inappropriate to classify spelling as being more golden still! ‘Unity is strength:’ No doubt, no doubt at all! and so is correct orthography. ‘Be redy when the signal comes, and the day is ours;’ that is a proposition which I am not prepared to dispute for a moment, but I think it would be much better if you had a spelling-book instead.”

The doctor considered it long and gravely, but, like so many of the boys, he could make no sense of it at all.

Mr. Selden, whose authority in the school was second only to his own, happened to drop in while he was engaged with it, and without a word of introduction he handed it to him.

“Seen that?” he said, as he thrust it into his hand.

Mr. Selden read it through and smiled; he thought there was a joke in it, which the doctor expected him to discover at first sight; but when he looked for the answering smile which he expected to find upon his face, instead of looking comical, he found him looking very grim indeed.

“Very funny, isn’t it?” he remarked, in that odd way of his which some people found it difficult to

understand. "I thought you'd think it was; some persons can see further into a millstone than others can. Fact is, I can't see where the joke comes in at all—unless the spelling's meant for one; that's the sort of joke to tickle those who're teaching it, amazingly."

"What do you mean?" answered Mr. Selden, who was rapidly becoming better acquainted with the peculiarities of the gentleman who occupied the position Dr. Graham would have wished himself to fill. "Where did you get it from? and what's the meaning of it all?"

"Quite so! that's the funniest part of it. What is the meaning of it all? Some pretty mischief, I daresay—perhaps a new gunpowder treason and plot; anything to amuse the boys. It was laid upon my desk—a hint, perhaps, to mind how I behave. You don't happen to know if we are the 'slaves once, but not for ever'? or whether we have to 'prepare, for the moment is at hand?' A little light upon these points would perhaps be as advisable as not."

But Mr. Selden could shed no ray; he treated it as a joke—was doubtful if the doctor was not treating it as a joke as well.

"It's only some nonsense of their own, no doubt; some folly or other among themselves, not meant to be known to you or me. What shall you do with the paper, burn it? If it means anything, it is nothing of interest to us, take my word for it."

"Perhaps not—don't say it is; but at the same

time, with your permission, I won't burn the paper, thank you, but put it by; it may have historical interest, at any rate."

And the doctor, taking back the paper which Mr. Selden held out to him, put it in a drawer in his writing-table, and turned the key on it.

The other recipient of this peculiar handbill, who could hardly have been personally interested in the society and its purposes, was no less a person than Miss Emily Macqueen. She had it in a letter—who sent the letter is no concern of ours, but it was not a girl. This letter contained language as remarkable as the bill itself—mysterious, weird, and wonderful, pointing to some great movement close at hand which was to surprise her not a little. This, coupled with the bill, puzzled her every whit as much as it did her father. If the printer and publisher of that announcement intended to arouse curiosity, he had succeeded in doing so to a degree probably even beyond his expectations.

One afternoon, while taking her walks abroad, Miss Macqueen, chancing to fall in with Tom Jackson, opened her batteries on him at once.

"Tom Jackson," said she, coming to the point without delay, and holding out the handbill for him to see, "tell me what is the meaning of that."

"Of that?" he answered, taken aback by the peremptory request—he had heard some misty talk about a secret society, but, as it happened, this was the first time he had seen this particular bill—"I—I really don't know what it means."

“You don’t know!” she repeated, as though she doubted if his ignorance were real; “do you mean to tell me that you don’t know?”

“I really don’t,” persisted Tom, who felt it hard that his veracity should be thus doubted; “I have never seen the bill before, and I don’t know what it means now that I have.”

With that she was obliged to be contented. She looked at him very fixedly, as though she still doubted if he were to be believed; but in the end she had to let him go without his having made her one whit wiser than she was before.

That same afternoon, as it chanced, something occurred which made the conspirators more determined, if possible, to persevere in their conspiracy than they had been previously. Tom, having been dismissed by Miss Macqueen, was sauntering along in not too bright a mood, when a party of young gentlemen, all talking at the top of their voices, overtook him.

They were walking as fast as they could, their cheeks flushed, their eyes sparkling, and there was that something in their demeanour which, to the keen observer, learned in his subject, made it look very much as though there were mischief in the air. Tom, who was not inclined for company of any kind, and certainly not for theirs, made a movement as if to get out of their way; but Howard Vincent, hastening on, slipped his arm through his and detained him a sort of prisoner at his side.

“Hollo!” he cried, “what are you doing all

alone? Come along with us, we are going to Old Gregory's."

Mr. Jabez Gregory, or "Old Gregory," as he was more generally called, had the honour of being purveyor-in-ordinary of "tuck" to the young gentlemen of Dorrincourt. Although it was an honourable position, it was not always an agreeable one; whether the fault was his or theirs, or whether there was some on either side, certain it is that not seldom he and his customers were on the worst instead of on the best of terms. With characteristic charity not a few of the latter were wont to set him down as the biggest cheat they had ever seen or heard of; while he on his part, we regret to say, found them at all times more ready to buy his goods than pay for them. Credit was the rock on which they split; over and over again, times without number, had he announced that not a farthing sugar-stick, not a penny tart, would be supplied by him except for money down, and as often was he beguiled into breaking the rule which he himself had made. Young gentlemen, because they had no money, seemed to think it unbearable that therefore they should have no "tuck" as well; they were very civil then, it was surprising how civil they could be. It was "Mr. Gregory," or "dear Old Gregory," then.

"Mr. Gregory," Maxwell Bromley, who was an inveterate offender, would remark, "if you will only let me have half a pound of almond rock, I promise you faithfully you shall have the cash next week."

"I daresay," Mr. Gregory would retort, looking at the humble applicant with much severity; "how often have you promised faithfully before, and how often have you kept your word? Not once in fifty times."

"But I do assure you that this time I will: I expect a letter down next week; it is sure to have cash in it, and I'll be certain to pay you directly it comes."

But it was when the letter came, and the cash in it, that the tug of war began. Master Bromley either was, or professed to be, astounded when the bill came in and he saw what was the amount of it.

"Five and twopence-halfpenny! why I haven't had eighteen pennyworth! I never heard anything like it in all my days. I should like to know what he takes me for? Why, it's ridiculous! The way Old Gregory tries to put it on us is just disgraceful! If he had any shame in him—but he hasn't. Never mind, before I pay him this I'll want to know the reason why."

Big with this resolve—to know the reason why—he communicated his grievance to his friends, and there and then they professed their readiness to accompany him on his visit to Old Gregory, and join with him in his attempt to elicit that unknown quantity, the "reason why." Thither they were bound when they fell in with Tom; although, when he learned the object of their expedition, he was by no means desirous to join in it, they were so eloquent,

not to say forcible, in their entreaties, that, not a little against his will, he was compelled to go.

Old Gregory's establishment was just out of bounds—of that, of course, each one of them was well aware—but on certain days permission might be obtained from a master or a monitor to pay him a friendly call. On the present occasion, their intentions being scarcely friendly, they had not thought it necessary to apply for that permission, but had preferred to act upon their own responsibility; therefore, if they were detected in the act, they might reasonably expect unpleasantness to follow.

It was not the most delightful weather, and, as they went along, the rain, which had been threatening all day, began to descend in a fine soaking drizzle; but to this they paid no heed; it would have to have rained cats and dogs, or something worse, to have baulked them of their purpose then.

Mr. Gregory's establishment was of rather a primitive kind; it was a small house at the corner of the village street, and not being set off by plate-glass windows, or any other adventitious ornamentation, it presented rather a shabby appearance to the youth who was accustomed to the glories of the London pastrycook. None the less, those who were best qualified to speak, maintained that there was a delicacy and a lightness about Mr. Gregory's wares which ran the best of metropolitan confectioners closer than he might perhaps have relished.

Mr. Gregory was in his shop looking over his account book, and speculating, probably, when some

of his debtors might be moved to pay him all they owed, when Master Bromley and his friends arrived. He was a middle-aged gentleman of very dignified demeanour, and, as a sidesman in the parish church, was held in great esteem. It not being one of those days when the young gentlemen at the school were accustomed to favour him with their calls, he was not expecting visitors, and in the middle of a troubled study of the multifarious items standing against the name of our friend Stornell, he was interrupted by a shadow falling across his page, and looking up he saw Maxwell Bromley standing in the doorway. With unexpected courtesy, as he advanced towards the counter, he raised his cap and bowed.

“I trust,” he said, in his blandest tones, “that I see you well. With such a conscience as yours, life must be almost more than you can bear. A pretty sort of scamp you are, upon my word.”

The fact that this was said with the civillest air at his command did not render the address any more agreeable for Mr. Gregory to hear. Among his failings—and under the circumstances there was little cause for wonder—was the fact that upon occasions his temper was not apt to be the longest possible; so in the present case, before Bromley had done speaking, he was glaring at him with his most ferocious air.

“Listen to me, my boy,” he said, striving to be dignified despite his indignation, “if you’ve come here to pay that bill of mine, pay it and go; but if you’ve come here to give me any of your sauce,

not if you were the king of England it wouldn't do."

"Five and twopence - halfpenny!" exclaimed Bromley, leaning over the counter with complete familiarity and tasting such sweets as were within his reach. "O Gregory, Gregory, what an old scamp you are! And how is Mrs. Gregory and all the little Gregorys? I trust for my sake, Gregory, that you will bring them up to be more honest than their pa."

"Look here, young feller," shouted Mr. Gregory with the full force of his lungs, "you've mistaken your man, that's what you have done; and if you don't get out of this shop before I say Jack Robinson, you'll have such a walloping as will make you open your eyes a bit."

"Walloping, Gregory?" went on Bromley, still with perfect calmness. "These aren't bad sweets of yours—pity you swindle so. I'm surprised to hear such language from a man like you; be decent if you are dishonest."

"Now then," cried the irate Mr. Gregory, advancing from behind the counter towards his visitor, "out you go! I've had enough of this; are you going by yourself, or am I to put you out?"

"Don't trouble yourself on my account, pray. Hollo!" and Bromley turned towards the window, "what's that stuck up there?"

Mr. Gregory turned on his heels like a teetotum; there certainly was something stuck up there; nearly the whole window was obscured by what seemed a

great white sheet. Mr. Gregory rushed out to see what it might be. There, sure enough, was a great sheet of white paper fastened by some means to the window, and on it, in large black letters, were these fine lines—

“Old Gregory’s a deceiver,
A rank old unbeliever ;
Blow up his shop,
And let it go pop,
The regular swindling thief !”

Directly he was in the street, and while he was surveying this striking specimen of youthful genius, a group of young gentlemen, whom he had not observed before, dashed into the shop, and before he had any idea of their intention had shut the door in the face of the outraged proprietor. But, like a hero, he dashed to the charge; fortunately, or unfortunately, they were unable to slip the bolt in time, so it became a question of pull butcher, pull baker, whether Mr. Gregory should be allowed on or off his own premises. It was at least an unusual sight to see the dignified purveyor of good things, without a hat, in his shirt-sleeves, and in the rain, struggling furiously to gain an entrance into his own shop, while his eccentric customers did their best to keep the door shut in his face.

“Let me in!” shouted Mr. Gregory, pushing with might and main. “I warn you once for all that if you don’t let me in”——

What he was going to warn them of he had no

time to say, for, before the words were from his lips, Howard Vincent whispered to his friends—

"We will let him in! When I say the word, all give way, and we'll see what comes of it. Now then, all together—back you go!" And instantly the agile youths, ceasing to struggle, sprang backwards from the door into the shop.

The natural consequence was, all resistance being removed, and Mr. Gregory not being prepared for it, the door went open with a rush, and he fell forward on the floor.

"Now's your time!" cried Howard Vincent, when they saw him fall, "make a bolt for it before he's up, and let him catch us if he can." And, in accordance with his advice, they did make a bolt for it, or, rather, tried to, for Nemesis was at hand, and they were not to get off so easily as that.

Vincent, who led the run, made good his flight, and the rest followed on his heels, jumping, with little ceremony, over Mr. Gregory's prostrate body; but that gentleman, when Bromley tried to follow their example, caught him by the leg, and, in spite of all his struggles, held him fast, and, rising to his feet, prepared to take vengeance on the captured foe. That Mr. Gregory's strength was equal to his indignation Master Maxwell very quickly found; taking him by the scruff of his neck, he laid him face downwards across his knee, and began to spank him with a force and vigour which were more striking than agreeable.

"Rescue! rescue!" shouted Bromley, in much distress; "take him off!" But it was easier said

than done; Mr. Gregory continued spanking without showing the slightest sign of weariness; it was evident that he would not be tired of the performance first. One of the victim's friends, meaning well no doubt, picked up a stone, and threw it; but instead of hitting Mr. Gregory, it hit the window, and smash went a pane of glass. Such an occurrence was little likely to diminish either the weight or number of the blows which still came battering down, and Master Maxwell began to howl.

“Do you hear, Old Gregory? you'd better let him go, or we'll make you pay for it,” cried Howard Vincent, touched at his friend's ill fortune. But Mr. Gregory was in no mood to pay heed to any threats of his, and Bromley's cries grew loud and long. “Let's make a dash for it and rescue him,” suggested Howard, when he saw that the punishment showed no signs of coming to an end. No sooner proposed than done, and the whole troop rushed forward to his help. But a new actor, whom they had not bargained for, came on the scene; that was no less a person than Mrs. Gregory. She was a lady of no slight muscular development, and having a good thick broomstick in her hand, she lost no time in laying it about her right and left.

There was a pretty commotion then. No wonder, heedless of the rain, the whole village turned out to see the fun; it was not every day they had a chance of seeing a sight like that. Who got the worst of it was doubtful perhaps, but it certainly was not Mrs. Gregory; there was every prospect of the assailants

being very glad to seek safety in flight, when once more a new actor figured on the scene, whose presence was as little expected as desired; this was no less a person than Mr. Jenkinson.

"Really," he began, in his pleasantly sarcastic way, when he recognised the combatants, "this is a delightful meeting; I believe these are young gentlemen from Dorrincourt? Excuse me, madam, but I should feel extremely obliged if you would not hit me more than necessary with that stick of yours," for Mrs. Gregory, ignorant of his neighbourhood, was waving it frantically around. "Maxwell Bromley, of course, and Jackson; it is an unexpected pleasure to meet you here"—as a matter of fact Tom had only been a looker-on throughout—"and our friend Maxted. I should be distressed if he were missing from such a gathering as this. Pray don't let your modesty lead you to hide your merits from my eyes. I have all your names by heart, and you may rest assured you will hear from me again. Perhaps, if you are ready, at your convenience, you will return whence you came."

They needed no second hint, but made off at once, leaving him to settle matters with Mr. and Mrs. Gregory as best he could.

"Just like our luck," mourned Vincent as they went; "if it had been any one but Jenkinson I shouldn't have minded so much, but we shall never hear the last of it from him."

"I wish I'd paid the wretched bill at the begin-

ning, and made no bones about it!" chimed in Bromley; "what an idiot I am!"

"By the way, how are your bones?" inquired Maxted, whose mortar-board had been injured in the fray; "I hope they're pretty well."

"Don't you try to chaff me, my boy, or you'll regret it to your dying day! I'm that sore I shan't be able to sit down comfortably for a week!" and Bromley sighed, fondling those parts which were in particular distress. But there were those among his friends who seemed to regard his melancholy as something of a joke.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE NEW PRESIDENT OF THE "SECRET SOCIETY."

TOM JACKSON was much troubled in his mind for Henry Boltington, not because the senior wished him so to be ; on that score, it was no fault of his.

"My dear Tom," he would observe when Tom had been pouring out his fears on his account, "what a fellow you are ! Why do you bother yourself for me ? The amount of good intended to be done is no doubt enormous, but the amount of good actually done is so very microscopic in proportion that it seems a pity so much effort should be thrown away."

It was one evening in the study ; they were alone, working, it was supposed, getting up to-morrow's prep. ; but as a matter of fact there had been much more talk than work, and much more silent thought than either. Tom was in his usual place, curled up in the great American chair beside the fire ; his books upon his knee, but little heed he paid to them ; his eyes were either fixed upon the flames, dancing and flashing on the glowing hearth, or else were following Boltington, who in one of his restless moods tried first one seat and then another, and then finding he

could keep still in none, sprang to his feet, and strode from side to side of the room, and from end to end. This was a performance enjoyed more by himself than by the occupants of the adjoining studies. The walls were not of the most substantial kind, and as every now and then he varied the monotony by dashing his fist against them in an absent frame of mind, his presence was rather too obvious to whoever might be upon the other side. More than once emphatic expressions of opinion had been shouted through the wall. Dodwell, who was laboriously trying to make his verses scan, was harassed into a high state of nervous excitement by the reiterated bumps coming at moments when he least expected them.

“Don’t!” he shouted every time another blow was given. “Don’t! my nerves are working like a pendulum!” But Boltington went on, unheeding.

At last the outraged student rushed out, in a state of mind bordering on frenzy, to treat this disturber of his peace to a plain word or two.

He appeared in the doorway with tangled hair, flushed countenance, coatless, with his shirt open at the neck, waving a pen in his right hand.

“Are you mad?” he cried; “is this Bedlam, or is it not? Here have I been engaged on one line for five-and-twenty minutes, and it won’t scan yet! If you keep on that bang, bang, banging against my wall, I’ll buy a revolver, and have my share of banging too.”

“Do!” said Boltington, with exasperating cool-

ness, in reply; "that would be proper sort of fun; then you might keep pop, pop, popping all night long."

"Work, indeed!" retorted Dodwell, in a rage; "the idea is farcical! What's the use of having a study to yourself if you have a lunatic next door to you? You must be mad, or you wouldn't treat everybody else as though they were insane."

"Your reasoning is wrong; it implies the presumption that only a madman would accord his fellows the treatment they should receive, and I thought you were such a stern opponent to anything like sham."

"Sham!" stormed Dodwell, who felt that this was adding insult to injury indeed; "sham! do you mean to say that I sham sanity?"

"Difficult to say," answered Boltington; "it is just possible that you only sham the other thing."

"I'll—I'll—such conduct in a sixth-form boy is scandalous! calling his colleagues lunatics! It would serve you right if I reported you! How am I to work if you keep beating a tattoo against my study wall? If anything goes wrong in class with me to-morrow I shall certainly let the doctor know who was the cause of it!"

And with this parting threat he bounced out of the room, with as much haste as he had bounced in.

"Now do be reasonable," said Tom, when he was gone. "If you won't work yourself, it's no reason why you shouldn't let others work instead."

“Reasonable! reasonable!” growled Boltington, in his hoarsest tones; “how can I be?”

“How indeed!” queried Tom, slyly giving his question a turn he had not meant that it should take. “I have long thought it was an impossibility with you.”

The senior glared at him; the remark flavoured of impudence beyond a doubt, but it had its ridiculous side as well, and, struck by that, he burst into a laugh.

“You take liberties,” he said, shaking his fist at Master Tom, “and each time I pardon you; but one day revenge will come, and when it comes, beware.”

“Yes,” commented Tom, without evincing fear of any kind, but smiling rather at the threatening fist; “when it comes I will beware.”

Matters between the doctor and Henry Boltington had been by no means improved by time; indeed, it was the other way. Geoffrey Hazlemere had much to answer for in this. That interview with Dr. Macqueen which has been chronicled had induced the headmaster to form an even worse estimate of the boy's character than had been the case before. That this was so, he took little pains to conceal. It was plain to every one that the doctor did not like Boltington, while Boltington, on his part, went out of his way to show that this feeling was quite mutual. A most unfortunate state of things was this, for endless discords were the consequence.

It was unanimously agreed by the members of the monitorial form that such proceedings were never

known at Dorrincourt before. There were scenes of the most unseemly kind, wrangles which would have been discreditable in a national school; but at Dorrincourt! It was universally allowed that things were very bad indeed.

