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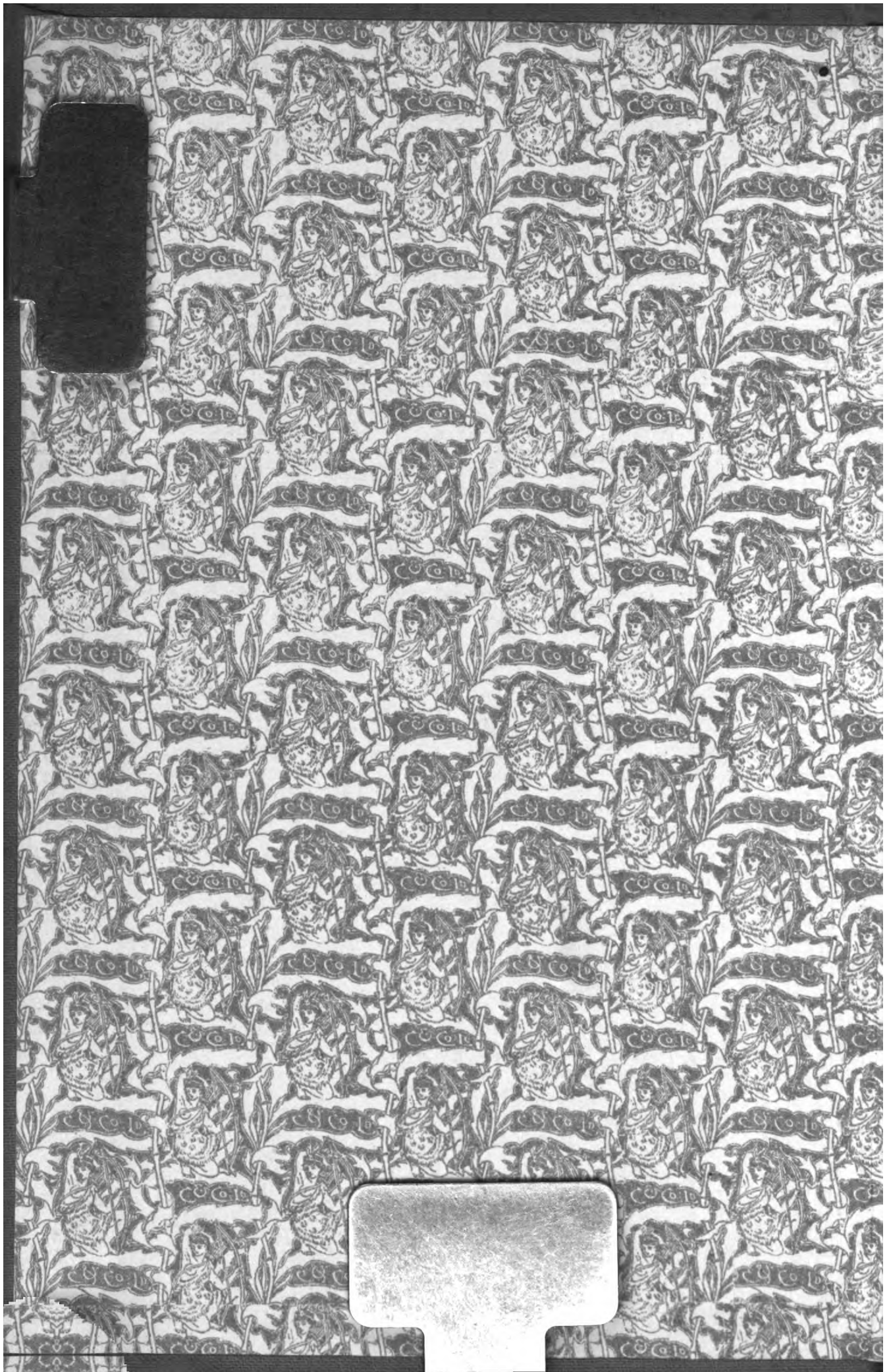


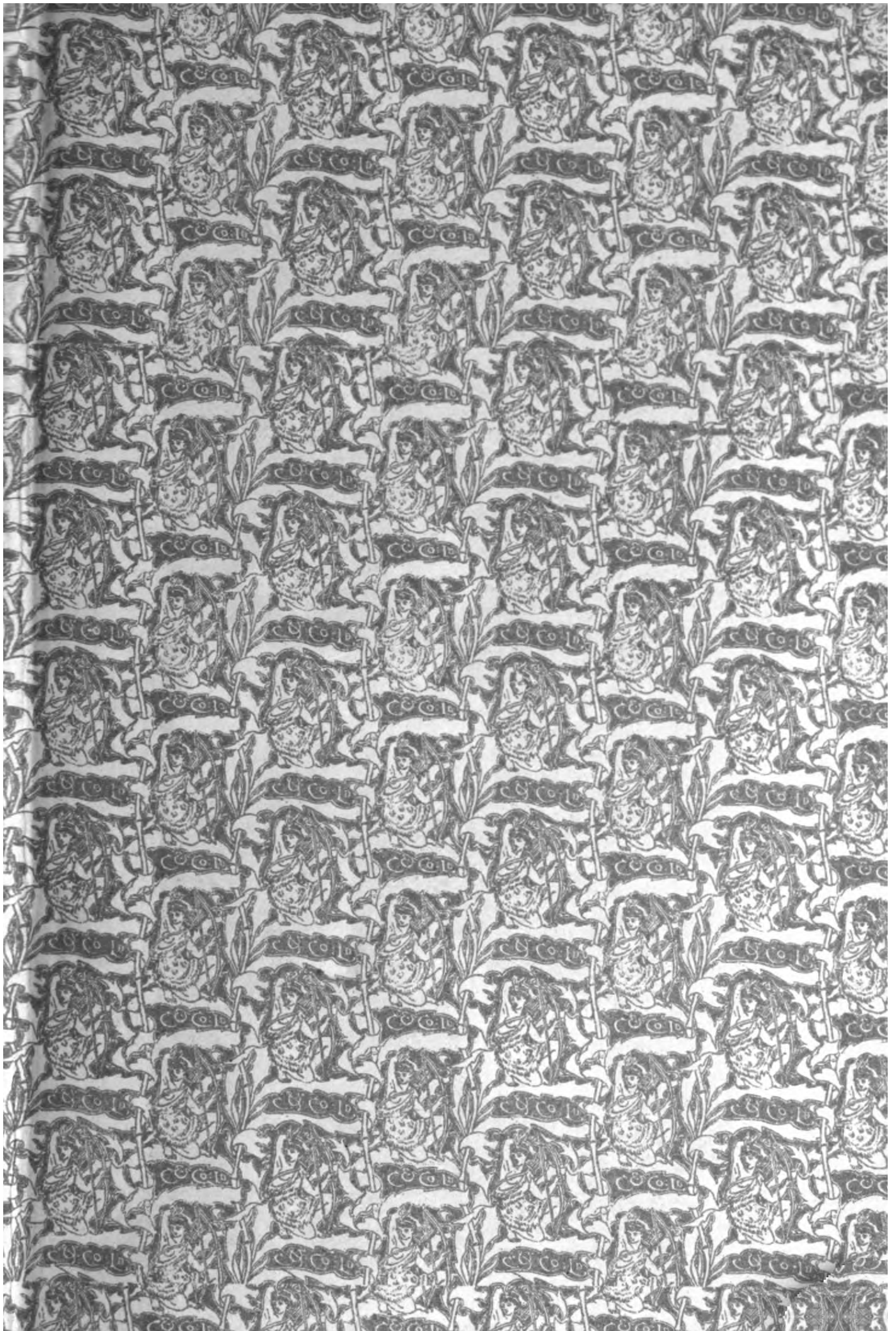
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MONITOR  
AT  
MEGSON'S



ROBERT LEIGHTON





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MONITOR AT MEGSON'S

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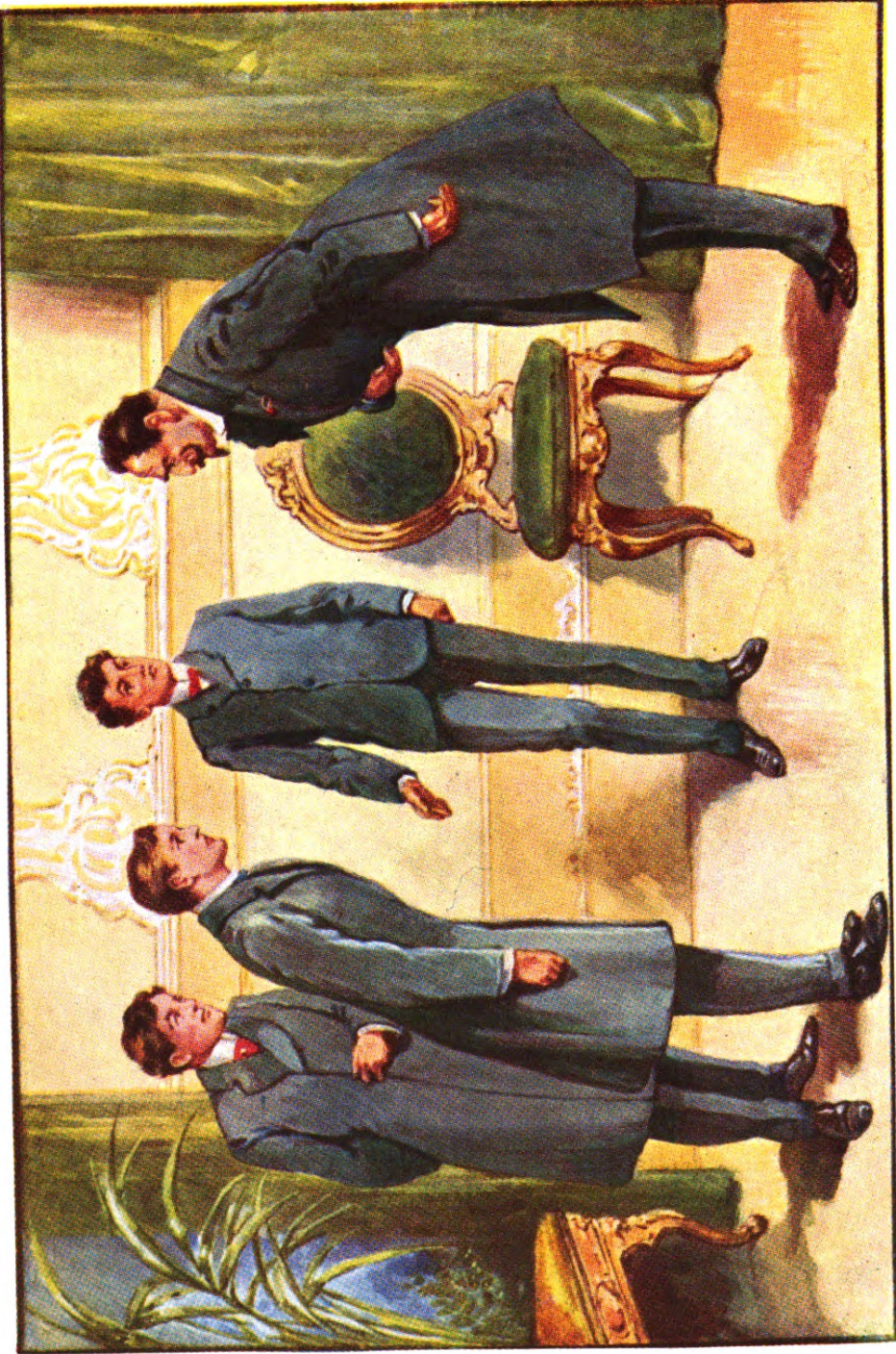
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# MONITOR AT MEGSON'S

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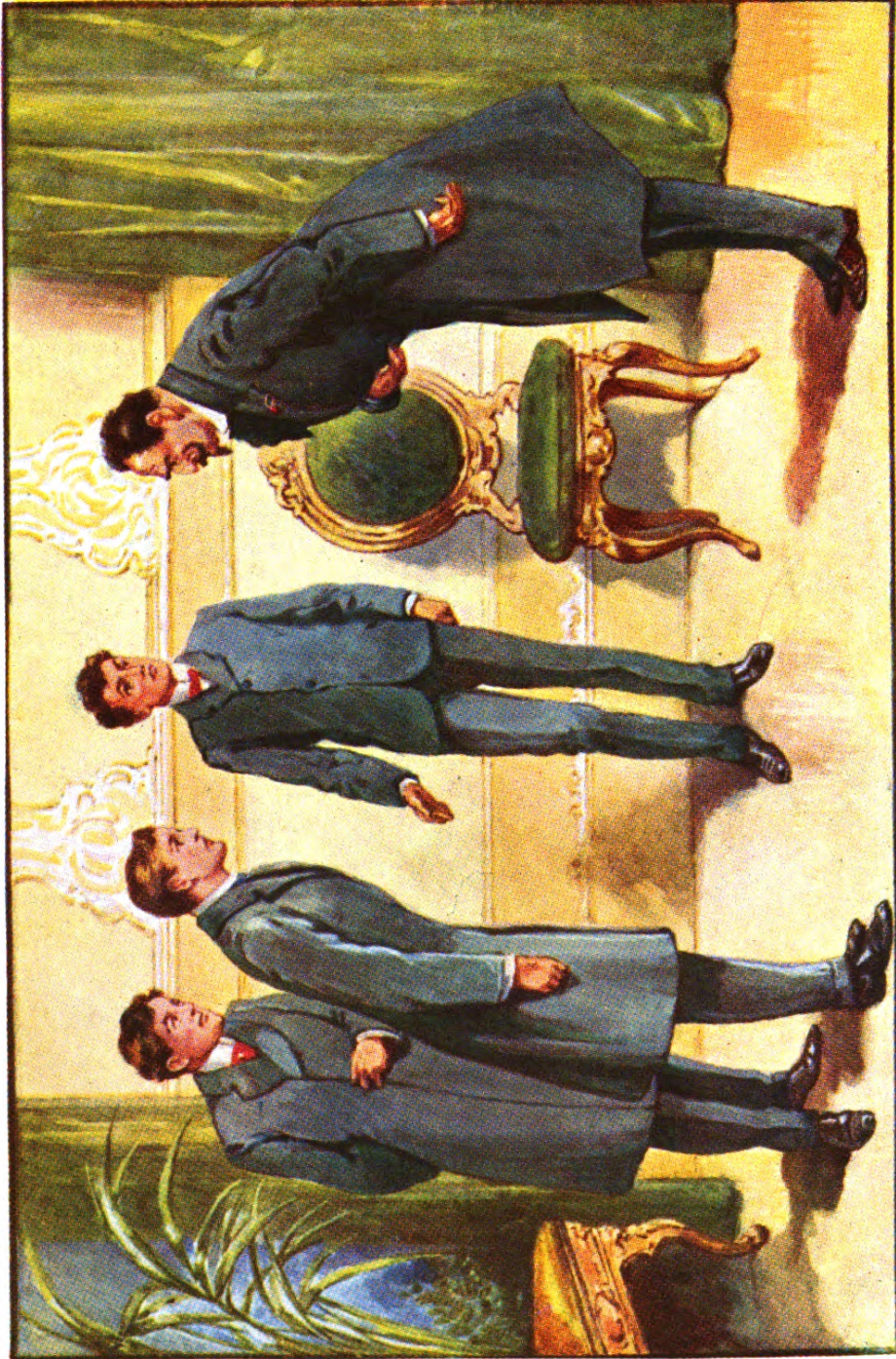
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# MONITOR AT MEGSON'S

A MASTER, A SCHOOLBOY, AND A SECRET

BY

ROBERT LEIGHTON

*Author of "The Boys of Waveney,"  
"The Other Fellow," etc.*

*ILLUSTRATED BY GORDON BROWNE*

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To

ROLAND AUBREY LEIGHTON.

MY DEAR ROLAND,—You took a keen interest in this story of Pierre Le Roy and his school-fellows when it appeared serially in *Chums*, and you will, I hope, be pleased now to possess the narrative in the permanent form of a book dedicated to yourself by

Your affectionate father,

ROBERT LEIGHTON.