Boltington was, of course, to blame. It is small excuse to say that it was not his fault alone; had he been careful, a better understanding would have sprung up ere this. But he was reckless, utterly careless of what might happen, bent on—a thing which it was wholly unnecessary to do—going out of his way to annoy the doctor. It was plain to all, himself included, that there could only be one ending if this state of things went on.

On one occasion he was forbidden to enter the doctor's presence for a week together, on another he was confined to his room for three whole days. It was obvious that this could not go on; there was only one course to pursue with a monitor who would persist in courting punishment; expulsion must be the end of it. It was this which troubled Tom.

To-day there had been another passage-of-arms between the doctor and his friend, and for the sixth or seventh time Boltington had been dismissed the room. Remonstrance seemed altogether futile; the offender only laughed at him.

"What is the use of wasting words of wisdom upon me?" he asked. "I'm like a ship, who won't answer to her helm, drifting right upon the rocks. Macqueen is just as obstinate as I. He means to scuttle me, and I mean scuttling."

And he laughed, though his laugh was not a lively one.

“What must be, must be, that you know, and the black sheep of the flock cannot change his skin.”

“Harry,” said Tom, in the sweet and gentle tones he always used; “would you like your mother to hear you talk like that?”

At this the other started and began to stride about the room again.

“I don’t think you should ever say what you would not like your mother to be sitting by to hear. Besides” — he paused — “besides, Harry, there is Someone even nearer than your mother, who hears it all. Besides, you know as well as I do, that it is the merest nonsense what you say.”

“It may be nonsense, but it is true in spite of that, Tom!” and he came and stood by where Tom was sitting, and laid his hand upon the chair. “It’s the easiest thing in life to talk morality. I could preach a sermon with the best of them; but to lie down in the dust, for Macqueen to step on me, is more than I can do.”

“Harry,” answered Tom, looking up at him with the ghost of a smile upon his face, “don’t you think that it’s almost easier to talk that sort of stuff than it is to talk morality? But I don’t think it’s brave or manly either, and I’m afraid you do.”

“What do you mean?” asked Boltington, flushing up at this; “I don’t think it’s anything of the kind — I’m not such an idiot! I only say that while

Macqueen persists in treating me as he treats me now, I shall not change to him."

"Which means, as far as I can see, that you would sooner knock out your brains against a wall than move aside and pass it by. That may be a gallant thing, but don't you think—for the sake of argument, you know—that it's rather a silly one as well?"

But Boltington would pay no heed to him; he was in one of his most rebellious moods, and nothing which savoured of submission would be listened to by him.

"How am I different from the others? Why should he treat me like a dog? It is easy for you to talk; say what you will, it is more difficult for me to do; and since it is plain we can't agree, let us at least agree to differ and to part!"

"To part! Does that mean, Harry, that you will do as the boys do in the story-books, run away from school, or be expelled instead?"

"What matters which it is? One or other of them it must be soon, and since there is so little choice why need I choose?"

There was silence for a time.

Boltington, with his hands behind his back, was still pacing restlessly to and fro, now with eyes upon the ground, now with his head thrown back, defiance in his glance, doing battle with his thoughts within. Tom never looked at him, but, with his hands clasped upon the open book, kept his eyes upon the fire, as though he read a story there; when

he spoke again, it was in a dreamy tone, as though his thoughts were far away.

“The cost—have you counted what the cost will be? Perhaps it is because I never knew my mother that I think so much of yours; but have you thought what will your mother say? She is so proud of you, she thinks she has so much cause for pride, that it will be hard to see you coming home like that.”

There was again silence for a moment, and then Boltington burst out more defiantly than ever.

“Why do you always harp upon my mother? and why do you always speak as though I should appear disgraceful in her eyes? I tell you I know her better than do you, and she won't judge me like that.”

“Perhaps not; as you say, you know her better than do I.”

There was weary music in his voice, as though he were tired.

“You may induce her to see it with your eyes, no doubt; she loves you too well to think ill of you for long. But if I had a mother—if I had a mother, I think I should like to act up to her ideal, not drag her down to mine. But I have no mother, so it is but theory after all.”

“Tom,” said Boltington, after another pause, “let there be no more of this; just understand me once for all, there must be no more! It does no good to either you or me. You may be right and I all wrong—that is a question I do not dispute at all; you have your way, and I'll have mine.”

"But if I'm wrong, I should like to be right with you," said Tom, with a doubtful smile.

"Come, don't let's have it over again!" cried Boltington, flinging himself upon the rug, and laying his head upon the other's knee. "Tell me a story, Tom—something grim and ghostly—some lively legend of a wicked youth who, being expelled from school, was condemned to haunt the classic shade of Dorrincourt for ever and a day."

"Are you the wicked youth?" asked Tom, with his hand upon the senior's head.

Boltington laughed, and rattled the poker in the fireplace; and so the subject changed, and they talked of other things.

The next morning an important event took place; important, that is to say, in the eyes of those who had to do with it.

Henry Boltington on first entering the study found that in the night some one had slipped a note beneath the door. It was written in a doubtful hand, and read as follows:—

"The Committee of the Secret Society present their compliments to Henry Boltington, and beg to say that if convenient they will wait on him when morning school is done, to submit to his consideration a particular proposal.

"*N.B.*—This subject is an important one.

"Signed, The Committee of the S. S. S. S."

At first Boltington was rather in a fog as to what this meant; the signature was vague, to say the

least of it. "The Committee of the S. S. S. S." was an unknown quantity, and what did those mysterious four letters mean? It was only after he had read it through a second time that it began to dawn on him that he had heard something of this society before; still he had no idea for what purposes it existed, still less could he conceive what business its committee could have with him.

Not five minutes after morning school he was in his study, and directly afterwards the committee men—or is it boys?—arrived. Their entrance was not exactly dignified; they hesitated whether to announce their presence, or to enter without ceremony of any kind. At the last moment a difficulty arose with reference to the order of their going. The first was desirous of being last, but the last by no means wanted to be first.

"You're the chairman," explained Tiny to Maxwell Bromley, "you ought to go in first."

"Stuff!" answered Mr. Chairman Bromley, "nothing of the kind! I'll see you farther first! Why don't Farthingale go in?"

"Yes," inquired the other three, "why don't Farthingale go in!"

And before Gerard could reply they avoided troubling him so far by dexterously elbowing him along the corridor, and, having turned the handle of the door, neatly jerked him forward into the senior's room, after which they all followed close upon his heels.

It had been arranged that Gerard should open the

ball by explaining the object of the interview, but that young gentleman was so disconcerted by the treatment his colleagues had accorded him, that he could only hold his tongue, and look the things he had meant to say. In this emergency, Bromley, with his ready tongue, filled up the breach.

He explained the object of their society, what their purpose was, and how that purpose was to be done. He then went on to point out how numerous their members were, that fresh ones were joining every day, and how there was every promise that success would wait on their deserving. A few home-thrusts were given at the doctor, and he very truly showed—and easily as well—that he was by no means the most popular headmaster the school had seen.

Both the speaker's matter and the speaker's manner tickled Boltington amazingly; nor, in the mood that he was in, need that be wondered at.

Bromley's coolness was surprising; he talked of a rebellion in the school as though it were a thing of course, and one which might be reckoned on with every certainty. When he had finished, Farthingale, by this time more master of himself, took up the strain.

"A head," he said in that half-whisper in which he spoke, "is what we want, some one in authority; one who can lead us on to battle, and captain us to victory. The spirit is ours; least and greatest, the blood is rising in our veins as the days go on; but without a general never was a victory won, without a good commander the best soldiers may lay down their arms and die."

"Therefore," continued Farquaharson in that dry tone of his which had a tendency to grate upon his comrades' ears, "as we are the best soldiers, and don't want to lay down our arms and die, we come to you, perceiving, with our prophetic eyes, that you are the general inspired to command, to ask you to make our cause your own, and lead us on to battle and the foe."

"Pity you can't talk sense," muttered Bromley between his closely shut teeth. "One of these days I'll have a row with you."

This was not intended for the public benefit, but Farquaharson chose to consider that it was.

"I beg your pardon," he remarked, turning on his friend, "what was that you said?"

"Punch his head," growled Vincent, inserting his elbow in Bromley's side.

"Punch my—" went on Farquaharson in his blandest tones. "Did I understand you to say punch my head? This is most distressing. You perceive," turning to Boltington, "how much we need a master's hand to unite these parted strands."

"The long and the short of it is," struck in Bromley, feeling that this sort of thing did not add to the dignity of the occasion, "that we want you to be our president, that's what we want; you're a monitor and that sort of thing, and we feel that if you were to join us, and be our president, it would give us a first-rate lift along."

There was a pause when this was said. The five committee men stood in a row, not in the most

graceful attitudes, nor did they look as though they felt so comfortable as they might have done. Boltington, towering like a giant above them all, leant with his back against the mantelshelf, looking down on them with an amused smile upon his handsome face.

"Don't you think," he said, as though he were throwing out a hint by way of a suggestion, "that it's rather a curious sort of thing you're asking me to do? I just put it to you, you know, just to see if such a thought has not occurred to you; I don't say what is my own opinion on the subject, but I just want to ask how it appears to you?"

Tiny Maxted, who had been suffering excruciating agonies, sitting on the safety-valve, as it were, to keep his tongue from going, here burst out with some original observations of his own.

The French revolution, as usual, was to the fore, and Boltington, who was not aware of his studies in the history of that period, not being able to make sure of what he said, was taken quite aback.

"It's this way," he observed, "while the demon of despotism reigns triumphant in the land, individual liberty must stand or fall. Ages may pass, and man exist no more, but the blood-red flag of progress rides triumphant in the wind, though their bones may crumble into dust and all are gone. Epoch follows epoch, and history is reiteration, but the tales of time, told while the tyrant totters, tramp through the world at the head of trembling tyrannies. This is plain, chaos may succeed delirium, but the dial hand of ages always turns to liberty."

With exceeding toil and trouble he had got this off by heart, out of some strange volume he had picked up somewhere; but the effect produced was by no means what he bargained for. Boltington, to whom the sort of thing was new, stared in amazement. His colleagues, who had heard too much of it before, were moved to indignation.

“You idiot!” exclaimed Bromley, hot with scorn. “I do believe you’re the greatest lunatic I ever knew!”

Tiny turned on his heels as on a pivot, eyeing his friends from top to toe. Scorn was on the face of all. Great orators have not been appreciated by their listeners before to-day, but it is doubtful if those same listeners ever went to the length of addressing them as Bromley did Tiny now. It is not strange that he felt hurt.

“What did you call me?” he asked.

“An idiot! and I’ll call it you again!”

Before they knew what was about to happen, the orator raised his hand and struck the critic a smart blow upon the cheek. In an instant Bromley made ready to pay him back in kind. There was every prospect of a scene which could scarcely be called desirable considering that they were both committee men, when Boltington interfered and threw oil upon the troubled waters.

“Excuse me,” he said, parting the combatants by the simple process of laying a hand on the shoulder of each of them, “but is this kindly? It is hardly a pleasant prospect, to lead an army which is not

united; even if the best soldiers fall out upon the road, of what service can any general be?"

The two committee-men looked neither cool nor dignified; both had flaming cheeks, and both had flashing eyes.

"Then he shouldn't call me names!" burst out Tiny in a pretty passion. "Do you think I will be called names by him?"

"Quite so," went on Boltington placidly, with a pleasant smile; "but perhaps you will remember that you came here to ask me to be your president, not to fight—at least, such I understood to be the case. If you must fight, I should be the last to interfere with your amusements; but pray let it be outside. With regard to your request, I accept with pleasure, and shall feel proud to preside over such a promising society.

"You will?" said Farthingale, holding out his hand to him.

"I will," answered Boltington, still with an odd smile about his lips, taking the proffered hand and holding it in his, "and if you will allow me to give you a sentiment, it shall be Success to the society, and down with tyrants and all tyranny."

CHAPTER XX.

GEOFFREY HAZLEMERE IMPROVING THE OCCASION.

BOLTINGTON lost no time in showing that he did not consider his office a sinecure ; president he seemed resolved to be in fact as well as name, and very soon his coadjutors found out that he by no means intended his position to be an ornamental one alone. In that enthusiastic way in which he was apt to take up all new ideas which caught his fancy, he took up the idea of this society ; if the ardour of its members was warm before, it was burning now. It was evident that Mr. President Boltington meant to reach by leaps and bounds the goal which they approached with cautious steps before.

The fact of his having accepted this new dignity was meant to be kept private ; indeed, the whole society was meant in practice and not in theory alone to be a secret one. But ere long, by some means or other, which we will not attempt to fathom, the thing leaked out, and it was pretty generally known that he, a senior and a sixth-form boy, had actually lent his countenance to a movement which was designed to overturn that very authority which, by every law written or traditional, it was his duty

to uphold. The excitement, the scandal rather, this created needs no description.

When the rumour was bruited abroad, those who heard it first, agog with curiosity, did all they could to prove it true or false. But that they found it difficult to do. Those who really did know were sealed to silence, and nothing could induce their tongues to wag. By the members of the society it was confidently asserted that they were supported by no less a person than the most popular monitor in the school. The non-members, however, who so far as capacity and conduct went were the cream of Dorrincourt, shook their heads and doubted. Indeed, although it was impossible to conceal that the society was in actual existence, so well had things been managed that, beyond the bare fact of its existence, very little was known by any but those whose names were on its roll of members; its real purposes or plans, if they had thought of them at all, they could only conjecture.

If they had thought of them at all, I say advisedly; for, as yet, few, if any, had given it a second thought—if they had accorded it a first. The seniors considered the whole affair—of which they only heard by chance if they heard at all—a piece of boyish nonsense, one of those freaks of folly which boys are apt to take up one day to fling aside the next. But, however, as time went on they looked at it more askance. Straws show how the tide is flowing; putting this and that together, the more observant of the monitors concluded that the

tide was flowing in a direction anything but creditable to the ancient school. A general spirit of discontent seemed in the air, a spirit which evinced itself more and more as the days went on. Punishment lists were swollen largely; every master had a bad report to make; the average work of the school was falling off from the high standard it had once maintained; there was a change for the worse in the demeanour and very bearing of the boys; a wholly new tendency to insolence showed itself, and grew as time slipped by; politeness faded fast; the relations between the masters and their pupils altered sadly; each seemed to vie with the other as to who could treat his tutor with the least respect.

There must be a reason for such things, and the head-boy and his colleagues decided that in this case there were two—in the first place, the popularity, or rather want of it, of Dr. Macqueen; and in the second, the influence of the Secret Society. There was no doubt the doctor was unpopular. Nor was the cause too far to seek; it was that very common one, always prolific of discord, the absence of a mutual understanding; they failed to understand the doctor in exactly the same degree as he failed in understanding them.

This grew worse instead of better as the days and weeks went on. No master, whether at the head of a class or of a school, can make the best of his opportunities if he is not in sympathy with those beneath him. Boys are kittle cattle, too often full of faults as an egg of meat, but, for all that, shrewd

observers in their small way; and if a master, be he who he may, dunce or scholar, is, and continues to be, unpopular with them, you may be very sure that the right is not entirely upon his side.

However that may be, Dr. Macqueen was unpopular at Dorrincourt, and, as not seldom is the case, he perceived it least of all. But again, be that how it may, it is very certain that no boy or body of boys has a right to make capital of such a feeling, and, for purposes of his or their own, fan it to a flame. This is what Otway and his colleagues perceived the Society was doing now.

Headmasters have been unpopular before to-day, and nothing serious has come of it; true it is that with little difficulty such a one may do less good than harm. But Dr. Macqueen might have been unpopular at Dorrincourt for ever, and yet doctrines never have entered the head of any one such as the Secret Society was teaching now.

When, therefore, it began to be whispered that Boltington, whose influence and authority among the juniors was notoriously great, had thrown in his lot with the discontented ones, and consented to lead them along the path which they were too ready to tread without his guidance, his colleagues, astonished beyond measure, fell to wondering what would be the end of it.

“But is it true?” said Thelton when they were assembled in Otway’s study to discuss the matter. “How do we know that after all we are not wronging him? I give him credit for a good

deal, but not for anything so absolutely insane as this."

"I do," continued Henderson, nose in the air, "and worse. I expected something of the sort some time ago. He's just the sort of fellow to bite off his nose to spite his face."

"I wish," moaned Dodwell, who was easily cast down, "Dr. Graham had never gone! A pretty fix we're getting in! What's the use of anything we can do? They'll care for us no more than that," and he snapped his fingers feebly. "I spoke to young Bromley as I came along the corridor—he's sure to have a hand in it—and he told me I might cut him into mincemeat before he'd tell me anything. That's a pretty speech for a monitor to hear!"

"I'd cut him into mincemeat," said Thelton grimly, "if I were you."

"That's the most agreeable part of it," Henderson went on, still with his nose, metaphorically speaking, in the air. "We might be a set of dummies for all the attention with which they think it worth their while to favour us. With the most complete sincerity we can say that we know no more what they are doing, or intend to do, than the most wooden wooden effigy; nor can we know unless they please, in their exceeding condescension, to so favour us."

After this it was but natural that they should need a few moments to turn the matter over in their minds. It was such an entire novelty for any move-

ment to be taking place in the school of which they were kept, and purposely kept, in the completest ignorance, that they wanted time to fully realise their new position. Until recently they had been, what they were meant to be, in the fullest sense leaders of the school; now that was changed, and they were left to follow, whether they would or no, leaders of whose very personality they were ignorant. Otway, seated at the head of the table in the only easy chair which the room contained, broke the silence which had reigned.

“As Thelton says, after all we may be wronging him. At any rate, we should not judge him from hearsay alone; if he be condemned, out of his own mouth let us condemn him. I think if one or two of us went to him personally, or I alone, and put the question plainly, he would hardly refuse an answer; or if he did, silence would constitute an answer in itself.”

“You go,” suggested Thelton; “you go alone, and we will wait to hear the answer you bring back again.”

So it was arranged. Without further loss of time the head-boy rose at once and went. He found Boltington had another visitor already—Tom Jackson had preceded him. Immediately on his entrance he perceived that he had interrupted something very like a scene. Boltington was standing in a defiant attitude in the centre of the room, an obstinate look upon his face; Jackson, with pale and agitated countenance, was close beside him. When Otway

entered, Boltington crossed and took up his position before the fireplace, while Tom remained where he had stood before.

“Can I speak to you?” asked Otway, looking doubtfully from the elder to the younger boy.

“Certainly. Is Jackson in the way?”

Otway judged from his hard and reckless tone that he had not a pleasant task before him.

“I will not stay,” said Tom hurriedly; “there is no use in staying now.” And without another word he hastened from the room.

Left alone, the two monitors eyed each other, mentally, as it were, taking each other’s measure. The senior spoke first. While he spoke, Boltington kept his glance fixed on him in a way which promised anything but satisfaction.

“There is some foolish story—at least I trust it is—being told of your having mixed yourself up with this folly of the juniors which threatens to discredit not only them but us as well; and as you were not with the rest of the fellows in my room just now, I thought it would be better for me to come and ask you to give me authority to say the story is untrue.”

“I am obliged to you,” retorted Boltington in tones and terms which put an end to any hopes the head-boy might have had that the tale was false. “I might, if I chose, ask what folly you alluded to, because I know of none which can properly be so called; but as I suppose I understand your meaning well enough, I prefer to simply say that I shall be

obliged by your not interfering in any affairs of mine until you are invited so to do. The accident of our sitting upon the same form by no means privileges you to indulge your curiosity to a degree which so strongly savours of impertinence." He stopped. Otway made no reply, but only looked at him; so Boltington went on—

"If you have nothing of more interest to communicate, may I ask you to excuse me, as I am much occupied just now?"

"Although I do not completely understand you, Boltington," returned Otway, with that grave dignity which so well became him,—and Boltington felt in some mysterious way as though the head-boy was reading his inmost thoughts—"I do in part. You are doing in haste what you will repent at leisure—playing with fire which will burn you most of all. If you take my advice"—

"Thank you, I will not take your advice; I prefer to be my own lawyer, even though I have a fool for a client. But if you will take mine, you will reserve your pearls of wisdom for some object more deserving, and, at any rate, leave me alone."

"Very well," said Otway, the ghost of a smile flitting across his face. "I am afraid the man is not yet born who would persuade you to see the difference between wrong-headedness and force of character; but as sure as we stand here, one day you will see, too late, with the eyes of experience that the difference does exist."

Then he went out and left Boltington alone.

Of all concerned, perhaps no one was more troubled by Boltington's proceedings than Tom Jackson. When, on Otway's entrance, he left the study, he did as he was wont to do when perplexed in mind—sought seclusion in the open air. He was crossing the cricket-field, his hands in his pockets, and his head downcast, when some one behind called him by his name. Thinking it was only some one who perhaps wanted him to join him in a game, being in anything but a mood for such a thing, he paid no heed, but strolled slowly on. But the caller, whoever he was, not to be denied, called him again; and then Tom heard some one running after him along the path, a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and for the third time he was called by name. Compelled to pay attention, he stopped and turned; it was Geoffrey Hazlemere.

“Geoffrey,” he began, “I did not know that it was you, or I would have stopped at once; I thought it was some fellow who had more time upon his hands than he knew what to do with.”

“I am not so sure,” said Geoffrey, with something of that unpleasantly sarcastic smile which was habitual with him, “but that that is a definition which applies to me. A doubt how to improve the shining hours which hang upon my hands is no uncommon thing with me.”

They fell in side by side. A change, subtle but defined, had come over Hazlemere; not only inwardly, but outwardly as well. Still particular almost to foppishness about his dress, there was a something

bolder, more independent, in his bearing. By no means devoid of all the unpleasant characteristics for which he had been peculiar before—such alterations, if they take place at all, are gradual, not the work of a day—none the less there was a marked and distinct improvement both in his mode of thought and mode of action. Geoffrey Hazlemere was still anything but a boy to be admired; but he was far more so than when first we became acquaintances. The germs of good which exist in every one were slowly declaring their existence, and it seemed that only time was needed to complete the revolution which already was begun. For some moments they went on silently, Tom still with his glances on the ground—he was plainly in no companionable mood—Geoffrey furtively watching him and the trouble which was mirrored on his face.

“What’s the row?” he asked at last; “you look as though you had a kingdom on your shoulders. Anything gone wrong? Got some verses, and can’t break the back of them? Anything in which I can lend a hand for you.”

“I’m afraid not,” said Tom, still with his eyes cast down. “It’s nothing of my own; it’s Boltington.”

As he spoke the name Geoffrey started, and a flush, which went as quickly as it came, passed across his face; he looked at Tom half doubtfully. It was curious he should mention it just now, for of all names that was the one of which he was least desirous to hear. Like the ghost of Hamlet’s father,

it weighed upon his mind, and always seemed to point to something of which he was not glad to think.

Of this Tom was wholly ignorant. What private reasons Geoffrey had for not wishing to make that headstrong friend of his the subject of his conversation he did not even guess; unconscious, therefore, of the feelings with which he heard, he went on to tell him of his trouble.

"The doctor and he do not get on at all, and it seems to me that it is not his fault alone; he thinks that the doctor does not like him—did not like him from the first; he is readier to find fault with him than anybody else, and he cannot understand why this should be."

"The doctor," said Geoffrey, with a queer look about his eyes—it was his turn now to keep them on the ground—"is prejudiced; he likes and dislikes for no reason at all—the second oftener than the first."

"With Boltington it is different from anybody else; being a monitor it is harder for him to bear; and—and I don't think he—he has the very best of tempers"—Geoffrey laughed at this unwilling admission; he had the best of reasons for knowing how true it was—"so that makes it harder still." He stopped; and then continued in a dreamy tone, as though he had forgotten who was his listener, "I'm afraid to think what will be the end of it. He will do mischief in the school; I see he means it now; and then—then it will mean expulsion at the least; and expulsion with such a character as

his means more than some might think. It seems all wrong. Why should the doctor and he be always disagreeing? I wish there was some one who could make them see it with my eyes."

He stopped, almost unconsciously, and if he still dreamed on, did not dream aloud. Hazlemere had visions of his own, and they were more unpleasant ones than Tom's; at least Tom's conscience was clear, which was exactly what Hazlemere's was not; uncomfortable reflections pressed on him fast, and clearer and clearer his mental vision saw the position he was in. All at once an inspiration came to him—a thought which gave him no peace till it was told. Suddenly he stood in the path and, turning to Tom, said, in a voice trembling with a feeling which at first neither of them could understand—

"Jackson, you once did a thing for me which I shall not forget—a thing which being done saved me from being even worse than I am now. I am not much given to gratitude as a rule, it's a quality in which I've little faith, but—but I can't stand still and hear you treating Boltington's bad business as though it were your own, and know that I am the cause of all!"

His face was white as paper; his hand trembled as he laid it on Tom's arm; there was an emotion in his eyes he could not master. Geoffrey Hazlemere was agitated by feelings of a kind he had never thought would gain a hold on him.

As for Tom, he was amazed; he stared in com-

plete bewilderment. What the other meant was as Double-Dutch to him.

"You?" he questioned, eyeing Geoffrey with stupid eyes; "you the cause of all?" He dimly doubted if Hazlemere were sound in all his faculties.

"Yes. I!—I!" he answered, with a passion which puzzled Tom yet more, "I believe I am the cause of everything that ever has gone wrong at Dorrincourt. I'm like the plague about the place, every one who approaches me receives contagion; and if Boltington is expelled, I shall have been at the bottom of it all."

"How is that the case?" asked Tom gently, thinking Geoffrey in his excitement was saying what he did not mean. "Don't let's stand still; it is too cold for that; let's go on a bit, and then you can tell me what it is you want to say; though how you can be at the bottom of all Boltington's misdoings is a mystery to me."

And he smiled, thinking by some means to calm the other's agitation; but Geoffrey took the smile in evil part.

"Don't laugh!" he cried. "Why do you laugh at me? If it is a joke to you I'll hold my tongue; but I thought you were in earnest when you spoke just now."

"So I was, and am. But tell me quietly, I shall so much better understand what you have to say if you tell me quietly; and you will be able to tell me better too."

"It's all very well to say tell me quietly," re-

torted Hazlemere, taking out his handkerchief and mopping his heated brow; "but it is more than I can do! I shouldn't be able to tell you at all, if it must be quietly. You wait till you've got something on your mind like I have, then you'll find that it must come out with a rush, or not at all! Quietly indeed!"

And he looked as though he felt aggrieved.

"Tell it then," said Tom, who, for the life of him, could not help seeing that Geoffrey's excitement had a comic side to it, "as you please. But if you tell anything"—this was very gravely—"I think if I were you I would tell all."

"Would you? you wait till you are me!" replied Geoffrey in waspish tones. "But if you keep interrupting me, how can I tell anything at all? If you're going to talk, talk; but if I am, let me talk alone!"

Tom made no reply.

Geoffrey was plainly in a bad temper all at once. From experience Tom knew that on such occasions it was best to let him conduct the conversation as he chose.

This he did, and in a language which was peculiarly his own Geoffrey told the tale he had to tell. Tom listened, and as he did so his eyes were opened more and more as he went out. Rather haltingly that memorable interview with the doctor in his study was retold to Tom's astonished ears. How the doctor mistook Boltington for Stornell; and how Geoffrey not only left him in his delusion,

but made it stronger still. So this was the secret of the doctor's dislike to Boltington; it was plain enough now! No wonder he distrusted him, when he was furnished with such a character by one who was supposed to know him well.

When Geoffrey finished, Tom said not a word. He was sick at heart; if he had known of this before! If he had only had this key to the position, how different it might have been! Geoffrey seemed to resent his silence as a personal wrong.

"Well," he demanded, "is that all you have to say?"

"All? I have said nothing yet, nor have I much to say. One thing is plain, you must go to the doctor, and tell him what you have told me now."

"To the doctor! Do you think I'm mad? No, thank you, I've not gone so far as that. I've shaved expulsion too close before to-day to wish to court it now."

"Then if you won't I must," said Tom quietly. "What is the use of your telling me the wrong that you have done, if you do not wish to set it right? Besides, a confidant in such a matter is an accomplice too, and that I would not be on any terms."

Hazlemere was still. This was a view of the position which had not occurred to him; when he spoke again it was as with an effort, and in low and dogged tones.

"If I must I must; and if it must be told, I'd sooner have it told by me than you. But mind, if

I'm expelled it will wipe off the score between us two."

"If anything that I can do or say can be of use to you it shall be said or done ; but it must be told, and, as you say, it is plain it would be better told by you."

Geoffrey grunted, or something very like it ; the situation did not commend itself to him by any means.

CHAPTER XXI.

TOM MEETS WITH A CATASTROPHE.

MATTERS, though outwardly, perhaps, there were no visible signs of their growing worse, still grew no better; moreover, those who saw beneath the surface, and kept a keen look-out to see which way the wind was blowing, doubted if there could be more than one stage further to make them worst of all. Otway was one of these, Tom Jackson was another.

Steeped to the lips in the traditions of the ancient school, jealous of its honour as though it were his own, the head-boy viewed the chaos towards which they rapidly were drifting with feelings difficult to understand. Ever since there had been Otways in the land, Dorrincourt had been the storehouse from which they drew their learning. It was but natural that in course of time they had come to look upon it almost as an heirloom of their own, of which they might be justly proud. They were of standing in the land, and this feeling in the boy was perpetuated in the man; in the senate and the world they watched its interests with zealous eyes. They were averse to changes; as they knew it, they wished their sons to know it too. Anything which

tended to pluck out, root and branch, landmarks which had existed in their fathers' time, met with their sternest opposition. Not that this feeling always showed to the best advantage. They disliked change, not because things were better as they were—indeed, sometimes they could scarcely have been worse—but because they were.

None the less, it is good that pupils, and their sons through many generations, should make the interests of their fathers' school their own. Loyalty is not so common now but that, in any form, it is a pleasant thing to see. George Otway's feelings, therefore, when he saw the crisis which was threatening on every hand, were of a kind difficult to understand. It was as though in his own home circle the retainers and the children had risen against the father, and treated with contempt him whom they should reverence.

With Tom Jackson it was different. His sympathies were with the actors, not the scene. He had no traditions to link each stone in the old walls with memories in the past; yet his interest, if less ideal, was quite as real. Since Hazlemere's confession it had become intenser still. Nor was his anxiety decreased by that young gentleman's behaviour.

Try how he would, he could not learn with certainty if he had told the story to the doctor as it was told to him. Time after time Geoffrey eluded his attempts to ascertain the truth. Never a more adroit shuffler than Geoffrey Hazlemere!

Tom's anxiety grew more and more. In vain did

he endeavour to bring him to the point; a plain answer to a plain question seemed the last thing he could give. At last things reached a crisis, when Tom resolved to trust no more to Geoffrey's evasions, but to tell the story on his own account.

He had just formed this resolution when two things happened, one of which made the necessity that something should be done more pressing still, while the second rendered the task more difficult to do.

Quite accidentally one day Tom learnt—and unintentionally, no doubt—that the Secret Society had gone so far as not only to decide upon a barring-out, but actually had fixed the date when the barring-out should be.

He was in agonies. That Boltington was the prime mover in the matter he had the plainest evidence; that he had imbued others with his spirit was undoubted. That they, wholly reckless of what the consequences might be, would go lengths which would inevitably increase their culpability, he had too much ground for fear.

Something must be done, no matter at what risk of incurring odium. He could not stand still, and, metaphorically speaking, see them dash out their brains against a wall, which they were determined not to see.

But what to do? That was the question which troubled him. What to do, which, when done, would not make things worse instead of better, was what he racked his brain to think.

That very afternoon, being half-holiday, he joined Leo Mason in a ramble through the fields—not because he cared for exercise, nor because he was in a mood for company, but because he felt that unless he did something to relieve himself from the strain of anxiety which preyed upon his mind, he should break down, and then all his anxiety would have probably been in vain.

He was by no means strong; indeed, the contrary—he was naturally weak; delicate to a degree, sometimes the least thing would lay him low. Such a contingency he was above all things wishful to avoid.

So this afternoon off he went with Leo Mason on a ramble through the fields.

It was a sunny afternoon; they were having some pleasant days now that the ice and snow had passed away. Mason, as usual, had his specimen-boxes, his air-gun, and his fly-net, and all the other paraphernalia of the naturalist who takes his walks abroad. Tom, who had no hobby of the kind, had nothing but himself to carry; so Mason, improving the occasion, took with him an additional number of his implements, which he persuaded Tom it was only fair that he should carry. Thus furnished, they set out upon their voyaging.

Leo's conversation was of nothing else but the animal life which his heart held dear. Tom was a willing listener. At first, in an abstracted mood, he paid little heed to what his friend was saying.

Leo, who was far from dull, soon saw this, and

that he was expending his eloquence on the attentive air.

“A pretty sort of fellow you are!” he exclaimed, indignantly. “I don’t believe you’ve heard a word I’ve said from first to last! I might as well talk to a wooden-headed dunderhead”—whatever that might be—“as you! You do nothing else but moon all day!”

Thus called to book, Tom humbly apologised for his inattention to his companion’s oratory, and set himself to pay more heed—a thing he found it anything but difficult to do. Few persons more worth listening to than the one who has made Nature, in any of her varied forms, his study and delight.

Leo was an enthusiast. The lower kinds of insect life possessed an attraction in his eyes which the ignorant outsider thought ridiculous indeed. But that was the fault of ignorance. The more he knew what it was that he derided, the fainter his derision grew. He found that the laugh, if any, was on the other side; as was the case in the church at Auburn—those who came to mock remained to pray!

Tom found—as indeed he had found before—that Leo’s conversation in his favourite theme had a charm entirely its own. True, he only discussed beetles and butterflies, newts and toads. But it is astonishing what a poetic reality hangs round even these strange creatures, and how distinct a fact it is that the plain truth of their lives and actions

is more surprising than the most astounding fiction that the mind of man has at any time conceived.

Very quickly Tom discovered that he was listening with his ears and heart as well. Mason had no cause to find fault then. So carried away was he by the interest his hearer showed, that he was within an ace of forgetting the chief purpose which had brought him out.

"I had no idea," said Tom, naïvely, after a brilliant burst on Leo's part, "that there was so much in frogs and toads as that. I have seen you very dirty"—a particular occasion recurred to him just then—"but I always thought that you liked the dirt rather than the things that you were looking for."

"Did you?" retorted Leo, scornfully. "That shows your ignorance. I never thought much of your brains, but I always gave you credit for having more than that? Like dirt indeed! Pray may I inquire why I should be more fond of dirt than you?"

It was on the tip of Tom's tongue to reply that he drew that not unnatural conclusion from the fact that his person was always so much more conspicuous for dirt than anybody else's; but for prudential reasons he deemed it better to refrain. Leo's temper was more easily brought to a state of storm than back to calm again.

"I suppose," suggested Jackson, mildly, "that it's the frogs and things which make you look so strange."

“Then why do you suppose anything of the kind?” demanded the naturalist, above a whisper. “Why should you suppose anything of the kind, I should like to know? And what do you mean by frogs and things? Things indeed! Let me tell you that frogs and things don’t make me look half so strange as they do you!”

With which rather vague remark he sniffed the air as a war-horse sniffs the fray; and, without condescending to notice Tom, commenced to march along the path at the rate of five miles an hour or more. Tom, who was no great pedestrian, found he needed all his breath if he did not wish to fall behind, and that he had none to spare for answering him. Ere long, finding it impossible to walk so fast, he had to break into a trot, and get on as he was able. Mason, though conscious doubtless of his distress, paid no heed, but still went striding on. Fortunately, just when Tom felt that he must give up the effort to keep up with him, his eyes were caught by something moving quickly through the ragged grass.

“Catch hold of those!” cried Mason, thrusting into his hands the fly-net, air-gun, and specimen boxes. “There’s the very thing that I’ve been looking for.”

The thing in question was a mole, which, directly it found that its movements were perceived, began to bury itself in the ground with the rapidity for which it is remarkable. Down went Leo on his hands and knees, eager for the chase; but the mole

had the start of him; already it was out of sight, and it was plain that if he wanted to effect its capture he would have to oust it from its underground retreat.

"Have you got my matches?" he asked, turning round to Tom.

"Matches!" answered Tom mistyly; he was in somewhat of a dilemma. Leo's possessions lay round him on every side—specimen-boxes, bottles, fly-net, everything lay scattered on the ground; in his haste Mason had not had time to see if he were prepared to accept the fresh responsibilities which he thrust upon him, and in consequence had caused him to drop even the things which he already carried. "I don't know. What do you want matches for?"

"Well, of all the butter-fingers I have seen," exclaimed the disgusted naturalist, who saw his boxes lying open and his bottles broken into pieces, "if you are not the worst! I ought to have carried you, instead of giving you anything to carry; then if you had come to grief it would not have mattered."

"I'm very sorry," replied Tom, mildly, inclined to think his case a hard one. "But you went so fast that all my breath was gone."

"Breath gone indeed!" retorted Mason, leaving the mole to its own resources, and busying himself in picking up the scattered treasures. "What has that to do with it? Your nerves gone, is what you mean."

By the time the various articles had been collected, lids put on, such bottles as were whole restored to something like their original condition, they became sensible of a fact which, if their attention had not been occupied with other things, they would have observed before. The afternoon had changed; the sun was gone, the sky was blotted out with clouds; one of those atmospheric revolutions which are characteristic of the early season of the year had changed the face of nature in an hour.

They were now some distance from the school; they had obtained leave to pass the boundaries beyond which the lower boys were ordinarily not allowed to go, and were probably some four or five miles distant from their starting-place. In a wild part of the country, no buildings near, exposed to the fury of the elements, the prospect was not a pleasant one. Heavy peals of thunder rolled from the distant sky—in March thunderstorms are rare, and probably on that account the severer when they come—darkness was upon the earth, and in the inky masses piled upon the horizon lightnings threatened. Silence, that inevitable precursor of the rage of elements, was everywhere.

“There’s going to be a storm,” said Tom, whose sympathetic nature was strangely susceptible to atmospheric influence.

“Yes,” said Mason, “that there is, and a big one too. Just like my luck! If I had known that it was coming, I’d have gone down to the pond, just the

weather for observations! But it's always the same with me."

They stood hesitating; they were in the centre of a field, and the only shelter within sight was a clump of trees at one end of it. Large drops of rain began to fall, the thunder sounded nearer, the storm was close at hand; unless they wanted soaking to the skin it was plain that they must seek some cover; this was obvious to both of them.

"It's no good stopping here," said Leo; "there's nothing to make observations of, unless that wretched mole means coming up again; and even then I doubt if it would be worth the damping we should get."

"There are only the trees," said Tom, "and you know they're dangerous in thunderstorms."

"I dare say they are," answered Mason, shortly. "I've heard of that before; but in many a one I've taken shelter underneath a tree, and never seen cause to regret it. I'll chance the danger—it's doubtful, anyhow, while the wetting is a certainty."

And before Tom could remonstrate further, he set off at speed in the direction of the trees. One moment Tom stood and doubted. As if by magic the rain increased in volume, and came down a deluge shower. To remain where he was was folly; to remain anywhere where the force of such a storm could reach him seemed folly too; so he turned and followed Mason.