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# MONITOR AT MEGSON'S.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE CASTING VOTE.

"THAT chap ought to make a good cricketer," Harvey Gilder casually remarked to his especial chum Fearon as they watched the young fellow dexterously catch an apple which one of his companions of Fifth Form had thrown to him. "Do you know anything about him?"

One may be for a long time at a public school, even in the capacity of prefect, and yet not know all one's school-fellows with friendly intimacy. Some force themselves upon one's close acquaintance; to some, one is merely indifferent; while others seem altogether to elude one's notice and are known only by name. It cannot truthfully be said that Le Roy had escaped Gilder's observation, however. He was the sort of youth who is bound in any circumstances to attract attention. Even in the first days of his coming to Haddisthorpe, Gilder had been conscious that there was something unusual in him—something which distinguished him from other boys. Gilder had admired his lithe, athletic figure, and detected the patrician refinement of his features. He had observed, too, a certain confident dignity in the way he held his head and looked forth fearlessly from his dark eyes. But further than this he had paid no especial regard to him; mainly, perhaps, because they had not been thrown together either in games or study.

"Do you know anything about him?" Gilder repeated.

Fearon glanced at the young fellow, who was perched on a corner of a desk munching the apple that had been thrown to him.

“ He is rather an outsider,” he replied. “ You should not go by appearances. I don't believe he will be worth a rap at cricket or anything else. He is French, you know—or half-French, anyway. His name is Le Roy—Pierre Le Roy.”

Fearon's estimate of him seemed at first to be more accurate than Gilder's. Le Roy did not distinguish himself at games. He seemed to lack many of the qualities characteristic of the British boy, and to be suffered as a foreigner rather than accepted as a companion. He was understood to be clever in class, and he was supposed never to need a crib ; but of his mental equipment neither Gilder nor Fearon had at that time any opportunity of judging, since he was in Upper Fifth, while they were in the Head's division ; and he was a boarder in Mr. Megson's house, while they had private studies in the school.

It was at the beginning of the summer term that Le Roy made his unostentatious appearance at Haddisthorpe, arriving by the train from London in company with Elkin and the new French master. His only luggage was one remarkably heavy trunk, a cricket bat and a tennis racket, and his school outfit was noticeably poor, although he always contrived to make himself look very neat, and was scrupulously careful of his clothes. He held himself apart from the other fellows with singular modesty and reserve ; never joining in their rough horseplay, never getting punished, never drawing undue attention to himself. And yet he was neither a prig nor a dolt. He was merely what Brelson called a quiet, inoffensive chap. And if he did not push himself forward into their notice, his companions, on their part, did not seek to allure him from his isolation.

In the excitement of the cricket season Gilder was too busy with his eleven to pay any attention to a new boy who was not in his own division, and who had not excelled at batting, bowling, or fielding ; and the term came to its close without their having spoken to each other. It was not until after the summer holidays that they met face to face and alone.

Gilder was crossing the fields towards the village, when,

coming to the footbridge, he discovered Le Roy reclining on his back staring up into the blue of the sky, with a book lying open across his white Sunday waistcoat.

Le Roy leapt to his feet, and his book slid down the grassy bank. Gilder picked it up and glanced at its title as he handed it to him.

"H'm," he nodded. "'The Last of the Mohicans,' eh? Rather an exciting tale, that," he remarked; "but you don't seem to be very deeply absorbed in it."

"On the contrary," returned Le Roy, "I am very much interested in it. I like not to read an exciting story too quickly. I was thinking about it when you saw me lying down there. Your fag lent it to me."

Gilder looked into the boy's handsome, bronzed face.

"You are very much sunburned," he observed. "Where did you spend the holidays? Been home to France, I suppose, eh? I was at St. Valerie one year. Enjoyed it awfully."

"France?" Le Roy repeated the word in momentary embarrassment. "No," he answered slowly, taking hold of the rail of the footbridge and gazing down into the trickling stream. "I have not been many miles away from here all the time. I have been what you call camping-out."

"Oh?" said Gilder. "Do you mean on the Broads?"

Le Roy turned with his back to the rail, with his hands clasped loosely in front of him, his book under his arm.

"Yes," he answered. "I live in the sailing boat, which I hire from the inn at Yarsham. I sail, I swim, I catch the fish. Always I live in the open air, every day. Nobody knew that I was there, you apprehend, and I was safe."

"Safe?" Gilder exclaimed questioningly. "How do you mean? Safe from what? You were not hiding from anyone, were you?"

The sunburn in Le Roy's face deepened to crimson. He lowered his eyes, as though he had been accused of committing some serious offence.

"Were you alone?" Gilder pursued. "All alone, like Robinson Crusoe before Man Friday turned up?"

Le Roy shrugged his shoulders.

"No," he replied in some hesitation, "I had my Man Friday—a friend." He did not mention his friend's name or indicate whether it was man or boy who had shared the adventurous holiday. And Gilder was not alert enough to discover that he was purposely withholding the information.

"I don't wonder you're sunburnt," said Gilder. "Roughing it like that is a much better way of spending the holidays than rotting about at a fashionable seaside hotel and dressing for dinner. I suppose you cooked your own food, did you?"

"Why, yes," nodded Le Roy. "We did everything for ourselves, even our own washing. It was that which made it all so enjoyable, you understand."

"You ought to have had Brelson with you," smiled Gilder. "Brelson's awfully keen on that sort of thing. If he were not an English schoolboy, I believe nothing would please him better than to be a Red Indian, living in a wig-wam, making fire out of two sticks, and cooking the food that he had himself hunted on the prairies. Well, I must be off, or the post office will be closed, and I have to register a letter."

Elkin, who had been head of the school, did not return to Haddisthorpe after the summer holidays. He had gone up to Oxford with his well-earned scholarship. And now it was a question as to who was to take Elkin's place in the honoured position which he had left vacant.

There was a great deal of whispering and consultation among the boys, as there always must be on such occasions. The names of Fearon and Gilder were bandied about like a tennis ball from side to side. Fearon hoped that Gilder would be chosen. Gilder hoped that it would be Fearon.

In these matters, however, it is seldom wise to calculate, and even Gilder was not a little taken aback when he chanced to overhear a conversation the boys were having on the subject.

He was at work in his study, which was at the top of the staircase near an embayed window, where the boys on their way to and from the classrooms were in the habit

of loitering to shy things at people in the playground below, or to meet in secret committee.

"Anyway," remarked Arlingford, "it's a pity that Elkin hasn't come back this term. Everything went smoothly when he was here. I for one should like to know who is going to step into his shoes."

"That's what a good many of us want to know," added one of the lower boys who were grouped near him.

"Of course it ought to be the senior fellow in the school," said another. "And Fearon's that."

"But seniority doesn't count for everything," rejoined Arlingford. "We want the best man."

"Elkin nominated G—Gilder as his s—s—s—successor," interposed Wallace with a stutter.

"Elkin had no more right to nominate his successor than you or I have, however," decided Arlingford. "The choice of a head rests with the school."

"But it's all settled," said another who had not before spoken. "Harvey Gilder is to be captain."

It was Tony Brelson who ventured to pronounce this unauthorised decision so complimentary to Gilder. Brelson was Gilder's fag at Haddisthorpe, and it was perhaps natural that he should wish to see his fag-master placed at the head of the school.

His opinion was not shared by the boy who spoke next. Gilder could not see him from where he sat at work, but he recognised his voice as that of an Upper Fifth boy named Lewis, who was not very well disposed towards him, mainly for the reason that, as a prefect, Gilder had more than once had occasion to punish him.

"Gilder?" he exclaimed, with a scornful laugh. "Why, Gilder's not even in the running. Runciman is first favourite, and he is going to be captain of footer as well."

"Indeed?" returned Brelson in a tone of surprise. "That's news. I should have thought that the fellow to be head of the school ought to be one whom the school wants, and I'm jolly well sure the school doesn't want a bully like Runciman. As for being captain of footer, that's rank nonsense. He isn't in it with Gilder, or even

with Fearon. Gilder is the man. He can do anything—*anything*—except——”

He paused.