That young gentleman, leaving Tom to manage as he could, bent his steps as fast as possible towards the trees, under the largest of which Tom found that

he had already taken up his stand. As a shelter from the rain, the place was admirably adapted; the trees were chestnut trees, giants of their kind, and were planted so close together that the branches, meeting overhead formed in summer-time a complete canopy of verdant foliage. Now, although of leaves they were quite bare, the branches were in themselves so thick, especially near the parent stem, as to afford a refuge from the fury of the storm by no means to be despised. Therefore, as close as possible to the trunk they stood and waited for the clouds to clear.

But that was an event of which the promise seemed but small. Mason, in not the sunniest of tempers at the thought that his half-holiday was spoilt, was one side of the tree; Tom, pale and nervous, was the other. At first it was only the rain they had to guard against; but that was only for a minute or so; for while with different feelings they watched the great drops falling with such force that they bounded from the earth again, all at once the heavens seemed rent asunder, and a vivid flash of lightning lit up the world, gleaming against the sky; almost simultaneously the batteries of thunder burst with a deafening din. So lurid was the flash, so tremendous the after thunder-clap, so unexpected both of them, that the boys were momentarily astonished into silence. It was the real beginning of the storm.

It was as though a fearful fray was being fought above. There was not a moment's calm; flash

flashed after flash, peal pealed after peal; the rage of the combatants was unceasing. Awed, the boys looked on with half-curious, half-frightened eyes; with Mason, curiosity predominated; with Jackson, fear. For his was one of those natures which are not so rare as some may think, which are oppressed by the magnificence of such a scene. His agitation increased as the storm went on; it was with difficulty he could put sufficient control upon himself to prevent his crying out; there was a blinding flash which travelled over the ground like some great sheet of fire.

“Hollo!” cried Mason, who was ignorant of the state of mind he was in, and in whom the bump of reverence was probably deficient; “what a oner! Shouldn’t I like to have been taking observations by the pond just then!”

“Leo,” said Tom, in low, frightened tones, “I cannot stay here; it seems”——

Before he could finish what he wished to say, there came another flash, similar to the last. There was a crashing sound in the higher branches overhead; Tom gave a cry of alarm, Leo one of surprise; and instantaneously a mighty branch came tumbling to the ground. It fell right at Jackson’s feet, and yet never touched him in its fall.

Seized with panic, before Mason knew what he was about to do, Tom sprang from beneath the tree and rushed into the open space. The rain still came down in torrents, but otherwise they seemed to have passed the climax of the storm. Wholly regardless

of the swamping rain, thinking only of escaping from the neighbourhood of the trees, he never paused nor stayed, but ran right on.

"Where are you going to?" shouted Mason, in astonishment; "have you gone mad?"

But Tom made no reply.

"I believe he has," said Mason to himself, half in earnest, half sarcastically; for Tom's movement was mysterious to him. "I wonder if the lightning struck him anywhere! Anyhow, it will never do to let him bolt over the country alone; here goes. If he likes a soaking, I suppose I must like one too."

And off he rushed after the retreating Tom. It was curious to see them flying as for life, laden with the implements which neither of them would let go. Mason, who was by far the taller and the stronger boy, overhauled Tom rapidly, until he reached his side. The rain still fell, but the lightning seemed to have stopped almost as quickly as it began; the ground was already like swamp; they were soon wet to the skin and muddy to the knees.

"Where—are—you—going—to?" asked Leo, with a pause between each word. "Why—couldn't—you—stop—beneath—the—trees?"

"I—couldn't!" was all that Tom replied; and he never paused an instant.

"Very well," said Leo, grimly, to himself, "if it's your game to see who can keep it up the longest, I'm ready to oblige you any day."

And so, without a word, they ran on side by side.

Only from sheer exhaustion did Tom stop at last, and then Mason eased up too.

"I'm likely to remember this half-holiday for some time to come," he remarked, as they fell into a walking-pace; "it's the jolliest I've had. When the sun comes out I hope you'll hang me up to dry."

"I could not help it," answered Tom, who, what with perspiration and rain, looked odd about the face. "I'm very sorry, but I'm always frightened at a thunderstorm."

They reached a stile; the rain was ceasing fast. In the western sky the clouds were breaking, and there was the promise of a bed of glory on which the sun might rest to bid the world good-night.

The rain stopped altogether; fairly fagged, their pace grew slower still; the sun burst through the clouds; the air was alive with the buoyancy and fragrance which follows after rain; there was the sweet smell of many-scented spring, better, almost, than the scent of flowers; the land was grateful; the grass was greener than before; diamond-drops glistened on a million blades; the hedges were conscious of the pride of many jewels; the birds were out, and carolling their evening hymns and songs of satisfaction, it almost seemed that summer-time was come already; but the wiser birds told their lady-loves that this was the fairyland of spring.

All traces of the storm had fled, quicker even than they came; a pleasant evening was the sequel to the day; a faint blue sky was dotted with cloud-lets of the purest white; a gentle breeze fanned

their heated faces, and the sun's last rays tinged trees, fields, and hedges—all the world, with splendour. They had entered a field which was a near cut to the school—were half across it, when suddenly Leo caught Tom by his arm, and with a startled face exclaimed—

“Look out! here's Jackson's bull.”

Taken by surprise, Tom instantly turned round. The farmer in question, Mr. Jackson, kept a bull, which he had more than once been warned was dangerous to keep in an enclosure which pedestrians might cross. As it happened, there was a feud between him and the boys at Dorrincourt, of which the cause was the very field they now were in. They claimed a right of way which he denied; they pleaded that from time immemorial they had crossed the meadows; to which he replied that if that were the case it was only through his courtesy and that of his predecessors—a courtesy which they abused by rifling the hedges and treading down the grass when haymaking was near, and that, in consequence, the privilege would be withdrawn, and any one found on it would be treated as a trespasser. In spite of that, the boys still crossed, perhaps crossed the more, and therefore, it may be, to keep them off he had turned the bull loose into the meadow. This Tom and Leo had forgotten, and when they remembered the fact, it was to find that Mr. Bull, evidently taking offence at their presence, was advancing towards them with his tail in the air and his head bent down.

He was not twelve yards from them, and was coming along in a pretty passion. Tom, whose nerves had already been too much strained that afternoon, stood staring at him as though he were rooted to the ground.

“Look alive!” cried Mason; “we can run faster than a great brute like that! Don’t stand staring at him like a dummy.”

But Tom, pale as possible, made no reply.

“Are you mad? If you won’t run, I will.”

And he proved that his words conveyed his meaning by running off as fast as his legs would carry him. Then Tom turned and followed his example. But either his nervousness made him lose his head, or in his excitement he did not see where he was going, for he had not taken a dozen steps when, tripping over a hole, with a cry of terror he fell headlong to the ground. Before he could rise again—before Leo could do anything to drive the bull away, the furious creature was upon him, lifted him up on its horns, and, to Mason’s exceeding horror, flung him right over the hedge into the adjoining field.

CHAPTER XXII.

DORRINCOURT WIPES OFF A SCORE.

QUICK as possible, Mason, who was at the farther end, sprang over the gate and ran round to where he lay. The bull, satisfied apparently with the mischief he had done, stood lashing his tail, and staring at his victim on the other side. Tom lay on his side, his arm twisted under him, and his face turned towards the sky. His eyes were closed, and every vestige of colour had left his cheeks. Kneeling on the ground, Leo called him by his name. He gave no answer—he had fainted. Rising, Mason filled his cap with water from the stream close by, and threw it in his comrade's face.

“This is a comfortable state of things!” he said, half tearfully, as he surveyed the senseless Tom; “this is the pleasantest half-holiday I’ve had this term! Don’t I wish I had the management of you!” shaking his fist at the bull, who still looked through the hedge. “I’d toss you, you murdering villain! I should like to know what’s the proper thing I ought to do! Tom! Tom!” falling on his knees again, “call me a fool, or an idiot, or anything, just to show that you are not dead!”

“What’s the matter here?” at this point asked a voice from over the hedge.

It was Farmer Jackson, who, seeing his bull running, had suspected mischief was in the air, and had come to see what was going on.

“Matter!” cried Leo, springing to his feet, and, careless of consequences, treating the farmer to a few plain words on his own account, which, if they fell short in logic, were fully up to the mark in emphasis; “I should like to see you toss that brute of yours, or see it tossing you! Hanging is less than you deserve! If he’s dead, then they’ll hang you up for murder, and I’ll come and dance upon your grave.”

“Dead!” exclaimed the farmer, who, if over hasty, was in the main a kindly man, paying no heed to the complimentary part of Mason’s speech, in his alarm lest such should indeed be the case; “you don’t mean that!”

And himself reckless of the hedge which formed a bone of contention between the boys and him, he scrambled through as best he could, and knelt at Jackson’s side.

“Run to the farm as hard as you can tear, tell them to put the horse into the trap, and send somebody here with some boards or something to carry him on! You boys will drive me mad, that will be the end of it.”

While Leo, genuinely alarmed, did as he was bid and put his best foot forward to reach the farm, the farmer tried all the simple remedies he was

acquainted with, and which his limited resources enabled him to use, to restore the unconscious lad to consciousness again; and to such effect that when Leo, accompanied by two labourers and the farmer's anxious wife and daughter, returned to the scene of the disaster, it was to find Tom sensible at least, and at a loss to understand what the commotion was about. At sight of Leo he stood up, or rather endeavoured to do so; for no sooner had he partly raised himself, than, with a loud groan of pain, he sank back and fainted a second time.

"We must carry him up to the farm, and wait until the doctor comes, to know what had best be done with him. I would have given a hundred pounds rather than have this happen!"

"Rather have given a hundred pounds!" retorted Mason, who, what with his indignation and his fears, was half in tears and half out of them. "I hope they'll make you give five hundred pounds now that it has happened! What did you turn that brute into the meadow for, if you didn't want it to do harm?"

And Leo turned upon the agitated farmer with his fist clenched, as though he would like to knock him down.

They took him to the farm, while a messenger was despatched in one direction for the local surgeon, and another to Dr. Macqueen with news of the accident.

Nothing could induce Mason to leave the bed on which Tom was laid. He told them in his bitterest

and fiercest tones that he suspected them of nothing else than a desire to complete the work of murder which they had begun, and that he would not leave him at their mercy at any cost.

It speaks very plainly of the agitation the establishment was in, or Master Mason would never have been allowed to use such language with impunity.

The surgeon was the first to come, and very soon Tom's actual injuries were known. He had been severely shaken, cut and bruised in a manner not pleasant to behold, and his arm was broken. Perfect rest was necessary, perfect quietude; on no account must he be moved. He had no doubt that if his directions were implicitly obeyed, and no fever intervened, ere long he would be quite well again, and no permanent injuries would ensue.

Thus it happened that, at the very moment when good health and liberty were absolute necessities in Tom's eyes, he was stretched upon a bed of sickness, from which visitors were rigidly excluded, conversation being entirely prohibited, and all exciting influences—in which phrase the surgeon included everything of the slightest interest in daily life—treated as forbidden things.

It was not till the morning after that the news became generally known throughout the school. Directly Boltington heard of it he sought out Mason, and learned all the facts from him; then, post haste, he set off for the farm.

Recently he and Tom had not been upon the best

of terms ; a cloud had marred the friendship which once had drawn them close together. The consciousness that the fault was his pricked his conscience now. The rift in the flute had become a fracture ; he saw that now. They had differed in many things. He had thrown in his lot with the discontented, and ranged himself against the side of order. If anything went wrong—and he alone knew how much probability there was of that—the fault would be his almost entirely ; while Tom—Tom's was like the gentle voice which always pleads with us for our own interest, and the interest of right.

He was denied admission. The orders were distinct ; on no account was any one to be admitted to the invalid. So, obliged to be content with the rebuff, he retraced his steps with the feeling that his errand was in vain.

It was unfortunate on many grounds. It is not at all impossible that had he only been able to have had speech with Jackson the influence for good might have won the victory, and he would have stopped short in the path which he was treading.

But it was not to be.

More than once he walked up to the farm ; but for all the good he gained he might have stayed away. Two days afterwards it was announced that the fever which the surgeon dreaded was upon the lad. His natural delicacy, the evident anxiety under which he laboured, his previous terror of the thunder-storm, the ill effects of the soaking he had had, were all so many forces fighting against the skill of medi-

cine—and then the chances of an interview were smaller still.

While he battled with the fever, matters reached a climax in the school.

Boltington, who was at one time plunged into depths of dejection, and at another appeared possessed with a spirit of wild excitement, wholly unlike his gay and sunny self, seemed to be centring all his energies in an attempt to do the greatest amount of mischief in the shortest possible space of time.

Those last days of the Lent term were to be ever after memorable at Dorrincourt.

Everything with reference to the barring-out had been resolved upon, only the actual details were still to be arranged ; they only waited for the appointed day to put their scheme into execution. Strange to say, so closely was the secret kept, that only those personally concerned had the slightest notion that such a crisis was close at hand.

Easter fell early that year ; the barring-out was to be on the Thursday week before Good Friday. On the preceding Wednesday everything was to be finally arranged, stores were to be distributed, and the finishing-touches given to the plot.

The Wednesday came. It was to be a famous one on two accounts. First, because of the meeting the conspirators were to hold, and other events afterwards to be chronicled ; and second, because on that day a great football match was to be played, which was to wipe off a score Dorrincourt had left unpaid,

and so equalise matters with another famous school which had hitherto been able to claim a balance in its favour.

That school was Boxall School.

The rivalry between these two extended to everything in which rivalry could possibly exist, and was as great in the football as the cricket field.

In the preceding cricket season the Boxall boys had made the victory their own. The intensity of the competition may be imagined from the fact, that until then each side had been able to claim an equal number of conquests in cricket and in football too. With the bat and ball their antagonists had borne the palm, and with the leather the boys at Dorrincourt had resolved with all the resolution they were equal to that theirs should be the prize.

It was passable weather in a football sense, in any other it was simply vile. A fine drizzle fell in the morning, but, as the day advanced, it cleared away; there was no wind but the slightest breeze, and, without freezing, it was cold and sharp. The sky was dull and heavy, and altogether it was about as gloomy an afternoon as you would care to see. But blue skies are not an unmixed blessing to the football player, and although he likes it dry, the ground must not be hard.

The Boxall boys came up by express in the morning, and were going back by express again at night: the match was fixed early in the afternoon, so that they might have time for something to eat when it was done. Of course all the school was there, and

not only the school, but a fair sprinkling of visitors besides.

On this occasion all private differences were quietly ignored; and every boy joined his fellow in the common wish that fortune might attend their arms.

At two punctually the opposing teams came out into the field, ready for the fray; their appearance was freely criticised by the lookers-on.

"How light they are!" said Howard Vincent, referring to the Boxall players; "they're youngsters compared to ours! In the scrimmages they'll be out of it."

"They are a small lot of men," acquiesced Maxwell Bromley; "but somehow they never do seem to boast of size at Boxall; you'll find they'll play a pretty game in spite of it."

"See that fellow there," struck in a fifth-form boy who was standing by, "with curly hair, and his hands behind his back? That's Mayne, who won the cricket-match for them; that fellow talking to him is Riddett; that's their captain, MacIntyre, Otway's speaking to."

Dorrincourt, as usual, was led by the head-boy, while the team—as was also generally the case with them—was composed entirely of monitors. Henderson, a fine kick and safe at collaring, was back; Boltington and Otway—nicknamed, because of the marvellous way they passed the ball into each other's hands, the "Lightning Twins"—were the three-quarters; Thelton and Dodwell—who was quick

enough upon his legs—were outside scrimmage. On the Boxall side, Riddett was back; MacIntyre and Mayne, three-quarters; Fores and Giffard, outside scrimmage. MacIntyre won the toss, and elected to play against what wind there was, down to the school. Exactly at 2.15 the ball was placed, and Otway, giving a last look at his forces arranged in line, amid a round of cheers, sent it flying towards the Boxall goal.

From the very first the play was fast; it was plain that each side was resolved to do or die. Riddett, receiving the ball, ran it almost to the centre of the ground, and then dropped it back to Henderson far behind. Swift as you please the Boxall boys were after it, as hounds run down their quarry; so hot the pace was made, that almost before Henderson could get the ball they were down on him; in his flurry he got the ball, dropped it badly, and MacIntyre caught it fairly as it fell. Making his mark, he prepared for a free-kick; he was still some distance from the goal, but near enough to make Dorrincourt wish that he were farther.

“Take your time!” said Mayne, loud enough for the forwards on the other side to hear.

“Don’t fear,” replied MacIntyre quietly, as he measured the distance with his eyes. Two of his opponents advanced to his mark, so that he might not have the advantage of a single inch; but MacIntyre paid no heed to them; coolly, with masterly precision—taking his time throughout—he dropped

the ball, lifted it upon his toe, and sent it high over the centre of the other goal.

The cheers of the Boxall boys were received with frigid silence by the lookers-on; no wonder they were elated. It was all very well to say it was a fluke, that such a thing was not likely to occur again; the fact remained that within the first five minutes they had won a goal, which, even granted it was fluked, was still a goal in spite of it. As for the spectators, there were long faces and black looks on every side; in the first flush of their surprise they were inclined to be unjust and say the fault was Beaumont Henderson's, because his nerve had failed him for an instant; indeed, when the Boxall cheers had quite subsided, some one shouted from among the crowd, "Bravo, Mr. Henderson." Beau, who heard well enough, simply turned his nose up higher, vowing to himself that if he had that critic committed to his hands, he would soon teach him to respect his seniors. The consciousness that the misfortune might to some extent be attributed to him in consequence of his not having returned the ball as well as he might have done, was not improved by overhearing Boltington say to Otway as they were settling in their places—

"We've begun by making a mess of it; let's hope that we shall finish better."

Otway looked at him; he did not like his manner, and he spoke in the carping, sarcastic tone which had become habitual to him of late.

"Let's hope we shall," he answered quietly.

“But you should remember that we are all liable to accidents at times.”

Boltington flushed; he thought that the words had a personal application; but Otway intended nothing of the kind.

At the recommencement of the game the Dorrincourt boys made it clear that they considered themselves upon their trial; a blot was on their shield, which they were bent on wiping off as soon as possible. MacIntyre kicked off, Otway caught the ball, and well backed up by Boltington, rushed off with it; Boltington kept to his left, a few feet in the rear; one of the Boxall boys, thinking he saw his chance, collared Otway beneath the arms, and closed with him, but not before that shrewd player, raising the ball above his head, flung it to Boltington behind, who started off at speed with it upon his left. Two or three of the Boxallites were on him in an instant, but, doubling like a hare, he sprang to one side, and made an obvious effort to run round their team.

“Bravo, Boltington!” cried the lookers-on; and “Well run, sir!” shouted his colleagues at his back.

Encouraged by the shouts, he strained every nerve to skirt the opposing players; he was more than half across the field, and had almost passed their forwards, when Fores, dropping on one knee, caught him by his leg, and flung him forward on his face. Before the others could close on him, Thelton dashed forward in the rear, supported by Dodwell on the

other side, caught the ball from under him, and was off again. Almost as quickly as he was down, Boltington, none the cleaner from his contact with the ground, was on his feet again and backing Thelton up in first-rate style.

“Pass it!” he cried, as Mayne dashed into him, and instantaneously the ball was flung behind.

Off rushed Boltington to the left again; but his course was done; half a dozen Boxallites closed in, and down he went, the ball beneath, and his foes on top of him.

“Down!” he gasped.

And assuming his perpendicular once more, a scrimmage was promptly formed.

“Now, Dorrincourt!” exclaimed the watchful Otway, as Boltington came to his side again, “all on the ball together! To the right! Centre there! Look out, they’ve sent it through!”

As Vincent had foreseen, in the scrimmages the Boxall boys, so to speak, were out of it; might was against them utterly; but, as Bromley had rightly prophesied, they could play a pretty game in spite of it—the prettier perhaps on that account. Well aware of their weakness physically, they went into the scrimmage like a wedge, and directly they were mastered by the superior calibre of their antagonists, scattered on either side, and let the ball go out behind.

Otway gave a warning cry, but it was too late. Down went the Dorrincourt forwards in a heap upon the ground. Giffard had the ball and was flying with it across the field.

"Well done," shouted MacIntyre at his back. "Drop it before you're collared."

Which he did, right into Henderson's hand.

"Now," said that young gentleman to himself, between his teeth, "if I make a mess of it this time, I'll resign my place in the team to-morrow!"

In pursuance of which resolution the spectators saw the finest bit of play which had yet been witnessed in the match.

Henderson, running a few yards forward, dropped it neatly back. One of the Boxallites, receiving it, sent it off again. Boltington took it in the second hop, and then one of those runs took place which had given the "Lightning Twins" their name and reputation. Boltington, who was playing on the left, dashed on his foes, and directly he saw there was a chance of collaring, passed to Otway on the right. Away went Otway in his turn, Boltington closing nearer to his side; five or six of the Boxall boys were dodged, when Giffard barred the way.

Boltington, who saw his opening, came rushing in, took the ball from beneath the head-boy's arm, and flew off like the wind farther to the right.

The onlookers screamed till they were hoarse. There was a chance of their disaster being retrieved.

By running to the side, Boltington had placed his pursuers at arm's length at any rate. It simply resolved itself into a trial of speed, as to who should first head the goal, he or his antagonists. Riddett

and the two three-quarters he had most to fear. If he could dispose of them, then all the rest was clear. His own side were tearing at his heels, Otway waiting on him to take the ball if he was forced to yield.

The whole body of the spectators were in motion, waving their hats, and shouting as if by screaming their very loudest they could help him on.

The two three-quarters were upon him. With agility which did him credit he dodged MacIntyre, and, charging Mayne with all his force, knocked him to the ground. Riddett still hovered threateningly in front.

“Take the ball!” gasped Boltington, fearing, perhaps, that Riddett would be one too many for him now, “and drop a goal.”

Catching the ball Boltington flung back, Otway ran to the centre, thereby disconcerting Riddett not a little, and, as easily as you please, sent it high over the cross-bar!

So they were equal.

The spectators did their best to burst their lungs, and the interest grew fast.

Directly afterwards half-time was called, and when ends were changed, each side finally determined to make victory their own.

But the position remained unaltered still. The game was nearly over. This was not for want of efforts to produce a different result. They fought like very Trojans; but struggle how they might the ball was very little removed from the centre of the

ground. The forwards had all their work to do; alive to the manœuvres of the other side, Dorrincourt was wary in the scrimmages; the ball was nearly always at their mercy, and so close did they stick to it, that it seemed impossible to get it out into the open field. Greek met Greek, and the tug of war came with a vengeance. Up one moment, down the next; trying every trick they knew, neither side could get nearer to the other's goal.

This continued till some five or six minutes before the call of time.

"It must be now or never," said Otway to Boltington, as once more the struggling forwards came tumbling to the ground; "in five minutes more it will be drawn."

"Will it?" answered Boltington, and there was the fire of excitement in his eyes; "not if I can help it anyhow it won't. Back me up, and we'll make a dash for it."

"Very good!" said Otway.

Then, a second after—

"Now's your time!"

And Boltington saw it too. In some way or other the ball came out behind.

"Pick it up!" cried Boltington to Louis Thelton, "and pass it back to me!"

Thelton did as he was told. Like a flash the ball went back to Boltington.

"Now for it!" he said to Otway. "If it can be done, I'll do it!"

And faster even than at the commencement of the game, he ran across the field.

The Boxallites were taken by surprise. It was risky play; if he had failed in making a good start they might have rushed the ball down nearly, if not quite, to the home goal. But he was off, and they were after him.

All saw that this was the crisis of the game. If he failed, and his opponents got the ball into their hands again, the chances were the world to a China orange that the match was drawn.

“Steady!” said Otway in the rear.

But just then Boltington did not seem to understand the word. He was as one possessed; it was as though a charm attended him, as though fresh strength, greater speed, were all at once bestowed on him. No one seemed able to withstand his charge. He was like an eel; hands were laid on him, but he slipped through their grasp with ease. The forwards were all passed. Fores, cannoned into Giffard, went down, with his friend below; MacIntyre, the giant of his side, measured his length upon his mother earth, to the tumultuous joy of the onlooking throng. Mayne was passed, Riddett was nowhere, and then, amidst such shouts as were seldom heard even on that ground, not thirty feet from the Boxall goal, Boltington stopped in his career, and kicked the ball over the cross-bar!

So the match was won, for, two minutes after, time was called before anything further could be done, and Boltington—hot, and full of fun as he

always used to be—was surrounded by admiring friends and foes, who universally allowed that never before had they seen so fine a run as that which won the match for Dorrincourt!

What would not Tom Jackson have given to have been there to see?

CHAPTER XXIII.

AFTER THE MATCH WAS OVER—THE CONSPIRATORS' LAST MEETING.

BOLTINGTON'S high spirits were remarked by all. At the dinner which took place before their visitors started to return, he was the life and soul of the whole party. It was an uproarious meal; his humour seemed to be infectious; a livelier gathering was seldom seen. He led the laugh, and his voice was heard above all others. His end of the table he kept in a perpetual roar, the din was edifying. Frantic efforts, in which they succeeded to a marvel, were made to eat, and talk, and laugh at once.

But those present who were best acquainted with Boltington's peculiarities were not too pleased to see the mood that he was in. There was a recklessness in his demeanour, a wild air of excitement in all he said and did, which, coupled with other things, struck them as at least peculiar. Even some of the visitors could not but notice that his spirits seemed unnaturally high. George Otway sat at the head of the table, and MacIntyre was at his right hand.

"Boltington means to carry off the honours at table as in the field," said the Boxall captain to

the Dorrincourt head-boy, when some fresh sally had set the table in a roar. Otway, who had perforce joined the others in the joke, all at once looked grave.

“Yes,” he answered quietly, with a smile MacIntyre was not certain he could understand. “Never a better companion than Boltington can be.”

The meal went on, the fun grew fast and furious; more than one of the hosts, with no desire to be inhospitable, began to wish that the visitors were gone. Otway, Dodwell, and others of that set exchanged glances, evincing the anxiety they felt. Instead of decreasing, Boltington’s excitement increased momentarily; his handsome face was flushed, and his fine eyes were lighted with unnatural fire.

“What time does your train start?” asked Otway, breaking a silence he had maintained some time. MacIntyre glanced at him, quick to catch the hint which was intended; but before he could reply, Boltington broke in.

“Nonsense! You’re not talking of going yet! We’re only just beginning to wake up! Otway, I’m ashamed of you! wait till I’m head-boy—if ever that halcyon day shall come—and then I’ll not remind my guests that we are slaves to time, but that time was made to minister to our desires. Speech-making, as you know, is barred; if it were not I’d give you, as a toast, Long life to revelry, and death to all wet blankets!”

“I daresay you would,” said Henderson, well knowing where the shaft was aimed. “But if I

were you, before I gave a toast at all, I'd be quite sure that it was acceptable to the taste of those who heard it."

"I'm inclined to think that I disagree with toasts *in toto*," continued Giffard, willing to keep the conversation in smooth waters. "What is a toast when you consider it? Simply an excuse to drink in support of a sentiment which, in nine cases out of ten, is pledged by the cup alone—perhaps not even by the lips; and how often by the heart?"

"Hear, hear," cried Boltington, clattering his glass upon the table. "Well said! my sentiments exactly, sir! Therefore, when I give as a toast the head-boy of Dorrincourt and all his friends, no doubt you will join me willingly?"

There was silence a moment; a more unpromising toast could hardly have been given. Boltington looked from one to the other, holding his glass up in the air.

"Come, gentlemen, are you charged? Fill up! In bumpers it must be drunk."

Still no one made a sign; nothing could have acted as a more effectual wet-blanket than his words had done.

"What! not even pledge them with the cup! This is hardly courteous. You see, Giffard, all are not such hypocrites as you imagined. Since no one will be my companion, I drink my toast alone. To the head-boy of Dorrincourt and all his friends, and may their deserts attend them."

"I think," said Otway, breaking the pause which followed, evincing no outward sign of what his feel-

ings were, "that we had better adjourn. The doctor wished me to say that he would like to see you before you go; and, with your permission, we will wait upon him now."

"We are much obliged to you for giving us the right of a refusal," retorted Boltington, who seemed possessed all at once with a spirit of mischief. "So far as I am concerned, my permission is certainly not given. Dr. Macqueen is a gentleman of whose company I desire as little as possible."

The visitors stared—as well they might. This was curious conduct at a hospitable meeting. They felt that there was something underneath of which they were in ignorance; undoubtedly Boltington was doing his best for their enlightenment. Flushed and reckless, he returned with interest the unfriendly looks his colleagues cast upon him. It evidently required but little to bring a storm about their ears; that little, Henderson—stung into a retort—immediately supplied.

"As your permission was the only one which was not required," he said with that exasperating air of superiority which upon occasion he could use so well, "we consider ourselves extremely obliged by your withholding it. Only those who can be held responsible for their behaviour we are anxious should accompany us."

"You insinuate," replied the other, in an instant hot with passion, "that I am not responsible. You are a master of insinuation, and such I always hold to be both cur and coward."

“Henderson! Henderson!” cried Otway, vainly trying to throw oil upon the troubled waters, while more than one instinctively rose to his feet.

“You need not fear for me,” retorted Henderson, still calmly supercilious. “With one who has so odd a standard of what a gentleman should be as Mr. Boltington appears to hold, I can hardly condescend to disagree.”

“For ‘condescend,’ read ‘dare’! For a coward, I have but contempt to show; as a mark of my esteem for Mr. Henderson, allow me to beg of him to accept that!”

And, before they knew what he was about to do, he caught up the glass which was at his side and flung the contents in the other’s face. In an instant all was in confusion; hosts and visitors alike rose from their seats and approached the disputants.

“For shame, Boltington!” said Otway in the stern tones he seldom used. “Shame on you to disgrace yourself and us,” laying his hand upon his shoulder.

“Take your hand away!” stormed Boltington, springing from his chair, “or it’ll be the worse for you!”

“Take my hand away?—yes, and myself too. In future I should advise you to be your own society; for if you have lost your self-respect, remember we have ours still. Henderson, leave the matter now; there has been enough mischief said and done already. Gentlemen, let us go.”

They needed no further pressing; without a word

they advanced and followed him. Dodwell, slipping his arm through Henderson's, led him from the room; so Boltington was left alone.

"*Au revoir*, gentlemen!" he cried, as they passed out. "When Mr. Henderson's courage returns, he will not find me far away. Good luck go with you! and may your experience of our respectable and amiable headmaster be the pleasantest half-hour of a most delightful day!"

With one hand on the back of a chair he kept his eyes fixed on them till the last was gone, and then, when the door was shut, and he was quite alone, flinging himself into a seat, he burst into a loud laugh. Thrusting his hands into his trousers' pockets, he leaned back, and surveyed the tablecloth; hot, feverish, in his most quarrelsome mood, with a bitter smile upon his lips, he sat chewing the cud of his reflections. They plainly were not pleasant ones; sounds of voices were heard in distant rooms, and merry laughter. Without, the wind howled, and the rain beat against the window-panes; within, the lights shone down on what is not one of the most cheerful sights in life—a festival-board when the feast is done. Rising with a sudden exclamation, he caught up the glass whose contents he had thrown at Henderson, and dashing it to the ground, shivered it to a dozen fragments; motionless he stood staring at the shattered pieces.

"Yes," he said, half savagely, half with a grim humour, "like other things, you need delicate handling, or there is an end of you; and when once you

come to grief, who shall do you good again? They say that wisdom is better than rubies; being so, I suppose it is too valuable a possession for such as I." He laughed—not pleasantly by any means—and commenced striding up and down the room. "What an idiot I am! If I must go out, let it be with a flash and a flame, at any rate; I'll raise a dust about their ears before I've done with them—I hate the lot! This is what they sarcastically call an educational establishment. Educational indeed! a pretty specimen of the rising generation they'll turn out when they turn me into the world! If I end upon the gallows, Macqueen should understand that it is the result of the training I received from him." He took out his watch, a dainty jewelled toy, his mother's gift to him. "Those fellows will be waiting for me now. I am very much mistaken if Otway and his friends would not have preferred to spend the next half-hour with me than with any headmaster in the world. Pity he did not know the treat that he was losing."

With quick and buoyant step, his head thrown back, feverish defiance in his eyes, he passed from the room in the direction of the sixth-form studies; reaching his own door, with his hand upon the handle he paused a moment, listening to voices talking eagerly within; then, opening it, he stepped inside.

The room, by no means large, was inconveniently crowded; boys were everywhere; on the floor, on tables, on chairs, squeezed flat against the wall.

As he entered a buzz of applause went round, which he acknowledged by nodding laughingly, turning the key in the lock. Picking his way among the crowd, and taking up his favourite position before the fireplace, he looked round upon his visitors.

They were mostly fourth-form boys, though there was a fair sprinkling of the fifth; Bromley was there, Farthingale, Farquaharson, Maxted, Vincent, and others with whom we are not personally acquainted.

There was an air of excitement, an air of mystery about them all; flushed cheeks and flashing eyes were on every side; Boltington smiled as he noted that identical emotions seemed expressed upon the faces of each of them.

This was to be the last meeting of the committeemen and leading members of the Secret Society; deeds, not words, were to ensue.

"Well, gentlemen," began Boltington, speaking with his hands behind his back, while every now and then they interrupted him with hearty, but not loud, applause. "I imagine that we may take to-day's victory as an omen of to-morrow's struggle; victorious to-day, we are certainly justified in anticipating success to-morrow, when we shall be striving for more than worthless laurels. As you know, I have just left the football dinner, and am able to state that no one outside our own charmed circle has the faintest notion of what our movements are to be. As your president, and as the one, per-

haps, who has more at stake than any one of you, I can only point out that if we are determined to succeed, success will undoubtedly be ours; want of determination has too often been the stumbling-block over which others have come to grief. That must not be so with us; we are united; we are resolved; we have no cowards in our ranks; and are one and all imbued with the desire to teach our friend the doctor that the days have gone when a headmaster can ride roughshod over those placed in his charge, and, because he chooses so to do, rule without semblance of justice or of common sense. Let our motto be 'Success,' and our watchword 'Resolution!' Let us show that the boys of England are still unchanged; that the spirit of their sires is living still; that now, as ever, they will not bow down before injustice; that they will not submit without an effort to one who is unfit to rule, and who abuses the authority he knows not how to use!"

He stopped; and as he did so they burst out into a roar they were too excited to restrain. If appearances might be trusted, little want of determination would be found in them; a red spot burned in every cheek, fire in every eye. Seldom had Boltington looked better; it would have been difficult to find one better qualified to win the sympathies of such a meeting. He himself was almost mastered by the excitement which he communicated with so much effect to them; in his present mood he would have done anything—as he would himself have said, he was ready to do or die.

“To come to details,” he went on, when silence came again. “What is there yet undone? Before we part—which we had better do before the others in my form find out that you are here—let each of us clearly understand our scheme of action. I suppose I may rely upon you keeping the rest posted up in what they have to do?”

“You may be sure of that,” answered Maxwell Bromley. “There were meetings in all the third and fourth form rooms before the match this afternoon. Besides, we’ve arranged everything as we’ve gone on; there is not one who does not know what must be done.”

“Then it is understood that at four o’clock everyone is called; that we meet in the schoolroom, and, that there and then we commence to barricade. You have the battens, I suppose, as was arranged, and the screws, and all. We must make no half-and-half affair of it, you know. Once out, we must keep them out; if they want to force an entrance they will have to do it by bringing the place about our ears; and they’ll hesitate, I fancy, before they come to that. Every boy must bring down his own supply of food, and we must not forget to have water in abundance; the minimum supply each was to have has been settled, and I trust that no one will come short of it. Officers must be appointed to manage the supplies, and rations will be served at proper times. Above all, understand there must be discipline, obedience. I shall endeavour to agree with every one, but since you have chosen me to be your

leader, rest assured I will do my best to win; but all my efforts will be vain, if in one and all of them I am not seconded heartily by you. If any of you have anything to say, let us hear it now, and then we must have done with talking, and come to deeds."

"Just one word," said Farquaharson, who was sitting on a table with his legs dangling in the air. "What terms must we demand before we yield?"

"Very simple ones," was Boltington's reply; "a general pardon; a promise that no one shall suffer in any way for the part he has taken in the matter; and for the rest, between this and to-morrow morning I propose to draw up a list of grievances which must be redressed."

"One practical result will be," observed Farthingale in his dreamy way, "that Dr. Macqueen will learn discretion. He will understand that he cannot do as he pleases without running risks he will hardly care to run. He will see that we are not the dummies he mistook us for, but are quite able to protect ourselves in an emergency."

"I don't think we need be much afraid of punishment," declared Howard Vincent. "I don't see how he could punish us all in a lump, and we wouldn't allow him to pick out any one. There'll be too much scandal in the thing; it'll be talked of everywhere; and the sooner he can hush it up the better he'll be pleased."

"Then there's the fun of it, my boys," confessed Maxwell Bromley, with perfect candour; "that's the cream of the joke to me. A barring-out! Why

it's the best lark we ever had in all our lives! When our turn comes to be old fogies, shan't we just be able to crow when we tell the story to our boys?"

"And not only so," continued Tiny Maxted, the French Revolution bursting out again, "but the eternal principles of right, mightier than the mighty hills, emerging from a million bonds, will light the cerulean arch of liberty with a flame to be handed down from age to age"——

"Look here," said Bromley, turning on him glances of anything but approbation; "if anything could make me throw the whole thing up, it is that trash of yours!"

"Trash!" exclaimed the apostle of liberty indignantly. "I tell you what, Maxwell Bromley, I've stood too much of that sort of thing before, and if you don't want that head of yours, which is thicker than anything I ever knew, cracked more than it is already, you'll just be careful what you are saying!"

And instantly these two leaders in the movement, with clenched fists and angry faces, stood glaring in each other's eyes.

"Bravo!" cried Farquaharson from his perch upon the table, thinking he saw the way open to a fight; "give it him, my boys."

The members, forgetful of the coming struggle in the pleasing prospect of an immediate disturbance, crowded round with appropriate remarks.

"You're quite right, Tiny," observed a fifth-form boy, who was conscientiously convinced that he was wrong. "It's perfectly absurd! If we have to

put up with that sort of thing, what will be the end of it? If it's business you intend, rely on me for seconding."

"I can't agree with you," declared a friend, who held both the disputants in equal scorn. "Bromley has a perfect right to criticise, and if Maxted chooses to take offence that's his own affair. I'm sure that my principal," clapping his hand on Bromley's shoulder, with whom, perhaps, he had not exchanged two dozen words in his life before, "will be quite willing to afford him any satisfaction his injured feelings may require."

"If there's going to be a fight," cried Farquaharson, who by this time was standing on the table, and from that eminence looked down upon the scene, "make a ring! Business before pleasure; when this little business is comfortably settled, then we can go in for the fun of the barring-out with easy consciences."

"Come," interposed Boltington, who up to this time had remained a quiet spectator of the proceedings, "this will never do! As your president, I would suggest that the business of the barring-out comes first, and the pleasure of private squabbles afterwards. The meeting is dissolved; the committee-men will kindly stay behind; for the rest, gentlemen, allow me to open the door for you."

And he did so, laughing and bowing to them as they went by. After such a hint it was scarcely possible even for those not bashful friends of his to intrude any longer in his own room.

“Now,” he said to the committee-men who alone remained, “I have troubled you to stay in order that I may have your assistance in drawing up our list of grievances. Will you lend me a hand, Farquaharson, in getting this table into the middle of the room?”