“Except what?” questioned Lewis.

“Well,” retorted Brelson, “except tell a lie, or act meanly, or imitate any other of Runciman’s ungentlemanly accomplishments.”

These personal comparisons were not meant for Gilder’s ears. He rose from his chair to close the intervening door, and so shut out the rest of the conversation.

This information that Runciman stood even a remote chance of being elected was disconcerting in view of the circumstance that he was notoriously unpopular with the masters, and not greatly respected by the school at large. He had not the character which wins confidence and loyalty. Brelson had rightly described him as a bully. At football and other games he was not especially skilful, and he was too autocratic to be liked. Besides, he could not command his temper, and was too apt to blame a fellow for failing to do impossible things.

Gilder was ready and willing to abide by the unanimous verdict of his companions; but that there should be even a hint that Runciman might be chosen was beyond his understanding. Without being conceited or unduly ambitious, he had secretly set his heart upon being head of the school, and he thought that he was justified in the expectation. Was it possible that he had been living in a fool’s paradise of fancied popularity? He remembered the cheers that had gone up when, as the last man in on a bumping pitch in a blinding light, he had driven Lambert’s ball to boundary, and so won for Haddisthorpe the closest match in its history. His ears still rang with the applause which greeted him when he came out only two marks below Elkin in the examination for the Christopher scholarship. By many tokens he knew that he stood high in the esteem of his schoolfellows. If Fearon had been his rival, he would have rejoiced. Fearon was his senior by four months, and was a better scholar in many subjects, although perhaps less alert on the playing fields. But Runciman——!

While he worked he tried to persuade himself that he did not care. He told himself that, relieved from the responsibility of making himself a walking example of integrity for all the school to imitate—that, relieved from the arduous duty of controlling the first fifteen at football—he would have all the more leisure to devote to preparing himself for Sandhurst. But it was mere folly to argue on these lines. He cared very much, and knew that if he failed to be chosen as captain of the school he would suffer a grievous disappointment.

As a candidate for the honour, he was not expected to vote; it was not necessary for him to be present at the election. But after six on that same day his anxiety drew him down to the common room, where the election took place. He entered late, just as the final voting papers were being counted, and he stood at the back, where he was not generally seen.

Tetley, who had been one of the scrutineers, rose to announce the result. There was a breathless hush in the hall. Gilder could almost hear his own heart beating.

“There are thirty-four votes for Gilder,” Tetley said with curious embarrassment. “And Runciman has got the same number. Therefore, it’s a tie.”

“It’s a swindle!” cried Brelson amid the commotion which followed. “Runciman has been canvassing for his votes right and left. It’s not fair!”

The commotion increased almost to the point of riot.

“There’s a fellow here who hasn’t voted!” bawled Lewis. “It’s Le Roy.” And the cry was taken up, “Le Roy hasn’t voted! Make him vote!”

Le Roy was called upon to record his vote. A paper was passed to him, and he nervously turned to his neighbour, protesting that he did not wish to have the responsibility of the decision thrust upon him in that way.

Many were only too eager to proffer him gratuitous advice, and at length he yielded. There was a sudden silence in the hall as his paper—the paper which was to determine so much—was slowly opened. Tetley scowled as he read the name upon it. His disappointment was obvious.



" Runciman is elected head of the school," he announced hoarsely.

Gilder was staggered. Until that moment he had thought that he could command his feelings whatever happened. But now the hot blood rushed to his cheeks in bitter, angry resentment. To preserve himself from blurting out some foolish, undignified protest, he stole out from the noisy room, utterly humiliated.

Why had Le Roy voted against him, he wondered.

## CHAPTER II.

### MEGSON'S.

FOR many minutes Harvey Gilder sat at his study table with his shamed head buried in his folded arms, trying to fathom the reason of his ignominious defeat and of Runciman's inexplicable success. What was he to do? How was he to face his companions, knowing that one half of their number, and that an unrecognisable half, had gone against him in favour of a fellow whom he knew to be a cad and a bounder? How was he to write home to his people, telling them that, after all, he had not gained the honour he had hoped for? During the holidays he had talked so much of his expectations that now it seemed a terribly humiliating task to admit that he was obviously not the favourite that he had believed himself to be!

Fearon and most of the fellows in the Head's division had assured him that no one else had a ghost of a chance of being captain; and he had listened to them, building his hopes upon their assurances.

Someone tapped at his door. He sat up, took his pen, and turned over a page of his Sophocles, trying to assume an air of calm indifference.

"Come in," he said, thinking it was his fag.

It was Tetley who entered; not Brelson. Tetley was in Upper Fifth, and did not seem capable of getting out of it, for he had still been in that form when Fearon and Gilder were two divisions behind him. He had the reputation of being a hot-headed, mischievous individual, careless and indolent in everything except games. He quietly closed the door and approached the prefect's table.

"This is a put-up affair, Gilder," he began, making himself very much at home. "That sneak Arbuthnot

is at the bottom of it. He and Lewis made up their minds that Runciman was to be elected, and they managed it by trickery. Everyone in Haddisthorpe knows that you would have had a thumping majority if there'd only been fair play."

Gilder rose from his chair and stood against the table, facing his visitor.

"There can be no possible good in your talking of this now, Tetley," he quietly assured him. "The school has decided, and that is the end of it. I do not want to hear any explanations. Runciman will make a very good head, no doubt, although I should rather it had been Fearon or Woodhouse. Of course, I don't mind that I was not myself elected. It must be an awful fag, being captain of a school like this."

"I came to offer my sympathy," said Tetley, "and to tell you about the unfair canvassing."

Gilder nodded.

"Thank you," he returned, forcing a smile. "But I wish to be alone."

Tetley moved towards the door. Gilder detained him with an uplifted finger.

"Wait a moment," he said. "There is something that I want to know about. I hear that there's going to be a fight, and that you are one of the intending combatants. Is that true?"

Tetley looked confused. He hesitated in answering:

"I had intended to give a thrashing to Arbuthnot," he admitted, "but another fellow has saved me the trouble and done it for me."

"But why should Arbuthnot be thrashed?" Gilder questioned in a tone of authority.

Tetley fumbled with his necktie, as was his habit when nervous.

"I think you will agree that he deserved it," he faltered, advancing further into the room. "You see, it was this way. Monsieur Noël, who takes us in modern languages, has the wild idea that Upper Fifth ought to know French as well as we know English, and he's been setting us the most awful tasks you could imagine. Yesterday he had

the cheek to set us as many as four pages of Molière, which was more than we could stand at any price. So we held an indignation meeting in the gravel playground, and discussed a plan of campaign."

Gilder sat on the edge of the table with a foot on his chair.

"Well?" he urged; for his visitor had paused while someone walked along the passage outside the door.

Tetley continued:

"Arbuthnot, who had a lot to say, as usual, proposed that we should go on strike, and one and all protest that the lesson was heaps too long and difficult, and that we refused to prepare it. Le Roy, who is French and hadn't the same excuse, was barred; but the rest of us agreed to a man, because Arbuthnot, who planned the whole rag and was rather proud of it, said it was bound to succeed if we only stood by each other."

Gilder shook his head in disapproval of such rebellion against a master whom he respected.

"This morning, in pupil room," Tetley went on, "Monsieur Noël got into a rare bate when each of us in turn declared he hadn't done his preparation, because it was miles too long and hard: and he threatened to report the whole form. Le Roy read his bit all right, of course, for he couldn't pretend not to know his own language. But when it came to Arbuthnot's turn, we all saw at once the trap that he had laid for us, for, to our amazement, he began to translate and went on without making a single mistake until he was told to stop. He got full marks, the sneak! But the rest of us didn't get off so easily, you may be sure. Noël swears that I was the ringleader of the rag, and I expect he will give me a rotten time at Megson's."

"So——?" Gilder urged, for he divined that this was not the end of the incident.

"Arbuthnot got his deserts," continued Tetley, with a chuckle. "Only it's a pity there weren't more witnesses. I was on my way to Megson's. Le Roy was in front of me. When he got to the footbridge I saw him make a sudden grab at a fellow who was behind the tree. 'Look

here,' he said, seizing Arbuthnot by the collar, 'do you know what you are? You're a sneak and a coward. It was all through you that those fellows were kept in this morning, and I'm going to punch your head!' He did it, too. He gave Buthie the soundest busting he ever got, and ended by dropping him into the ditch."

Gilder smiled in approval, inwardly congratulating Le Roy on his courage. For this act of school-boy justice he could almost have forgiven the young foreigner for voting against him.

"I see," he said, returning to his chair and taking up his pen. "So the threatened fight is not going to come off? That's satisfactory. I should have been bound to put a stop to it, you know."

Scarcely had Tetley quitted the room, leaving the door ajar, when Le Roy himself peeped in, first tapping gently.

"Pardon," he said in a clear, mellow voice that had in it just the very slightest suspicion of foreign accent. "Mr. Eyre-Loftus he desire to see you in his private room."

Gilder pushed his books aside and stood up, fixing his glance upon the boy who had had it in his power to decide the momentous election.

"Thank you," he said. "I will go immediately."

Le Roy lingered hesitatingly, as if he desired to make some explanation.

"Won't you come inside?" Gilder invited, as he deliberately packed his books.

Le Roy advanced slowly, glancing inquisitively at the prefect's bookshelves, pictures, and furniture. His glance rested on a collection of cricket bats in the far corner of the room, and then upon a number of silver challenge cups on the mantelpiece, above which a pair of fencing foils engaged his attention.

"I have just been hearing from Tetley how you gave Arbuthnot a thrashing," Gilder presently remarked. "It was plucky of you."

"Plucky?" Le Roy shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly. "I did not think so. It was necessary he should be punished. He very much deceive the other

boys, and I like not what you call sneaking. It is not Eenglish; it is not honourable."

"You are not English yourself, I believe?" Gilder pursued questioningly, as he idly turned one or two pages of an autograph album that lay near him. "But you speak astonishingly well for a foreigner."

Le Roy drew a quick breath and glanced at Gilder apprehensively, as though he dreaded that this reference to his being a foreigner might lead to the revelation of a secret he was continually guarding.

"Not so well as I should desire," he responded, keeping his eyes fixed upon the prefect. Gilder reflected that they were wonderfully fine eyes, and that Le Roy's face was decidedly aristocratic. There was an air of refinement about him which was not confined to the neatness with which he wore his clothes. He was robust, wholesomely healthy, scrupulously clean.

He went nearer to the table. Gilder supposed that he was about to tell him why he had voted in favour of Runciman.

"I observe you collect the autographs," Le Roy casually remarked, indicating the album. "That is interesting, much more interesting than the foreign stamps, eh?"

Gilder pushed the album towards him invitingly. He was proud of his collection of the letters and signatures of famous persons.

"Thank you." Le Roy shook his head. "Another time, perhaps. I believe Mr. Eyre-Loftus he wait for you."

The Rev. Mr. Eyre-Loftus was the headmaster of Haddisthorpe School. He prided himself upon the degree of friendship which existed between himself and his pupils.

"Good evening, Gilder," he nodded, as the prefect entered his library, where he sat. "I want you to dine with me to-night at half-past seven. A fellow officer of your father's—Colonel Mapleson—will be here, and he is anxious to meet you. In the meantime, however, as we may not have an opportunity afterwards, I wish to say how sorry and surprised I am at the result of this election.

Nothing could have pleased me more than that you should have been chosen as Elkin's successor. I fully expected that you would be, and I am disappointed. But, in a sense, I do not wholly regret it, because it leaves you free to undertake——" He paused. "To put it briefly, Gilder, I have thought that you might not object to changing your quarters and occupying one of the larger rooms at Mr. Megson's."

Gilder gave a visible start of astonishment at the unexpected proposal.

"Megson's?" he repeated.

Mr. Eyre-Loftus nodded, gravely. "Yes; you know my difficulties in regard to that house. It is bringing the whole school into disrepute. I regret to say that the insubordination, the ragging, and the misrule that go on there render it quite impossible for Mr. Megson, even with the help of Professor Noël, to preserve discipline, and I have long felt the need of introducing into the house one whose uprightness and sense of honour might act as a good example, and who at the same time might exercise some authority over the boys while associating with them in their studies and their games."

Gilder regarded him with a curiously perplexed expression.

"I quite understand, sir," he responded. "You wish me to go into Megson's as a sort of policeman?"

The headmaster looked a trifle annoyed.

"I wish you to go as a responsible monitor," he corrected. "Of course," he added quickly, "it is somewhat out of the strict order of things that I should ask you to make so very unusual a change; but you will remember that your father originally entered you for Mr. Megson's house, and I only took you into the school for my own convenience. I do not think that Major Gilder would object to the change, and, as I say, you will have a larger room, and your position as a monitor will give you responsibilities and experience which may be of use to you in your career as a soldier."

"I am sure my father would have no objections whatever, sir," Gilder responded. "I shall still be under your

care and guidance. And perhaps Fearon can have my old study."

"Certainly," agreed Mr. Eyre-Loftus.

"I'm rather disturbed about Brelson, though, sir," Gilder went on. "He's the best fag I ever had, and will do simply anything for me, partly because I humour his harmless fancy for making believe that he is a Red Indian."

The Headmaster smiled.

"Brelson seems to take that fancy quite seriously," he remarked. "I caught sight of him the other day marching with a whole tribe of fellows in Indian file through Primrose Lane. They all had feathers in their caps and carried tomahawks and bows and arrows. Well, what about my proposal, Harvey? Do you accept it? I believe I can arrange for Brelson to go with you."

They talked the matter over, and in the end Gilder agreed to the suggestion, but with considerable misgiving; for it was not a trifling responsibility which was being thrust so unexpectedly upon his shoulders.

The very atmosphere of Megson's was believed to have a demoralising effect upon the boarders. Boys who entered the house truthful and honest had gradually degenerated into sneaks and cheats. Dishonesty seemed to exude from the walls like a subtle infection which it was impossible to escape. There are mansions that are said to be persistently unlucky to the families which inhabit them, and it might almost have been supposed that Megson's had an inheritance of evil. There was something sinister and forbidding in the lonely, sombre house on the edge of the marsh—something suggestive of dark, undiscovered crimes and ghostly visitants. It had formerly been a thriving farmstead, but had long remained untenanted save by the owls and bats. It was half hidden under rank ivy, secluded among gnarled old trees that were covered with fungus and moss, and its foundations rose out of the slimy waters of a moat.

The prospect before him was not enticing; but it was more for the good of the school than with thought of personal advantage that he resolved to occupy the room set apart for him. Had he known what was in store for



him, he might well have shrunk back dismayed from the undertaking. But he did not imagine what strange and terrible events were to cast their shadows across his path, or foresee the grim and awful tragedy which was fated to be enacted under his eyes.

That night, before lock-up time at Megson's, Pierre Le Roy stole unobserved up the stairs to Monsieur Prosper Noël's study on the top landing, where no boy in the house was supposed to trespass. He entered boldly, without knocking. The tutor stood up, showing no surprise that this particular pupil should dare to intrude upon his privacy. He even greeted him with a polite bow.

"Well?" he said. "There is nothing wrong, I hope? Nothing has disturbed you, eh?"

Le Roy went up to the mantelpiece and stood before the empty fireplace, looking down into the grate.

"No," he answered. "Nothing is wrong. It is all arranged, Monsieur."

"Arranged?" The French master did not appear to understand. "What is arranged, then?"

"Why," returned Le Roy, "Gilder is to come to Megson's."

"Ah!" cried Monsieur Noël. "That is your doing, eh? But I understood that Gilder was to be captain of the school. In that case, how is it possible that he shall come to Mr. Megson's? How have you contrived it, for example?"

"It was not altogether my doing." Le Roy took the professor's pipe from the edge of the mantelpiece, screwed its curved mouthpiece more straight, then wiped his fingers with his handkerchief, wrinkling his shapely nose in disgust at the smell of stale tobacco. "Professor?"

"Yes?" said Monsieur Noël. "What will you, my friend?"