Together they drew a small round table to the centre, on which was placed a paper, ink, and pens; chairs were placed round it, and they sat down. Boltington inclined in a great lounging-chair, and the rest occupied such seats as were handiest. Bromley and his friend the orator, though anything but cool, were at any rate cooler than before. There was silence for some few moments, during which the president seemed taking stock of his companions. Then, with candour which was so complete as to be almost remarkable, he said, and there was a sarcastic recklessness in his voice and manner which suited his mood and theirs—

“I presume that it is not absolutely necessary to be strictly logical in our proceedings, but it is advisable to keep up appearances. I don’t suppose that any two of us are influenced by the same causes in what we are about to do. I’m not going to inquire why you, any one of you, object to Dr. Macqueen, I’m not even conscious if such a feeling exists at all; but one feeling, I have no doubt, is common to us all—the desire to avoid as much as possible any unpleasantness as a consequence of what we are about to do. A superficial observer would say that one fate would be the common lot of all of us—expulsion.” He paused; his listeners with one

accord changed countenance. "Personally, I should not care if I am expelled to-morrow, but as I am aware that some would view the matter with different feelings, I would point out that it would be advisable to render such a prospect as remote as possible. I"—he paused again—"I, for reasons of my own, being desirous of causing Dr. Macqueen as much discomfort as lies in my power, am perfectly willing to let him do his worst, so long as I've done mine already. With you it may be different."

"Ah!" said Farquaharson, leaning back in his chair, and trying to affect the carelessness he did not feel, "so it may! so it may! I know my respected sire would not view my return with my tail between my legs with equanimity, whatever I might do."

"If you're going to talk in that sort of way," put in Tiny Maxted, not looking quite so confident as he had done before, "all I can say is, it's a pity you didn't do the same before. Expulsion indeed! I daresay it's all very well for you to say that you don't care; but—but all I can say is, that if I'd known that it was going to come to anything like that I'd have left it alone from the beginning."

"No doubt—no doubt!" continued Boltington blandly, seeming driven by some mysterious influence to tread on the corns of every one; "but I am rather inclined to think that it is too late in the day to tell us what you would have done. You drew me in, you will remember; not I you. Those eternal principles of right you so eloquently defend

are responsible for my conversion; and I assure you it will not benefit you in the least to desert the cause you have made your own."

The words conveyed a threat they felt applied equally to all of them.

"Moreover, if you had waited for a moment, I would have shown you how we can make the risk a minimum; we cannot do away with it entirely. And if you consider, you will remember that at no time have I pretended that such proceedings as you have planned could take place with impunity; no such notion on your part has received any encouragement on mine."

He paused again. The faces of his hearers were getting gradually blanched. Any style of conversation less calculated to keep their spirits up he could hardly have imagined; it was as though he told them, that though he was quite aware they were not desirous of execution, and though the road which they were travelling certainly led to it, none the less it was a road from which it was impossible they could depart.

As if to complete their discomfiture, banging his fist upon the table, he continued with sudden passion—

"Are you idiots? Do you suppose you can have your cake and eat it? Do you suppose if you struck me I should not strike you back again? And do you imagine Dr. Macqueen to be different from all the world? I tell you"—

What he was about to tell them no one ever

knew, for the words were scarcely spoken when the door was flung wide open, and Geoffrey Hazlemere, white as any ghost, rushed into the room.

"Boltington, have you heard the news?" he cried, and he seemed trembling so that he could hardly stand.

"News?—what news?" asked Boltington, surprised.

"Tom Jackson's dying!"

"Dying!" shouted Boltington.

And, springing from his lounging-chair, in his haste he upset the table, papers, pen, ink, and Tiny Macted, who sat opposite, all in one great heap upon the floor.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BOLTINGTON PROVES FALSE.

“DYING!” repeated Boltington, paying no heed to the prostrate Tiny, and leaving him to pick himself and the table up as best he could; “who told you so?”

“Mr. Selden, as he came in just now. I knew he had been sent for from the farm, and I watched for his return; and when he came I asked him how Tom was, and he said that he was nearer heaven than he or I.”

“He said so, did he?” asked Boltington with passionate bitterness. “That would be true in any case. Dead or alive, he is near, while we are far away. Where is my hat?”

He caught up one which lay upon the floor; it was his mortar-board, the worse for wear—for of all his headgear it was the one he least esteemed. Ramming it on his head, without another word he hurried from the room, leaving them to stay or follow at their leisure.

“Well,” said Bromley, directly he was gone, “he’s a pretty sort of fellow. I believe he’s next door to a lunatic. First he does his best to give us

a fit of the blues, and then he cuts off in this fashion!"

"I wish," groaned Tiny, disencumbering himself from the débris on the floor, "I wish that French Revolution had never been, and then I shouldn't be in the mess that I'm in now. He'll do for every one of us before he's done, you'll see. Expelled indeed! I should like to see myself expelled. I don't know what to goodness the pater'd say."

"This," said Gerard Farthingale, musingly, "is exactly what I wanted it to be. What is the use of a conspiracy if there's no danger in conspiring? In every rebellion the rebels always get the worst of it."

"The worst of it!" shouted Howard Vincent, while the rest looked on as though they would like to annihilate him on the spot. "Yes, a pretty set of idiots we are! Until we've gone too far to back out of it again, you never say a word about expulsion or punishment at all; then, when it's a case of sink or swim with us, you tell us that rebels always get the worst of it, and that we're pretty sure to be expelled. If I'm expelled—if I am, I should like to cut you and half a dozen like you into sausage meat."

And his colleagues then and there explained that his sentiments were theirs exactly. They were just beginning to see that there might be something more in a barring-out than the mere fun of it.

Meanwhile Boltington was making as much haste as possible in the direction of Farmer Jackson's

farm. In that hour the scales fell from his eyes, and he saw things as they were.

It was a stormy night; the rain came down in torrents, and the wind was high. He had no overcoat; his coat, unbuttoned, was no protection from the storm. But he paid no heed. He cared nothing for the rage of elements, wholly occupied by the rage within. Careless of the weather without, he dashed across ploughed fields, and scrambled anyhow through hedges. The excitement of the night had reached its culminating point, and drove him wildly on.

Dying! The word rang in his ears; it was borne on every passing gale. Dying! At this thought memories flashed across his brain, as the torrent across the dam. Dying! Was this to be the end of all? Was this page of his life to have this for its finish? Was this shadow of the past to fall upon the page to come? And in some strange way, as these and suchlike thoughts sped through his mind, some one whispered close at hand—so clearly that he started at the sound—the one word, Mother! “Dying!” “Mother!” Upon the wind they rose and fell, first one and then the other, beating on his brain, filling the surrounding gloom with a myriad strange visions of the night. No matter how he ran, he could not outstrip the mocking spirits which attended him on every side, and multiplied as he went on.

The truth was, his state of mind was the natural and inevitable result of the growing excitement, not

only of that day, but of many days gone by. For some time past it had been at fever heat, and it only needed the news Geoffrey Hazlemere had brought, to upset the tottering balance of his mind. Previously only with difficulty had he mastered his agitation, now his agitation fairly mastered him. He would have wept, but his eyes were dry; he would have cried aloud, but his tongue was dumb.

“Mother! mother!” he heard on every side, and at the thought of her he put up his hands to hide his face as he ran on!

But, as an instance of the curious condition his mental faculties were in, all at once he ran against a man—a man slouching across the field, with his hands in his pockets, his cap drawn over his eyes, his coat-collar turned up almost to his ears. Before either saw the other coming, Boltington had cannoned into him, and all but knocked him down. A volley of bad language was his salutation in return.

With sudden vividness it flashed on Boltington that he had heard that voice before. Laying his hand upon the fellow's shoulder, he peered into his face. Even in the darkness he perceived that it was the tramp whom he had found molesting Tom and Mason, and whom he had thrown into the pond. The fellow seemed to recognise him too.

“What do you want here?” asked Boltington, speaking in commonplace tones, which took him by surprise, and feeling all at once an odd curiosity to learn what could have tempted him abroad on such

a night. "Don't you see that it is raining, and the wind is high?"

"What's that to you?" growled the other. "You take your hand away. There ain't a house this side of Bradybury, and that's six miles away."

"A house! do you mean a workhouse?" questioned Boltington—and long after it puzzled him to explain what induced him to stop at such a moment to talk to such a man. "Have you no money to hire a bed? I've given you five shillings before, you know, and I've read somewhere that indiscriminate charity is indiscriminate robbery. Such a night as this is not fit for a dog, but I should not think a workhouse would be too comfortable now."

While the man stared in surprise, he took half-a-crown from his trousers' pocket, and giving it him, before he had a chance of thanking him ran on again. The fellow, following him with his eyes as he vanished in the night, muttered, half-tearfully—so thoroughly cowed was he—

"God bless the lad! He'll be a fine cove when he grows up, I'll lay a tanner."

Boltington was calmer now. The tumult of his mind had much decreased. A strange tenderness took the place of his previous excitement—a great sorrow for himself and all the world. The thought of Tom lying on his dying bed on such a night as this filled him with a pity which seemed infinite. He longed to be kneeling by his side, and to soothe him in his sorrow; he longed to feel Tom's hand upon his burning brow, and to hear him whisper, in

that voice he knew so well, the gentle words which he was wont to speak; and with his longings his mother was included. Oddly enough, he grieved to think that Tom had none, and then grieved again to think at the pain his own mother would feel when the tale of his misdeeds was told.

These sensations were not unpleasant ones, nor were they very real; they were simply another result of his unsettled mind; nothing was very real with him just now. His was the poetry, the luxury, of sentiment—a word which generally represents a fiction, not a fact.

“Poor Tom! poor Tom!” He repeated it to himself several times, and sighed in doing so; but why he sighed, or why he was “Poor Tom,” he would have found it hard to say. His state was almost like the state of one who dreams; when he awoke the shadows would give place to substance.

Careless of mud, and slush, and rain, and wind, he had deserted the highroad and made the best of his way across the fields. He had now reached the last of them, and stopped at the hedge which bounded the farmer’s yard. On one side stood the barns and outbuildings, and beyond that he could see the dim outlines of the farm. All was dark, save that at an upper window a light gleamed through the blind. Within that room, doubtless, Tom was lying. Now that he had reached the goal for which he had made such haste, he hesitated, and leaning over the hedge watched the light as it gleamed upon the blind. He could not but wonder what was

passing in the room; and in his mind's eye, dreamily, he drew a vivid picture of the scenes within; Tom, lying on the bed, still with that strange smile upon his face, which, he vowed, would always haunt him when he thought of Tom, the doctor bending over, and the nurse standing by his side. He wondered what they were saying; was Tom speaking of him? or was some other in his thoughts? This suspense could not endure. With a single bound he was over the hedge; rushing across the yard he seized the handle of the bell, and rang a peal which he would have been deaf indeed who did not hear.

Some one came hurrying downstairs; the door was opened, and the farmer's wife stood in the doorway with a lamp held in her hand. She stared, as well she might, at the spectacle her visitor presented. The perspiration was streaming down his face, his clothes were all disordered and mudded from top to toe, his necktie hung loose, one side of his collar was undone, and, to add to the peculiarity of his appearance, he stood staring at the woman as though he had lost the power of speech, and, without a word of explanation as to what it was he wanted, moved forward as if to enter. Instantly the door was swung upon its hinges, and flung back in his face so suddenly that he had to spring sharply backwards to avoid a blow.

"Who are you?" inquired Mrs. Jackson, peering through the six inches or so she had left open; "and what do you want?"

Boltington, exasperated at an indignity which

would scarcely be consoling to his pride, clenched his fists and glared at her in a way which seemed to alarm her not a little.

“Don’t look at me like that, young man, or I’ll send my goodman to you pretty quick.”

“Send him!” shouted Boltington, in his indignation forgetful of Tom and everything; “I should like to see him! What do you mean by talking to me like that? Let me in; I’ve come to see my friend.”

“Hush! shame on you then! A pretty friend you are to make a noise like that with him above your head just at death’s door! And if you were fifty friends I couldn’t let you in, for the doctor said I was to admit no one without a written line from him.”

Though rough, the woman seemed kindly too; and if Boltington had been sufficiently awake he would have seen that the tears stood in her eyes as she spoke of Tom being “at death’s door.” Those were the words which alone he heard, and which served to make him oblivious of her refusal to let him in.

“So he—is he very ill?” he asked, with a great tremor in his voice, and a sudden change of manner which took her by surprise. “Will he—will he die?”

“That’s not for you or I to say; the Lord is very good. His will be done!”

All her roughness had fled now, and she was fairly crying.

“Is he so great a friend of yours, my lad? I did not know that he was that. The doctor is returning soon; if you wait a bit I’ll hear what he will say; maybe he’ll let you in when he knows that you’re his friend.”

But Boltington heard no more. He read the woman’s tone aright, and from the tears perceived that Tom’s end was nigh. With a groan, putting his hands up to his face, he staggered from the door and moved across the yard. Mrs. Jackson, who had the door open its widest now, stepped out into the night, holding the lamp above her head, to see where he had gone; but before she could arrest his going, the shadows had closed around, and he had passed from sight.

Whither he went he did not care. He stumbled upon a haystack in the dark, and heedless that it was almost sodden with the rain, flung himself upon a heap which was lying on the ground. The fountains of his grief were opened now, and he cried as though his heart would break. He, Henry Boltington! King Boltington! the merriest of the merry, mourned as he had never mourned before.

As he lay there, weeping his heart away, wholly regardless of anything else except his sorrow, he did not hear footsteps approaching him from behind; nor did he heed when a tall figure, emerging from the darkness, stood in silence by his side, attracted rather by his sobs than by the fact that he could perceive his presence there. The stranger, whoever he was, was tall and thin, and was shrouded from

head to foot in a long black overcoat, which buttoned to his chin. His hat was drawn so far over his face that it was difficult to perceive his features, but they seemed to be conspicuous chiefly for a pair of brilliant eyes, which flashed even through the gloom. For some seconds he stood in silence, his head bent slightly forward, and his gloved hands loosely clasped in front of him.

Then, in a voice which, though very low, was rich and full of music, he whispered tenderly, as though it were a familiar sound to him—

“Harry!”

But Boltington did not hear; he still cried on, and his ears were deafened.

The stranger waited to see if he replied; then, perceiving that he did not, bending down, he laid his hand gently on the boy's right shoulder, and again he whispered—

“Harry!”

No one in the school, except Tom Jackson, called him by that name. He was “Boltington” to most; none ventured to address him more familiarly than “Henry,” for with all his sunshine and light-heartedness, there was a certain dignity about him which made the most careless of his acquaintance understand that by him would not be tolerated the slightest approach to the familiarity which breeds contempt.

But this stranger called him “Harry,” as though to the manner born—as though it were a name well known to him, and which he had often used.

But still Boltington paid no heed; and when the stranger, holding him with a firmer grasp, tried to lift him from the ground, he rose up angrily and flung his hand away.

"Leave me alone!" he cried, choking with his sobs, and he sank upon his face again.

But the stranger would not be put off so.

"Don't you know me, Harry?" he said, louder now, but gently still. "It is I."

All at once Boltington was silent, he ceased to cry as suddenly as he began. There was a pause; the stranger stood motionless, and Boltington lay still. Then with much deliberation he raised himself again, and supporting himself upon one hand, looked up at the tall figure bending over him, while the stranger looked down at him.

Still neither spoke; till, with a great catch in his voice, the monitor said—

"You! It—is—not you?"

There was doubt, and hesitation, and a curious wonder in his tone.

"Yes, it is I"—and though it was dark one could have vowed the stranger smiled—"it is I, body and bones. Are you afraid of me?"

"Afraid!" cried Boltington, leaping to his feet with a single spring, "not I!"

They were face to face; he looking at the stranger, and the stranger looking back at him.

"You, sir!" he said—and there was one of those sudden changes in his voice which were characteristic

of his waywardness—"it is better than a hundred pounds the sight of you."

And putting out his hand he took the stranger's in his own, and held it in its firmest clasp.

"A hundred pounds, Harry? Remember, that is a pretty sum, and not found every day. Do not be rash in valuing me too high."

There could be no doubt that the stranger was smiling now, and, what was the strangest part of it, Boltington laughed too; and what was perhaps even stranger still, his laugh had the old, true, merry ring; all his tears were chased away, and his heart was lighter than it had been for many a day; for Dr. Graham had come back again.

Yes, the stranger was Dr. Graham; you knew it before my pen had written it. Why will you boys and girls find out things before you are told?

Doctor Graham had come back to school—back to Dorrincourt, like the good prince in the fairy tale, at the very moment when his presence was needed most.

The doctor and his wayward pupil fell in side by side as naturally and as easily as though they had not been parted for a day; the doctor's arm was slipped through Harry's, and, apparently quite regardless of the rain, they strolled slowly on, talking by the way.

"And how are you, sir? are you well and strong again? Of course you have come back for good? Do the fellows know that you are here? How did you find out that I was lying there?"

“I have always thought that it was not easy even for the cleverest man to answer more than two questions at a time, and as far as I could follow you—for you don’t appear to have lost your powers of speech—you ask half-a-dozen.”

Boltington laughed, but held his tongue.

“How did I find that you were lying there? the last shall be first, so I will answer that. I came here to see that little fellow, whom I heard was lying ill, and heard you speaking at the door.”

Boltington was grave at once.

“And—and did you see him, sir?”

“Yes, I saw him. He seems to be an uncommon character. I don’t think I ever saw a boy who impressed me more favourably at first sight. He mentioned your name to me.”

“My name, sir! dear old Tom! I do believe that he is the best fellow in all the world. I ought to know. I don’t think that I shall ever know a better;” this was spoken softly. “Is—is he very ill?”

“So ill that the die is almost cast. I spoke to the doctor before he went, and he said that to-night he will reach the cross-roads which lead to life and death. Which he will take it is impossible for us to say. Of this we may be sure, that he at any rate has no fear of death.”

“He has been the best of friends to me,” said Boltington, breaking the pause which followed. “He is much wiser than I—which is saying little—though my years are more, and I did not treat

him well. O doctor, I wish you had not gone away!"

"I ought to feel flattered at such a tone of tragedy." And the doctor smiled. "At any rate I have come back, and feeling comparatively quite young again. I shall bowl you out at cricket yet—you have a vicious habit of slogging every ball—though at football you may run me off my legs. I have heard of your exploits, and do, what Dorrincourt has done already, thank you in its name."

The smile upon his listener's face was but a transient one, and soon gave way to gravity again.

"I know you so well, Harry, that before we are half-way through next term I should not be at all surprised to find you wishing I would go away again."

Boltington sighed; the doctor eyed him through the gloom, and then was still. When he spoke it was with a tinge of bitterness.

"But supposing I am not here next term?" he said.

"Not here!" the doctor cried, surprised. "I thought it was arranged that you were not to matriculate till after the long vacation? Have your plans been changed?"

"That is according to how you look at it." His tone was almost rudely bitter, and the doctor wondered. "I don't think that whether I do or don't matriculate will have anything to do with it—that

is to say, in the event of my being expelled before this term is done."

The doctor stopped in his amazement, withdrew his arm, and stared at him.

"Expelled! What do you mean? What is it you have done?"

"Done!" cried Boltington, all his pent-up emotion bursting forth at once; "what have I left undone? What have I done that I should do? Ask Doctor Macqueen—he will give you a better answer than I can—and even he does not know all."

In the silence which ensued the doctor slipped his arm through his and led him on again.

"Come, Harry!" He spoke quietly, and the familiar, gentle tones affected his hearer more than any anger could have done. "What a lad you are! You are always in extremes. I don't mean to say that when you are good you could not be better; but I know from experience that when you are bad, according to your own account you could not possibly be worse. Come, tell me all the mystery."