Le Roy went slowly nearer to him and looked beyond him through the open door across the passage.

"You will now arrange that he occupy the room opposite yours," he said in a mysterious whisper that had in it something of authority. "You understand? You must arrange it so."

The professor drew back a step in amazement at the request.

"But how can I?" he objected, with a shrug of his broad shoulders. "I have not the power so to interfere."

Le Roy fixed his dark eyes on him sharply, and the professor, whom every other boy in the school dreaded for his martinet severity, shrank under the compelling glance as if he had been afraid.

"Gilder must occupy that room." Le Roy insisted. "That room and none other. Do you understand? He *must*. His being there, alone, is necessary if our scheme is to succeed, and our secret be kept secure."

He spoke imperatively, commandingly, as with the assurance that his request could not be refused. And Monsieur Noël bowed in resolute acquiescence.

"Very well," he murmured. "If your High——"

"Sh—sh!" cautioned Le Roy.

Anyone watching their movements during the next few moments, and listening to the words of mystery and strange suggestion that passed between them, might well have judged them to be a pair of hardened criminals, conspiring to take Harvey Gilder's life.

## CHAPTER III.

### MISS PREW'S IMPORTUNITY.

It was on the Saturday afternoon that Gilder's goods and chattels were removed to Megson's.

Fearon was to have his old study, which looked woefully bare, stripped of all its late occupant's personal treasures. His own room, which he had shared with Carleton, was now to be shared by Carleton and Williams. They were to be separated, Fearon and Gilder; but they promised each other that their being in different houses would not interfere with their companionship, and that they would still meet and work together under the Head's personal guidance. They were both sapping for Sandhurst, and Mr. Eyre-Loftus, who had been an Army coach, was giving them his particular attention.

"You'll have a tough job looking after the fellows here on middle passage," Gilder warned his chum. "They usually kick up a fearful shindy at night over passage football. And you'll find that they still rush in here and chuck their books into the ottoman to save time when the bell rings. There's a fellow named Wilmer that I ought to caution you about. He's dangerously insane on chemistry and electricity, and the other night he mixed two gases in a jar and planted the thing on my window sill, with a wire connecting it with his electrical machine. Fortunately, I discovered it in time to cut the connection and prevent an explosion. You will have to be firm. But don't be too hard on them. We were just the same ourselves, you know, when we were lower boys."

"Yes." Fearon laughed. "Do you remember the time when we shoved little Jefferies in the hamper and lowered him out of the window, leaving him suspended in

mid-air for three quarters of an hour, until the prefect cleared out and allowed us to rescue him? I'm not likely to err on the side of severity; and I shall not have anything like so tough a job as you will have at Megson's. I don't envy you your responsibilities, old fellow. It's my impression you will have to weed out some of the black sheep before you can hope to regenerate your flock. And it's a beastly dull old place to live in. Megson complains that the house is a little damp. I should rather call it decidedly wet. I hope you won't go and get laid up with rheumatism. I believe Megson's rheumatism is all owing to the house having its foundation in that horrid moat."

When Gilder walked up the long avenue, it struck him that the house did not look nearly so isolated and gloomy as he had always imagined it to be. The red sunlight was reflected on the windows, the boys had not yet robbed the porch of its roses, the lawn had been newly mown, the paths were trimly gravelled, and the whole place was invitingly clean and neat. Through the trees he could see some boats on the mere, and in the field between the avenue and the mill a crowd of Megson's boys were having a game of football.

He paused to watch them, hoping to discover one or two promising half-backs. They were playing with more noise than skill, and were badly organised. Tetley got rather a good try, and kicked a goal from it. Lindsey played a neat centre game and trapped a dropping ball with admirable precision; but Arbuthnot was slow, and lost an excellent chance by failing to charge Durrant at the critical moment. Bamlett worked splendidly, and as he gave a beautiful kick from volley Gilder heard a long-drawn "Ah-h!" of admiration from beyond the tree against which he stood.

Someone else than himself was watching the game. He looked round the tree trunk.

"Hullo, Le Roy," he cried, discovering that person sitting on the bank with his chin in his hands. "You're not playing?"

Le Roy stood up very respectfully.

"I have not been asked," he responded. "Probably they do not think I am any good."

"And are you?" Gilder smiled, thinking of the Megson team of which he had already been voted captain. "What place do you covet on the field?"

"It is possible I might make a fairly decent half-back," Le Roy said, nervously twisting a blade of rush grass about his fingers—"that is, of course, if there should be a vacancy, you comprehend."

"Very well," Gilder rejoined, "I will see what I can do for you on Monday. I am too busy to-day. But," he added, "I didn't think you played football in France."

Le Roy slowly unwound the grass from his fingers and dropped it at his feet.

"It was not in France that I learned," he said. But he did not volunteer any further information, nor did Gilder question him, naturally presuming that he had been at some other English school before coming to Haddisthorpe.

Brelson, who had been following with his fag-master's dressing-case, passed them just then on his way up to the house.

"Rather a mysterious chap that cove you were talking with," he remarked as Gilder overtook him. Le Roy had remained behind to watch the game.

"Indeed?"

"Yes." Brelson hitched the bag into his other hand and dropped into step with Gilder. "You might talk with him until you were blue in the face and not get any information out of him. He won't tell you anything about himself. I don't believe he's got any people. He never receives any letters, or even writes any, and he doesn't seem to know a living soul outside the school."

"Where did he come from?" Gilder asked. "What school was he at?"

"Ugh! Nobody knows."

"But you don't tell me that he came to Haddisthorpe like a common waif, out of the void?" pursued Gilder.

"That's exactly how he did come," declared Brelson. "I call him Still Water, because he's so deep. You can't

see through him. You never can tell what he's thinking. Still Water's the best name for him I've thought of yet, and I'll stick to it."

Brelson had fancy Indian names for most of the fellows at Haddisthorpe. He had a following of braves and scouts, who kept their tribal totems, held pow-wows, and went on the warpath, learning the secrets of beasts and birds; and he considered it truly Indian never to show his teeth in a smile, or to betray his emotions in any way whatever.

"I daresay the Great Chief knows all about him," he continued; "but nobody else can get on his trail. He's a perfect mystery. You can tell pretty well where most fellows have been for their holidays, and where their homes are, by simply examining their luggage labels; but there isn't a sign of one on Le Roy's box, and none of us has the least idea where he came from or where his home is. Even the brass buttons on his trousers haven't got any tailor's name on them. His hat, I happen to know, was bought in Colchester; his penknife, which he once lent me, was made in Sheffield, and his revolver in Birmingham."

"His revolver?" exclaimed Gilder, alarmed at such a forbidden article being brought into a public school.

Brelson grunted in orthodox Indian fashion.

"Ugh! it's only a toy one, with pink paper caps," he averred. "'Tisn't a Colt's six-shooter."

"You have certainly been overhauling him pretty completely," Gilder smiled. "It's not good form to be so inquisitive."

Brelson strode on with silent tread. He had fitted indiarubber soles on his boots, and called them moccasins. Indians, he argued, always walk noiselessly.

"He's got some queer things in that heavy trunk of his, I believe," he continued, "although he lets nobody look into it, and keeps it locked. It was Hawkeye that made the discoveries about his buttons having no tailor's name on them, although it was I who put him up to it. I wanted to make sure that Le Roy is genuine. My own idea is that he's been turned out of some other school, and is ashamed of himself. There must be some reason

for his being so fearfully secretive. Wax-Wing—that's Dewsbury, who swears he once nearly caught a wax-wing on Dismal Swamp—thought that Monsieur Noël might tell him something, seeing that he and Le Roy are both French ; and he asked him one day, when Noël gave him three more marks than he was entitled to. But it was no good. Noël knows nothing about him—less even than we do—and he doesn't seem to want to know, either. In fact, I believe he hates the very sight of him."

"Oh ? Well, you had better leave Le Roy to himself," Gilder recommended. "He is evidently reserved and sensitive ; perhaps a little proud."

Brelson shook his head.

"It isn't pride," he declared. "Le Roy's not at all stuck up, and he never puts on side. Only yesterday, when I took a message for you to Miss Megson about your mattress, I went into pupil room and saw him showing Arlingford's fag the best way to cook a red herring without a gridiron ; and he's quite clever at skinning moles and water rats. No ; he's not a bit proud in an objectionable way, or supercilious, either. He's not at all a bad sort when you don't interfere with him or show too much curiosity. Of course, it's right and proper that we should know something about the family connections of our schoolfellows ; and when a chap has nothing to be ashamed of he will let you know without any questioning. But when you ask Le Roy about his people or where he came from, or anything about himself before he came to Haddis-thorpe, he blushes and shrinks himself up like one of those sensitive plants."

Miss Megson, the house-master's sister, met Gilder and his fag in the hall, and cautioned them against making footmarks on the clean floor. She had a wholesome dislike of the genus schoolboy. Fags were her abhorrence.

"Carry Gilder's bag to his room," she said to Brelson, "and then come down and take up a cup of tea for him. Your own cot and locker have been made ready in Number Three dormitory." To Gilder she added: "I have had a fire lighted, in case your room should be a little damp. Your things have all been taken up."

He found that not only his own but his fag's things also had been dumped in the middle of the floor; for Mr. Eyre-Loftus had so arranged that Brelson should be removed to Megson's, an arrangement with which no one was more satisfied than Brelson himself. As a matter of fact, Tony had long wished that he were a boarder with Mr. Megson, whose house was situated in the very centre of what he called the Indian Reservation. Everything that Brelson did and wished at this time had some relationship to his habit of masquerading as a Redskin. It is probable, by the way, that Gilder was himself accountable for the origin of this queer hobby of his fag's, for he had lent Brelson some books by Fenimore Cooper and Mayne Reid, and had given him a genuine Indian tomahawk which Major Gilder had brought home from the Red River.

Among Brelson's belongings, now mixed hopelessly with his fag-master's, were several bundles of long white feathers, with strange cabalistic marks on them, some bows and formidable arrows, and a confusion of long sticks and stretches of painted canvas which looked suspiciously like the materials for an Indian's wigwam.

"Are you making a collection of hop poles, Brelson?" Gilder asked him, indicating the long sticks.

"Hu!" Brelson exclaimed in surprise at sight of them. "No. That's my tee-pee. I never intended these things to be brought up here. Wax-Wing promised to get them put into the compound for me; but I believe he's gone down to the village. And that reminds me, Gilder, when I was at the tuck-shop to-day, sending off your telegram, Miss Prew asked me when you intend to pay the little account you owe her."

"Miss Prew must wait," Gilder decided impatiently. "I'm rather hard up just now. I hope you quieted her."

"She says she can't wait beyond Monday week," Brelson anxiously pursued. "She's got to pay her rent; and if she doesn't get the money she's going to report the matter to the Head, and then you'll get into an awful row."

"All right, Brelson; all right," Gilder nodded. "Just



go downstairs and get me a hammer and some nails. I want to hang up these pictures."

While Tony was absent Gilder went to the window. His room was at the top of the house, in the east gable. The view was not so good as the one from his study windows in the school, where he could get a glimpse of the sea; but here, over the tree-tops, he could see the far-stretching Essex marshes, which Brelson called the Dismal Swamp, and the sluggish river winding like Meander among the reeds and osiers. There was not a dwelling in sight, unless a black old hulk stranded in the mud about a mile away could be called a dwelling. Gilder had heard that it was haunted, and it looked desolate enough to warrant such a belief. He could see a corner of the football field, and one of the goals, where a tough battle was going on. Knowles missed a certain try by failing to pass to his wing.

"Duffer!" Gilder cried. "You ought to have passed to Arlingford."

"Did you speak, Gilder?"

Gilder swung round quickly. Monsieur Noël stood in the doorway. His own door was opposite, in the same passage.

"I was only talking to myself, sir," Gilder responded, taking up a picture and holding it against the wall in the place where he thought it would look best.

"We are to be neighbours," Monsieur Noël said, advancing a step. "That will be agreeable to us both, I 'ope."

"I hope so, sir," Gilder agreed, laying the picture on the table quite near to Monsieur, who casually glanced at it. "You ought to know that place," he remarked. It was a very good etching of Nôtre Dame, in Paris.

Monsieur Noël glanced at it a second time, but without recognition.

"Yes?" he said interrogatively. His eyebrows twitched curiously, as if he were in doubt. Gilder felt sure that he did not know the building. And yet——

"You are a Parisian, are you not, Monsieur Noël?" he questioned.

Then the professor's expression underwent a change, and, with a laugh which sounded a trifle forced and unnatural, he said :

" Ah, it is Nôtre Dame, then ! " He stepped back, treading on one of Gilder's fencing foils. He picked it up, and before placing it on the top of the luggage he held the weapon in his hand, pressing the button on the floor and bending the flexible blade. His grip of it was that of an experienced swordsman. Gilder thought as he looked at him that such a man as he was utterly wasted, working for a miserable wage as a tutor in this dull East Anglian school.

Monsieur Noël was a man of about forty years of age, tall, muscular, and rather good-looking with his regular features and brown complexion. He kept his dark hair cropped short, but he had a long, military moustache that made his teeth look especially white when he smiled. He invariably wore a very large black silk scarf tied in a butterfly bow that came outside his coat collar. On special occasions his head covering was a peculiarly tall silk hat, very straight in the brim ; but on windy days, and when he went out for his solitary walks, this was substituted by a soft felt wideawake which was equally French in its shape. He was known to be exceedingly strong and agile. Gilder had once seen him catch an insubordinate boy by the belt, lift him with one hand, and shake him like a rat. He could clear a five-barred gate with any of the Haddisthorpe boys ; but he was shy of displaying his physical powers, and even his athletic figure was concealed under his shabby, ill-fitting clothes—his threadbare black coat and baggy trousers. He held himself with an almost military uprightness, and when he walked you could fancy you heard the clanking of spurs.

As he laid aside the fencing foil, Monsieur Noël took up one of Gilder's French books and began to read aloud a poem about the *vent de la mer*. He was a good elocutionist.

" That is magnifique ! " he exclaimed, closing the volume with a sharp smack. " You can almost imagine that you 'ear ze wind shrieking in ze rigging of ze ship ! "

"Yes, sir," Gilder agreed; "but somehow I can't think much of your French sea songs. They are not like ours. Your French seaman is always yearning to get back home; but a British sailor glories in the life on the ocean wave for its own sake. There is salt in his blood, and the salt gets into our poetry of the sea."

"But apparently you 'ave pleasure in reading ze French apart from your school tasks?" observed the professor. "There are many books here which tell me so. Certainly you know ze language remarkably well—better, I consider, than any one in ze school, excepting——"

He checked himself.

"You mean, excepting Le Roy," suggested Gilder. "But then he is French. It is his native tongue."

Monsieur Noël knitted his brows and went somewhat abruptly out of the room, as if he did not wish to talk about Le Roy. Brelson's remark came into Gilder's mind.

"In fact, I believe he hates the very sight of him," Brelson had said, and Brelson never spoke at random.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE CURIOUS BEHAVIOUR OF MONSIEUR NOËL.

DURING the whole of the next week, when not occupied in study in the Head's division, Gilder was busy selecting and drilling his football team. He experienced considerable difficulty in satisfying everybody. They all wanted to have foremost places, and he was obliged to be arbitrary in his decisions and to test the tactics of each player in various positions on the field before welding the human units into a complete force capable of holding its own against the other houses of the school. Some who had given promise in the last season seemed now to have lost their skill and enthusiasm, and had to be dismissed altogether or merely held in reserve. Others, who had grown in strength and agility during the summer, proved unexpectedly capable. Marriott, for example, who had formerly been undistinguished in one of the lower school teams, had improved into a good forward, and Lewis, whom personally Gilder did not like and whom he would willingly have dispensed with, showed himself in such fine form as a tackler and accurate kicker that it was only due to him to be placed at full back. Le Roy, who had asked to be a half-back, had perforce to be content with a position in wing. Cricket had somewhat confused the minds of some of the Megsonites, who seemed to be less active with their feet than their hands, and were inclined to spread themselves out as if they expected to follow a four to boundary. Indeed, they all required practice. But at the end of a week of fine afternoons Gilder had drilled them sufficiently to undertake a trial match against the Blackwoodites, who beat him by three goals to one.