"There will be little mystery soon," cried Boltington, standing in the path, and facing towards his master and his friend, "and nothing will be left to tell. Doctor Macqueen has hated me from the first—why, goodness knows; nothing I could do, and I have tried hard at times, was to his liking; ask Otway, ask Dodwell, ask Jackson, ask all the school, and they will tell you it is so! But he

has had his way; he has wanted to expel me all along, and now I have given him a first-rate chance of doing it."

"What do you mean? You have done nothing rash, I hope?" And the doctor laid his hand on the excited speaker's arm.

"That again depends on how you look at it. There is to be a barring-out, that's all; and I am at the head of it."

"A barring-out! You don't mean to say that any of you are so foolish as to think you can defy authority!"

"I don't know about defying authority, but we do think of defying him. So far as that goes, it is my affair all through. If I had not led them up to it, they would never have dared to go beyond talking, all their lives."

"I had heard something of this before," said the doctor, still quietly, though Boltington, who knew every tone of his voice so well, knew the trouble that was in it, "but I had no idea that it had gone so far. Is this the way you return the talents committed to your charge?"

There was something in the way he spoke which thrilled through his hearer's every pulse.

"You don't know all!" he said.

"True I do not know all; but in one sense, at least, I know too much already. But what avails our standing here? My wintering will do me little good if I defy the elements like this. Tell me all as

we go on ; we can talk as well walking as standing, in such a rain."

So again they went on together. That was a curious walk ; by degrees the downpour ceased, but it was hardly the sort of night to choose for a confidential walk and talk through country lanes. Boltington had the conversation chiefly to himself, and the doctor listened. It puzzled him not a little to understand how in so short a space of time matters had reached so strange a pitch ; and it not only puzzled, but grieved him too. But something which happened when they reached the school surprised him as much as it did Boltington, and formed the climax to the events of that eventful night.

As a matter of course they entered through the headmaster's private door. Directly they stepped inside, Dr. Macqueen came rushing out, and, totally ignoring Dr. Graham (whom, by the way, he had seen on his arrival), he seized his pupil's hand, and in his own peculiar way broke out as follows :—

"I've been wrong from beginning to end—blind as a bat, my boy—deceived by that precocious rascal ! He's led me by the nose—by the nose, sir, to serve his own disreputable ends ; and if his conscience—what is left of it—hadn't been too much for him at the eleventh hour, I should have gone on being mistaken to the end !"

So Master Hazlemere had confessed at last. Boltington stared, and Dr. Graham stared. Both the doctor's words and manner were inexplicable to

them; but the thing grew clearer by degrees, as he proceeded to explain how, in the first instance, he had mistaken Stornell for Boltington, how Geoffrey had confirmed him in his error, and how only from Geoffrey's own lips he had discovered how grossly he had been misled.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BARRING-OUT.

OF their favourite master's return, and Boltington's revelations, the conspirators remained in the completest ignorance. Dr. Graham, for reasons of his own, insisted that it should be so; and Dr. Macqueen, who felt that he had not hitherto managed matters with such success as to justify his acting in opposition to his more experienced colleague, was obliged to acquiesce in his desire. None even of the sixth-form boys were told that Dr. Graham had come back again; it was his wish that they should learn the fact only from his own lips.

That evening Boltington spent in the doctor's own apartments. His position was so novel that he was at a loss to understand it all. Dr. Macqueen was so very desirous of reinstating him in every one's good graces that it was rather overwhelming; from his place upon the hearthrug, with his hands under his coat-tails, in his own fashion he enlarged upon the vice of judging over hastily.

"More harm—I say that more harm's done by returning a verdict before hearing the evidence than ever Nero did! Hum! What's the use of hang-

ing first, and saying you're sorry afterwards? In 'Alice Through the Looking-Glass,' a book—I say, a book which I'm not ashamed to say I've read through more than once—first they execute, then they try, then the crime's committed last of all. That's a pretty state of things! Hum! 'Marry in haste, and repent at leisure.' I say, 'Judge in haste, and repent for ever.' You'll repent a good deal more hastily than you gave judgment."

He forgot to point out that these moral observations, if applicable to anybody, were peculiarly applicable to himself just now; but perhaps he felt it all the more because he did not point it out.

Dr. Macqueen and his wife, and Dr. Graham, were the grown-ups of the party, while Boltington and Miss Emily Macqueen were the juveniles. That young lady stood in little awe of the young gentleman, monitor though he was; he was tall enough and big enough to make two or three of her, but he would have had to be a giant indeed before he might presume to look down on her. Some recollection of a certain scene, in which Master Jackson and herself had been the actors, and Boltington, whether intentionally or not, a looker-on, might have somewhat troubled her at first; but that this feeling did not weigh oppressively upon her mind, she soon evinced—if not entirely to his satisfaction, at any rate beyond any possibility of his doubting it. Sitting modestly in the background—for, to tell the truth, he was not too presentable an object to figure in polite

society, something Mrs. Macqueen was saying tickled his fancy, and he burst out laughing. All at once, while his face was still wreathed in smile, a voice whispered in his ear, by no means loudly, but with most unmistakable distinctness—

“I think you’re the cruellest, hard-heartedest, ungratefulest boy in all the world, and it would serve you right if everybody hated you with all their might!”

Astounded, he stared in amazement—and with good reason too—and turned to see who this very candid speaker might chance to be. It was Miss Emily Macqueen. She sat at his left hand, but slightly in the rear, looking at him with what not the most conceited individual could have imagined to be friendly eyes. Surprised, but somewhat tickled too, he perceived her indignation. In the same low tone which she had used—

“Really,” he said, “I am very sorry to have offended you; but I am quite at a loss to know what it is which I have done.”

“Done!” replied Miss Macqueen, with the intensest scorn. “Hasn’t Tom Jackson been your friend?” And to her hearer’s increased bewilderment something very like a sob caught her breath. “And isn’t he dying? and—and aren’t you laughing here, as—as if you didn’t care if he were dead!”

And here she plunged the whole company into consternation by bursting into a flood of tears. Rising to her feet, and flying to the door, she still found

breath to hurl a few parting words of bitterness at the offending monitor.

“You cruel, cruel boy! I don’t believe there’s a boy in all the world who knows what feeling is!”

And through the door she fled, while her anxious mother pursued her with all speed to learn if possible what prompted such strange behaviour.

The members of the Secret Society, unconscious of the mine which was about to be sprung beneath their feet, slept on—it would perhaps be wrong to say in peace, for very few of them did that. Like Macbeth, they had tried to screw their courage to the striking point, and failed. They were even brave at first; but by degrees, as the night stole on, in its silent watches their valour oozed out bit by bit. Theirs were unquiet slumbers; phantoms stood round their beds, ghosts of the things which were to come; they dreamt such dreams, dreams which they had never dreamt before! and as, when the appointed hour of four had come, each proceeded to relate his experiences to his friend, they soon succeeded in working themselves into a condition of doleful melancholy, which tended to do anything but keep their spirits up.

It had been previously arranged that the five committee-men should arouse their gallant colleagues at the awful hour of four A.M. As the time approached those same committee-men held a little meeting of their own by the light of a single tallow candle, which Farthingale held in his hand, seated

upon the bed of Master Tiny Maxted. Dressed themselves, they watched that eloquent exponent of the principles of liberty donning his clothes with an air of martyrdom.

“What a night!” he groaned, struggling with a refractory sock. “What a time to drag a fellow out of bed! I wish I’d never had anything to do with it from first to last. I never went to sleep till two o’clock, and then I dreamed such a dream as I never dreamed before; like—like somebody or other before his execution. I dreamed that the dear old mater”—he was affectionate upon a sudden—“was standing by the bed, and praying me upon her knees to wash my hands of everything.”

“Was she standing on her knees, or kneeling on her stand?” inquired Farquaharson, who was irrepressible. “Either position would be rather curious, don’t you know?”

“All criminals have ghastly visions,” explained Farthingale, in that cheerfully cold-blooded way of his; “and all conspirators are criminals, you know. I dreamt that there were five blocks all of a row, and five executioners with bloody swords; our bodies lay on one side, and the executioners held up our bleeding heads in their right hands. That is what all conspirators come to in the end, I think.”

This exceedingly comfortable declaration was followed by the blankest silence. The speakers’ intense convictions would have told upon the stoutest hearts, and the superlative degree could hardly have been applied to them just then. When

the answer came it was distinctly practical in kind. Without a word, Maxwell Bromley caught up Maxted's bolster, and knocked down the prophet with a single blow.

"If ever," said Maxwell solemnly, speaking in the darkness which followed in a voice of sepulchral gloom, "if ever I go shares with Farthingale in any lark again, let me know of it."

After which little incident, as was naturally to be expected, their spirits were not much cheerfuller; and when, through the darkness and the silence of the morning, the great school clock clanged out the hour of four, and they proceeded to rouse the others, one would have thought from their manner that they were calling upon their victims to prepare for the execution which was undoubtedly to follow.

In very few cases did the awakened sleepers greet them with delight. As a rule, the slumberers seemed to think that they were playing with them, and only with difficulty were they able to explain in time to avoid the numerous stand-up fights which threatened.

When at last the sleepers were all roused, and induced to understand the reason of their being so, the grumbling was loud and long. To listen to them you would have supposed that those five committeemen were responsible for all the ills to which poor flesh is heir; and when Tiny Maxted, in deep and dark despair, suggested that they were as miserable as any one of them, it was at once proposed to put him in the water-butt, and leave him there to drown.

Although this was negatived, Tiny felt that the proposal even was more than he deserved.

Directly afterwards, Farquaharson dryly congratulating them on the spirits they were in, his injured auditors felt that this was more than they could stand; so without further argument it was decided to turn the committee-men out into the corridors, and leave them in the cold. The five patriots, not unreasonably objecting to this decision, did their best to prevent its being put into execution; but, in spite of their strenuous efforts, from every dormitory they were thrust, and forced into the dark and draughty passages, to console themselves as best they could.

Two consequences were the immediate result of this. First, the patriots themselves, passing from mutual recriminations to mutual blows, were soon engaged in a little series of free fights, which must have been interesting from the zeal with which they engaged in them. Then, the noise which they had made, owing to circumstances over which they had no control, seemed to effectually arouse, not only the conspirators, but everybody else who was within anything like hearing distance.

It was surprising how much more cheerful these non-conspirators were than the real actors.

Proceedings rapidly became livelier than had promised to be the case at the beginning. The non-initiated, who were not slow to suspect what was doing, lost no time in chaffing their initiated friends, which those same friends, not being in a humour

for anything of the kind, returned, not with words alone, but blows as well.

Very soon a pleasing variety of battles-royal were taking place, which had certainly not entered into the calculations of those to whom the Secret Society owed its first inception.

And when at last something like real business commenced, and there was a gathering of the forces in the great schoolroom, generally speaking the heroes' spirits were down at zero, and their hearts were in their boots.

It was a melancholy scene. The great schoolroom was shrouded in mystic gloom, rendered the more intense by the twelve or thirteen flickering candles, held in the owners' trembling hands.

Without, the wind was howling, seeming to mock at them with cold and savage glee; while the rain still beat against the casements, drowning the world in tears.

"We must do something," said Howard Vincent, with an involuntary shiver, as his doleful tones echoed through the ghostly room. "It's no use our standing here to freeze."

"Where's Boltington?" inquired a voice from among the crowd; and,—

"Yes, where's Boltington?" continued a dozen at his side.

"Oh, he'll be here directly," answered Maxwell Bromley, who felt with Vincent that something must be done. "In the meantime, as I'm vice-president, I propose that operations are begun. It's

no use our sneaking off with our tails between our legs, like a parcel of whipped curs, after all we've said that we would do. For my part"—

"For my part," struck in some one, perfectly indifferent how *mal-à-propos* his remarks might be, "if I get so much as a single imposition I'll give Maxwell Bromley the best thrashing he ever had."

The speaker was a fifth-form boy, and quite capable of doing what he threatened.

The vice-president was still. He felt that his was not a bed of roses.

"What's the use of going on like this?" exclaimed Howard Vincent, making another effort to dispel the gloom that reigned. "Are we a set of idiots?"

There was no reply. Perhaps they felt that silence was an adequate answer.

"Here, I'm going to begin. After all your talk, if you fellows are going on like this, I don't care who you are, I say you're the biggest set of sneaks and cowards I've ever seen!"

And Master Vincent, whose left hand was full of enormous nails, and who held a hammer in the other, advanced towards the door at the further end.

"Then I say you shan't!" cried Holman, the fifth-form boy who had previously threatened Bromley, stepping out from among the crowd. "I say you shan't drive a single nail into that door! We're big enough idiots without wanting to be made bigger than we are already. I was a fool ever to listen to

your trash. Your talking was rank rubbish, and your practice I will not stand."

"What do you mean?" demanded Bromley, with much heat. He was no coward, whatever else he was. "Do you mean to say that you're afraid? Put it in plain English, if that's the case. Didn't you give your word of honour that you'd stick to us through thick and thin?"

"Supposing I did, it's only the more fortunate for me that my senses have returned at last. Besides, where's Boltington? What about his word of honour? What about his promises? It looks to me uncommonly as though he'd thrown you overboard? I for one say that nothing should be done, at any rate till we know what has become of him."

"The truth is, Holman," said Farquaharson, somewhat to their surprise—but the fact was that, with his colleagues, after all their pledges he felt that something must be done—"if you're afraid you'd better tell us so. You know where the door is as well as any one. We are not to be ruled by you. I don't care if I am left alone, and every one of you turn tail; I'll carry out the barring-out alone."

"Bravo!" cried Bromley, to whom this burst from his sarcastic friend was unexpected—and there was some applause from the surrounding throng—"you shall not stand alone while I can lend a hand. It's sink or swim with me, and I'll stand by you to the end."

"So will I!" cried Vincent; and there was a pretty general acclamation in response. Nothing

like a show of courage for carrying boys away. "Come along, my boys," continued Howard, determined to strike the iron while it still was hot, "and we'll show them what we're made of yet!" And every one, or nearly every one, caught up their tools and hurried to the doors.

"Then I wash my hands of the whole affair," exclaimed Holman, raising his voice above the noise, "and will not be responsible for anything which follows."

"Three groans for Holman!" shouted Vincent; and the groans were given with no little heartiness all round the room.

"Groan away, my boys; it'll be my turn to groan for you before you've done. Those who have not lost all their senses, and are not quite demented, will leave the room with me." Pushing those around him out of his path, he strode across the floor; for a few moments no one moved, then six or seven—small boys for the most part, though our friend Stornell was one—followed in his train.

"Give it 'em!" screamed Vincent, dancing with excitement; "give it to the sneaks! help 'em to the door!" And in an instant the small band of prudent ones were surrounded by the crowd, pushed and hustled in rear and front, and attacked by assailants who, owing to the darkness and confusion, were utterly unknown to them. Holman, a tall and stalwart lad, returned the attacks with might and main, and Stornell imitated him as best he could, but the rest fared ill indeed. By the time they

reached the door they were hot, bruised, and aching, their clothes were torn half off their backs, and altogether they were about as uncomfortable as they could well have been.

“Don’t you think,” said Bromley to Howard Vincent, feeling more than doubtful as to the gallantry of the assault, “that if we make this noise we shall have the whole place about our ears?”

“We shall have the whole place about our ears in any case,” returned the reckless Howard—which was truer, perhaps, than he intended; “and so far as I can see, it doesn’t matter much if we have it now or later on.”

In one sense he was to have it both now and later on as well; the noise—which, what with tumbling over desks, struggling, and shouting, was deafening—had penetrated even to the dormitories above, whose occupants, suspecting that some fun was in the wind, and not wishing to be left entirely in the cold, came down to see what the disturbance was about, carrying, by way of precaution, their bolsters in their hands. The first detachment arrived upon the scene at the moment when Holman, struggling in the arms of a dozen foes, was being thrown head foremost through the door.

“Give me a bolster!” he cried, directly he was on his feet; “give me a bolster, and let me get at them!” And without ceremony he seized a bolster from a young gentleman standing near—a young gentleman who, in common with the majority of his friends, had his trousers drawn over his night-

shirt, and had neither shoes nor stockings on his feet, while some were more lightly attired still.

With a resolution which was worthy of a better cause, Holman rushed singlehanded against his foes. His action was like the spark to gunpowder; in an instant the word was passed that a free fight was on, and the whole crowd came rushing in, wholly ignorant of the cause of quarrel—ignorant even who the combatants might be, but burning for the fray. Nor were they doomed to disappointment; and when, taken by surprise, the boys within gave way, in another second they were in the schoolroom, attacking everybody with perfect impartiality, right and left of them.

And this was the prelude to the barring-out! this the discipline which was to be so rigorously preserved! this pandemonium of excited boys! What the disturbance was about no one had the least idea. One side was as much in the dark as to the cause of difference as by any possibility the other could be. Somebody had fallen out with somebody about something—they supposed there could be no doubt of that; but there their knowledge stayed.

So fiercely raged the battle, and so deafening was the din, they were wholly unconscious that the door at the further end—the master's door—was being opened, and that somebody came in. There were two who entered: without exchanging a word they walked up the great schoolroom, and never paused till they reached the struggling and excited throng. Then the elder said, in tones which were loud and clear—

“Boys, what am I to understand by this?”

The effect of his words was magical; it was as though a magician spoke. In spite of the din his voice seemed heard by every one; and when they heard, with one accord the tumult ceased, and they turned to look at him. And when they saw who it was who spoke, in an instant the bolsters fell from their hands, their fists were no more clenched, and, sad and ashamed, their eyes sank to the ground—for it was Dr. Graham.

Dr. Graham! with a small lamp held in his hand, and a look of sorrow on his care-lined face—that face they knew so well. And, to render their amazement the more complete, Boltington stood at his side—the recreant Boltington, with anything but a recreant look upon his countenance, but something, rather, very like a smile. In the silence which ensued it seemed as though they heard their own hearts beating, a dropping pin would have certainly been heard; the contrast to the previous discord was astonishing.

“Boys,” the doctor said, repeating the words he had used before, “what am I to understand by this?”

They could not say; they were tongue-tied, every one of them. What could he understand, but what they would have given a good deal to be able to deny? There were many there—Holman was a notable example—who had made it their perpetual desire to stand well with him; whose names had been seldom or never down for punishment; and who had felt, in

their own small way, that they were a credit to themselves and to the school, and who would almost as soon have thought of flying as of so figuring in his eyes. For the matter of that, there was not one present who would have acted as he had done had Dr. Graham never changed places with Dr. Macqueen.

“I came back to-night,” went on the doctor, and every word he said cut them to their hearts, “and came back to what? I thought that I was coming back to the Dorrincourt I had known so long, and the boys whom I knew so well; but it seems that I was wrong. My Dorrincourt was not like this, nor, surely, are these my boys; if so, and all is changed, then I think that it would almost have been better if I had not come; the illusion would have remained, though the reality had gone.”

They still were silent; what could they say? So dumfounded were they, that none even attempted to steal away; each felt as though the master's eye were on himself, and, concealment being out of the question, flight would but make the matter worse.

“I will not keep you now. I am as little inclined for your company as you are for mine. Besides, the hour is suitable for neither you nor me. I have to look forward in the morning to a meeting very different to that which I hoped would be. It has been well said that it is pleasant to part, in order that we may know the joy of a reunion; but you have made that joy impossible by these your acts to-night. You will each retire to his room, and I trust that

the dawning day will see you waken to a sense of your misconduct."

He ceased, and they made a movement towards the door; but there were a few more words to be said before the scene was over. The speaker was Stornell, and his remark was quite in character.

"It isn't all our fault," he grumbled—he was very sore indeed, having suffered sadly in the fray, and wished with all his heart he had acted up to the prudent truth, "Discretion is the better part of valour," from the beginning. "Why don't you speak to Boltington like that? I'm sure I should never have had anything to do with it if it hadn't been for him; but he was president and that, so I thought there was no harm; and now he gets off free, as though all the blame were ours."

"Stornell," said the doctor, checking an attempt of Boltington's to speak—and his tone was sterner all at once—"I think it is Stornell?" and he shone the lamp in that young gentleman's face to make sure that it was he—"during all the years in which you have known me, you have never known me intentionally to act unjustly; you may rest assured that I shall not depart from justice now. The blame will be duly portioned, and I am quite sure that your share will not be greater than your deserts."

When they were once more in their rooms, and again between the sheets, one or two critical remarks were made by the chief actors.

"If ever," declared Tiny Maxted, who was still

gloomy as ever, "if ever I have anything more to do with barring-out, or secret societies, or the French Revolution, I shall deserve shutting up in an asylum, for I shall be quite mad."

"Quite," acquiesced the sarcastic Farquharson; "I have no doubt of that. You've been pretty mad all through. It was the French Revolution which turned your brain; it's like a weather-cock, quickly turned."

"I don't care—I don't care for anything," protested Bromley, "now that the doctor has come back"—it was to be noted that they never mentioned Dr. Graham without his title, and that alone was a very accurate gauge of what they thought of him. "I'd sooner he'd come back than anything I know, for now it'll be good-bye to old Macqueen."

"I suppose we shall be punished," observed Farthingale in his quiet way; "there can be no doubt of that. We shall deserve it, too. It was only natural we should fail; as a rule conspiracies do. I've noticed in nine cases out of ten no good is ever done by them. And then the conspirators have their heads cut off. Of course they'll leave our heads alone, but I daresay we'll be flogged, or else expelled."

"I don't know," shouted Vincent from his bed, "who was responsible for your birth and bringing up; and I should like to know; for if the son was like the father, a pretty pair you must have been."

"My father," explained Farthingale, with that

perfect equanimity which was not the least surprising feature in his character, "is a clergyman; he is quite different to me. I am opposed to everything; I intend always to conspire. If ever I get into Parliament I shall hatch a plot to blow up every one; I daresay I shall be beheaded in the end."

After this speech not another word was spoken; it was impossible to say anything more remarkable; all efforts would be vain. So, since they were fairly tired out, and the hour was late—or early, should it be?—they composed themselves to sleep. And as they slept, no doubt they dreamed of secret societies, revolutions, barrings-out, and what not, all in one strange jumble, as dreams are wont to be. But one thing was beyond the slightest doubt, that though (as Farthingale would put it) their conspiracy had failed, they enjoyed far sweeter, far calmer, far more perfect rest than they had done when success seemed possible.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE END.

“TOM, old boy, so I’ve got a sight of you at last; if you only knew how I’ve been hammering at the door, how I’ve been ringing at the bell, how I’ve been driving Farmer Jackson wild, you’d say my perseverance had been most commendable. You might have been the most precious thing in the whole of Christendom, judging from the way they’ve taken care of you; you might have been like something in some fairy tale, liable to grow smaller by degrees, and beautifully less each time folks set eyes on you.”

The speaker was Henry Boltington, and it was Tom Jackson he addressed — Tom Jackson lying propped up in bed, in an oasis of pillows, and the bedclothes pulled up to his chin — Tom Jackson, still weak and feeble, still rather shadowy to look upon, but turned the road which leads to health and strength, bound to the haven of a safe recovery. That night, long to be remembered, was the crisis of his illness; at first they were doubtful what the result would be, but at last doubt gave place to

certainty, and now, as the doctor said, he was progressing as favourably as could be expected.

None the less, it was some days before it was deemed advisable to admit the visitors who pressed to see him; chief among these were Boltington and Geoffrey Hazlemere.

The latter young gentleman was peculiarly assiduous. It only too forcibly illustrated that failing in his character when he resolved that he would get in by foul means if he could not by fair; in accordance with which resolution he adopted a course of action which rapidly threatened to drive the unfortunate farmer to his wits' end.

One evening, as the family were seated round the supper-table, they were startled by a peculiar sound, proceeding, as it appeared to them, from overhead, and immediately after some heavy body fell with a crash to the ground outside. Running to see what the cause of the disturbance was, they were surprised to find that Master Geoffrey Hazlemere had scaled the Virginian creeper which grew against the wall beneath Tom Jackson's window, until he had almost reached the goal which he was aiming at; but, unfortunately for himself, some half-dozen pots of jam, destined for his friend, which he was carrying in a bag, so trammelled his movements that, to save himself, he had been obliged to drop them from his hand, and every jam-pot had been smashed to shivers on the ground below.

On another occasion, one afternoon — only two days after the previous adventure — they were

horrified by a heavy ladder falling against the breakfast-room window, breaking every pane of glass, and the frame, to atoms. Again, on inquiry, was Master Geoffrey discovered to be the cause of it; he had only been dragging a heavy ladder, which would have needed two men to carry it, across the yard, and was lifting it, with the intention of placing one end against Tom Jackson's window-sill, when, as was only reasonably to be expected, its weight proving more than he could manage, down it came, almost killing him in its fall, and disposing of the breakfast-room window for ever and a day.

Leo Mason, too, managed to make himself in no small degree trying to the farmer's nerves. He persisted in regarding himself, for some unknown cause, as in some mysterious way responsible for the lad's mishap, and, with the apparent belief that some blame lay at his door, insisted on making amends for the catastrophe.

The way in which he set about doing this was the exasperating part of it. Although he must have known that Tom's tastes were not his own, and, even if they were, living creatures of the newt and lizard families were not what an invalid required, day after day did he persevere in bringing choice specimens of those reptiles, with which he proposed to soothe the sick boy on his bed.

The farmer's wife had an instinctive horror of all such animals, and every ring at the bell made her shake with terror for fear the sympathetic naturalist had come back again. Moreover, Leo would not

take "No" for a reply. He expressed his opinion candidly, that people who did not like newts, frogs, toads, and lizards were just the sort of people to let mad bulls loose in public places, and that if Tom died, his murder would certainly be charged to them.

Under these circumstances it may be imagined that it was with feelings of the intensest satisfaction they learnt that the invalid was on the high-road to recovery; and when for the first time permission was given for visitors to be admitted, it was quite a red-letter day in their calendar.

Of these, the first was Boltington, and all the past pains seemed changed to joy now that he and Tom were once more face to face.

"I've heard of your coming," said Tom, with the monitor's hand held in both of his, "and the noise you made. If you fellows only knew what a worry you've been to the folks downstairs, you would open your eyes. I do believe that Mrs. Jackson was more than once on the brink of suicide."

"I'm sorry for that," laughed Boltington, as though it were a laughing matter, "but the fact is, I was in such a state of worry that I couldn't keep away. You should see how the mater has been asking after you; she strictly enjoined me to send her daily bulletins of how you were going on, and of course I couldn't conscientiously do that, you know, unless I got them at first-hand. I am inclined to fancy she thinks you are a paragon, or the nearest modern approach to one."

"You are responsible for that," said Tom, with mock dignity. "I wouldn't leave my character with you, not for a thousand pounds! I shall make it my first business when I am up and about again to write and tell her that your assertions are all libellous."

"I am much obliged. And there is some one else who seems to have rather a high opinion of you; am I responsible for that too, I should like to know?"

"Who is it?" asked Tom, who, for some inscrutable reason or other, felt that his cheeks were getting warm as he noted the smile in the speaker's eyes.

"Well, it's Miss Emily Macqueen. What I've done to that young damsel I've not the least idea, but she's treated me worse than any criminal; she follows me like my shadow. If I happen to meet her in the morning before I have been up to you, I shiver in my shoes, for she never hesitates to charge me with the most base ingratitude—as though it were my special and particular duty to look you up every quarter of an hour or so; if I have been, then she puts me in the witness-box and cross-examines me, and if I fail to satisfy her in the least particular she gives me to understand that hanging would be a fate too good for me."

"Poor Harry Boltington! did they cross-examine him! It's a shame that they should tease him so!"

But though Tom spoke in a tone of mockery, his cheeks were flushed, and his eyes were glistening.

There was a mighty budget of news to tell. Tom had not yet heard the story of Dr. Graham's coming back, and the barring-out was an episode which surprised him not a little; the latter the narrator treated as a joke which could never be surpassed.

"You should have seen them when Dr. Graham and I came in! They were fighting like cats and dogs; they were in the dark, and pitching into each other, perfectly regardless who were friends and who were foes! And the best of the joke is, that I can't make out—nor any one else either—what it was all about. Nearly all the school was there; they had forgotten about the barring-out entirely, and knew no more why they were doing their best to thump each other than the man in the moon. Of course Otway and the rest of them were shocked. But Dr. Graham made it straight with them; I formally apologised to Otway, and said how sorry I was for everything. And though I am laughing now, it was no joke then, and I would sooner cut off my tongue than make such an idiot of myself again. And now everything is as it was before, and you would think the doctor had never gone away."

"And Dr. Macqueen, what is to become of him?"

"Oh, he is going; we are quite friends now. Young Hazlemere made a clean breast of it, as I suppose you know, and now we understand what we did not understand before. He told me—and I quite believe him—that he is not sorry to go; and it has been his first try at schoolmastering,

and it will be his last. Books, he says, he understands, but hardly boys, and every one should stick to what he knows."

After this there was a pause.

When Tom spoke again his speech scarcely bore upon the subject which they had in hand.

"This has been my first term, and though I do not wish to have it back again, still less do I wish that it had never been. They say that the beginning is always difficult, but when that is passed the rest is easier. If that be so, then I certainly do look forward to the terms to come. And, after all, I have learnt something since I came; that books are good, but—but that friends are good as well."

"Boo! what good are friends?" cried Boltington, who had resolved not to give way to sentiment, and who set down the tears in Jackson's eyes to the state of health which he was in; "at any rate, such friends as I? Boys are what that American fellow says civilisation is, a failure. They're an imposture, too, and the worst speculation going. Take myself for an example! They're selfish, mulish, stupid, faithless, and pig-headed! ten times more like donkeys than the real animals, and not one in fifty is worth his salt!"

"Has Emily Macqueen told you all that?" asked Tom slyly, from the bed, laughing as he noted that Boltington was indulging in his favourite habit of stamping up and down the room. "If so, would you mind telling her that I don't agree with her? Boys are not perfection. I don't believe men are

that. They are like calves and foals, not too sensible; but even calves and foals grow up, you know."

It was the afternoon following that Geoffrey Hazlemere and Leopold Mason paid him their first call.

Geoffrey came in first, rather sheepishly, as though he were not quite sure what sort of welcome his would be. But Tom soon set his mind at rest in that respect, and very soon they were talking as though they had been friends from the beginning.

"You're a youngster," observed Hazlemere, after he had been there some little time—he stood in Boltington's familiar attitude, with his back to the fire—"and a little one at that. But there's something about you, Jackson, which is too much for me. I never meant to treat you as a chum of mine; I meant to hate you from the first; but"—and he scratched his head as though in doubt—"but here I am, as though I'd known you all your life, and liked you all along. What's the secret of it all?"

"Am I a seer to discover mysteries? I am content to accept the result; how it came about I leave to others to find out. One thing I do believe—though I am a youngster, and you may laugh at me if you will—I do believe that all good which comes is sent by God. I know that ever since I have been at Dorrincourt I have been asking Him, and asking Him, for certain things, and now I have got everything for which I asked."

Hazlemere looked at him keenly for a minute,

and then he moved from his place before the fireplace to Tom's bedside.

"I am no saint, Tom; that sort of thing is not my style at all. But I do believe that He sent you. If it hadn't been for you, where and what should I have been to-day?"——

But Tom stopped him before he could answer his own question,—

"What matters? How can you tell or I? And when you say, in that tone, that saintliness is not your style at all, I am sure that you are wrong. I've been thinking about it a good deal since I've been lying here, and I'm quite sure that it is no use living at all without religion. Turn your question round, and just think how it would have been with me if God had not helped me, now?"

"Perhaps you are right," said Geoffrey, after a pause, and there was a touch of the old bitterness in his tone. "I know I've tried the other thing, and come to grief with that. I've had about as bad a time of it as I could have had since I've been here. But it's easier to talk about than to do—to say that the future shall not be like the past."

"Good resolutions are worth making at any rate. Let's both make ours together, and when next term is done we'll have a private and confidential meeting, and ask each other how they have been carried out."

But before he could reply, another visitor was announced, and Leo Mason came sidling in.

“Hallo, Leo!” cried Tom. “I can’t tell you how glad I am you’re come. I’ve heard all about your visits. I don’t know what I shall have to do for thanks, all you fellows have been so kind to me.”

But though Tom smiled, Leo was discontented, as it was his wont to be.

“Oh yes; I daresay! A pretty state of things indeed. If I’ve been once, I’ve been twenty times. But that old blockhead there”—it is to be feared Leo alluded to Mrs. Jackson in this irreverent manner—“wouldn’t let you have a single thing I brought. She asked me just now if I’d got any of my nasty creatures with me. But I was not to be done, so I pretended not to hear, and I’ve some of the finest beetles”—producing a flat box he had stuffed between his waistcoat and his shirt—“you ever saw in your life.”

And opening the lid, he proceeded to disclose to Tom’s not too enchanted eyes a heterogeneous collection of beetles, of all sorts, and shapes, and sizes, who immediately proceeded to demonstrate their liveliness by climbing over the edges and falling on the bed.

“That’s the worst of them,” remarked the enthusiastic naturalist with much placidity, restoring them to their places as quickly as he could. “If they get into the bedclothes we shall have a pretty hunt for them.”

“What a brute you are!” observed Hazlemere, not appreciating the new additions to the company, and perceiving that Tom held them in almost as

much horror as Mrs. Jackson did. "I should like to pitch them through the window, and you on top of them."

"Would you?" retorted Mason. "A nice sort of fellow you must be! If you knew anything about it, you'd know that beetles have as much a place in creation as you, and perhaps as important every bit."

"Come," said Tom, wishing to make peace between them, delighted to see that Mason once more had his pets confined in durance vile, and sincerely trusting that he would not undo the lid again, "have you come to see me, or to quarrel about black beetles? I've no doubt whatever that beetles have a place in creation, but I'd much rather they didn't have a place upon my bed."

Then Mason proceeded to lecture him in his turn.

To begin a book is difficult: it is even more difficult to end. In one of his prefaces Charles Dickens speaks of his unwillingness to part with the creatures of his brain. But this was to be but the story of a term, and if we do not haste the term will be done before our tale.

Changes were taking place of various kinds. George Otway was leaving, so was Dodwell; they were entering the university at the beginning of the Easter Term, and Louis Thelton, who came next in seniority, would be head-boy.

Alexander Stornell would not return. His father had made up his mind that a public-school education was not exactly what his son required. He was

going to a "crammer's" to prepare for Woolwich, and a pleasant time under the direction of such a gentleman Master Stornell might look forward to. It would be wrong to say his presence would not be missed, but it would hardly be disagreeably.

But the most important news of all was that Dr. Graham would remain, now he had returned, and resume his place as their headmaster. It was understood that Dr. Macqueen was every whit as anxious for this as any one. Indeed, it was said, but on what authority we cannot tell, that he had declared wild horses should not induce him to occupy his place again. His heart was in his books; he was a scholar in the exact sense of the term, though, as Beau Henderson said, he did not look it. He was a bookworm born and bred, little experienced in his fellows of the world. Miss Emily's bringing-up might stand as evidence of that. He was as ready to acknowledge as any one that his attempt to fill the delicate and onerous position of headmaster of a great school had not been so successful as it might have been. The true headmaster is born and bred, as surely as ever poet was.

There was a great feast given by Tom to his friends in Mrs. Jackson's best parlour, which will well form the closing scene of this our story. His recovery was of the most satisfyingly rapid kind, he was out of bed almost before they were aware of it, and the first occasion of his coming downstairs was celebrated in a befitting manner by a gathering of all his friends in the great old parlour at the farm.

The eatables and drinkables were of Mrs. Jackson's providing, but the invitations were all Tom's. It was the last night of the term, and little difficulty was found in obtaining extra absence for the guests from school.

It was a merry meeting, and mighty feats were done in the way of feeding. Tom did not do much, he had not yet come to that, but he enjoyed himself quite as much in looking on—perhaps more, if indigestion has anything to do with it. The parlour was a large room, with a low ceiling, and walls panelled with oak black with age. The table was equal to the occasion, and very nice it looked, the soft light of many candles displaying the dainties which covered every available inch of room, and shining on the laughing faces of the gallant lads who were doing their best to diminish the weight under which it groaned.

Tom, as host, sat at one end, Boltington, who was no slight acquisition, was at the other. On Tom's right was Leo Mason, on his left was Geoffrey Hazlemere; while Boltington's supporters were Maxted and Maxwell Bromley. Elsewhere were Vincent, Farthingale, Farquaharson, Holman, and many others whom we do not know; indeed the number of young gentlemen who laid claim to the honour of Tom's friendship directly anything in the shape of eating was in the air, was quite astonishing. Boltington proposed that Miss Emily Macqueen should figure among the guests. But that was only in fun; whatever Tom's own feelings were,

he felt that it was as impossible for him to invite her as it would be for her to come.

During the meal they managed not only to eat and drink, but to talk as well, and it was a moot point which they did to most perfection.

"I hope you fellows will have enough," Tom kept saying. "There's that tongue near you, Hazlemere; when you've helped yourself, will you pass it on? I can recommend the pork-pies, Farquaharson. Mrs. Jackson's the best hand at pork-pies I know. Those are pigeons near you, Bromley; take my advice and put one on your plate."

He made a first-rate host, the better because eating so little himself, he had more time for attending to others. But it must be owned, his was an easy task. It would be difficult to imagine a party of guests who needed less pressing than did they. They tried each dish with complete impartiality, pronounced all good alike, and, if possible, they came again. It was only when such a course was no longer possible, and for the best of reason, that pressure was required.

When the more serious business was concluded, they fell with fresh zest to talk, and jokes, and laughter.

So the evening passed, not a dull moment all the time, not one when the fun seemed flagging, till the flight of time, which, it is well known, waits for no one, warned them that soon they must be gone. It was then, just when they became aware that the signal would ere long be given for them to be off to

school and bed, that Boltington made the first and last speech of the evening.

“Gentlemen,” he said, rising in his place, and of course his rising was followed by applause, “I have one duty to perform before we part, and that it is a pleasant one we shall all agree: would that all our duties were the same! It is to propose the health of our host and friend (tumultuous cheering). *Our* friend, I say advisedly. I am proud to call him mine, and if you knew him as well as I do you would say the same. On this occasion too much gravity would be out of place, and certainly you would not look for it from me; but on this, the last night of the first term in which he has been with us here, let me tell you, that if it had not been for him, more than one of us would not be doing what we are at present, looking forward to another. His health, gentlemen, standing, with three times three, and would that there were more Tom Jacksons in the world.”

And while they stamped and roared, each trying to outroar the others, the occasion of their tumult—a little hunchbacked boy—sat, red as a rose, trembling even, with the great tears in his eyes, holding a letter in his feeble hands.

“Dear Tom,” it ran, “I hope you will have fun to-night. I shall think of you all the time. We are going to-morrow early, before you are up. I send you a present—I knew who it was for when I was choosing it—some kisses, and good-bye. I hope we shall see each other soon again; but if we do not I

will never forget you, and I hope you will not forget
EM.”

The present was a Bible, a pretty pocket copy; she “knew who it was for when she was choosing it.” A leaf was turned down, some words were marked, one or two were underlined. The passage read as follows—and with what better words could we too say good-bye?

“Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*”

And while they cheered, and wished him well, Tom saw the words and nothing else, as though they were written in letters of fire right in front of him.

THE END.



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