On the way home from that match, Le Roy walked

with Gilder, who gave him a few friendly hints on his play. He was genuinely anxious to excel, but he still needed a good deal of teaching.

"You kick too much with your toe," Gilder told him. "You ought to lift the ball with your instep, and your foot should follow the ball more. Of course, practice is worth tons of theory in football, as in most things."

"Certainly it is kind of you to point out my faults," Le Roy said humbly.

"Well, you see," returned Gilder, "I want to work up our team to be the best in the school, and I think you shape well. I want our lot to beat your friend Runciman's in the cup-tie."

"Runciman is not my friend," Le Roy denied.

"But you voted for him in preference to me," Gilder reminded him.

"Yes, I know," he faltered; but he gave no explanation of why he had voted in favour of Runciman.

When they were parting, Gilder told him that after tea he might go up to his study, and he would give him some further tips about football.

Fearon and Monsieur Noël were in the room when Le Roy timidly entered, bearing with him a subtle perfume of violets. The two chums were puzzling over a problem in equations, and the professor was helping them.

"All right, Le Roy," Gilder nodded. "Take a seat there. You can have a look at my autograph album while you are waiting. You will find it interesting."

Monsieur Noël turned his back on the young fellow, and looked somewhat annoyed at his coming in. During an interval of the work Gilder stood up and strolled to the window embayment where Le Roy sat with the album on his knee. Gilder looked out over the tops of the trees.

"You have many rare autographs in your collection," Le Roy remarked with sincere interest.

"Yes," Gilder responded with pride, "although I have not added much to them lately. That's a good lot that you are looking at now. Those are quite the best I have. That letter written by Mary Queen of Scots is worth any amount of money. I wouldn't take five pounds

for it. Do you keep an album of any sort yourself—stamps or picture postcards ? ”

“ *Hélas !* ” Le Roy sighed ; “ it is too expensive a ’obby.”

He spoke as if he had not a penny in the world. Gilder pitied him.

Monsieur Noël presently retired to his own room across the passage without saying a word to Le Roy, or even glancing in his direction. Brelson had surely been right when he had said that Noël and Le Roy hated each other !

Later in the evening when Brelson went up with a can of hot water for Gilder he stopped and sniffed curiously.

“ Ugh ! Le Roy has been here,” he said. “ He uses violet de Parme soap.” Brelson prided himself on his acute senses, and he often surprised his schoolfellows by the really wonderful accuracy of his inductions.

“ Rather a queer thing happened to-day about Le Roy,” he went on presently. “ Turner and Roberts had a dispute about whether the French have horse races on Sundays. They appealed to Le Roy, and—what do you think ?—he actually didn’t know ! Didn’t know that the great day for the races outside Paris is always a Sunday ! ”

“ But his ignorance of a thing like that is surely not to his discredit, is it ? ” smiled Gilder. “ Many an English boy might not know that the Derby is not a steeplechase, and that the ’Varsity boat race is not rowed at either Oxford or Cambridge.”

“ Yes,” agreed Brelson. “ That’s all very well ; but Le Roy, who knows so much, ought to have known a simple thing like that. He blushed when he said he couldn’t settle the dispute. Gilder ? ”

“ What ? ”

“ Do you believe it possible that Le Roy isn’t French at all ? ”

Gilder smiled.

“ Why, of course he is French,” he insisted. “ How can you doubt it ? ”

“ For lots of reasons,” was Brelson’s sapient rejoinder. “ For one thing, I’ve discovered that he isn’t particularly

patriotic about France. Once on the football field, I said something about our Navy being superior to the French, and Le Roy said, 'Certainly it is, everybody knows that.' And he admitted that London's a more beautiful city than Paris, which he would hardly have done if he'd had an ounce of patriotism in him. Then at another time he volunteered the opinion that an English tailor can knock spots off any French one for making a decent suit of clothes. You'd expect him to stick up for his own country through thick and thin, the same as Wallace sticks up for Scotland. Wallace won't allow that anything English can come up to the same thing Scotch. He even protests that it's only in Scotland that perfect Latin is spoken; which is absurd, as Euclid says."

"Well, Euclid ought to know, oughtn't he, Brelson?" returned Gilder. "He's generally pretty exact in his statements."

On the next Monday after four Gilder had occasion to go into the village post-office, which was also the sock-shop. Miss Prew, who was sorting letters on the counter, assailed him angrily concerning the account of three pounds that he owed her. He saw that she was serious in her intention to expose him to Mr. Eyre-Loftus, and that he must pay up at all hazards. He had not yet dared to tell his father of this accumulated debt, and all his pocket money was exhausted. Miss Prew had never before been so importunate. It was mortifying and humiliating to be attacked by her while there were other fellows in the shop, listening.

While he was pleading with her for an extension of time, she turned up a letter bearing two foreign stamps that were strange to him. He knew a lot about foreign stamps, because his chum Fearon had an album; but he did not recognise these.

"What country does that foreign letter come from, Miss Prew?" he asked. "May I have a look at the stamps?"

She stared at him across the counter with an angry frown.

"No, you may not," she answered testily, and covered

the letter ; but he had already seen that it was addressed to M. Prosper Noël.

Just at that moment Monsieur Noël himself entered the shop, and the letter was handed to him. He took it eagerly, thrust it quickly into his pocket, and went out again very hurriedly and excitedly, without even buying the tobacco which he had come in to purchase.

“ All right, then, Miss Prew,” said Gilder. “ You shall be paid in a day or two, I promise.”

He followed Monsieur Noël from the shop and saw him turn in by the short cut across the churchyard. As he swung open the gate, the professor glanced round nervously. Gilder went past the gate for a few strides. Then, remembering the two foreign stamps, which he coveted in order that they might be added to Fearon’s collection, he thought he might reasonably venture to ask for them. Monsieur Noël could have no possible use for them.

Returning to the gate, he crossed the churchyard, walking on the grass to cleanse his boots from the mud that was on them. He did not purposely intend to walk silently ; nor did he for a moment expect that when he came to the church porch he should see Monsieur Noël there, with an open letter in his hand, reading it with concentrated avidity.

When Monsieur heard a tread upon the gravel, he started violently—almost guiltily, Gilder thought—dropped the empty envelope from his trembling fingers, and hastily hid the letter under his coat.

Gilder had seen him, as it were, with the corner of his eye, and he passed on, as if he had observed nothing unusual, but reflecting, nevertheless, that it was exceedingly strange in a master to shrink from being seen reading a letter honestly addressed to himself. The communication must have been very private indeed if it required to be read furtively in the seclusion of the church porch. In the circumstances it was expedient to “ skulk,” and Gilder did not even raise his cap as he walked on in the direction of the school.

Not until he had gone beyond the churchyard did he think again of the two foreign stamps which he had missed



securing for his chum. He decided that it was now too late to ask for them. To do so would betray his knowledge of the letter which the professor seemed to be so anxious to hide.

His thoughts of Fearon's stamp album, however, and of its value, reminded him that his own album of the autograph letters of famous people represented a very considerable financial asset. He was in immediate want of money, and here was a possibility of realising a sufficient sum to pay off the importunate shopkeeper who had threatened to expose him to the Headmaster. His letter written by Mary Stuart, for example, would, if he were to sell it, more than satisfy his present debt. He was not sure, indeed, that he did not greatly underestimate its market value. It was an interesting historical document, unquestionably genuine, and it was his own property, to do what he liked with. The thought of selling it gave him a comfortable contentment, and his anxiety melted away like dew in the genial warmth of the morning sun.

On entering Megson's and going up to his study, he took down his album to examine his precious historical relic with the purpose of writing that same evening to an agent in London who, he knew, would give a fair market price for it. He would first send a transcript of the letter, with his assurance of its authenticity in the form of a certificate which he possessed from an expert at the British Museum; and when the bargain was arranged, the letter itself would follow and the money would be duly remitted to him.

He sat in the window seat with the album on his knee, just as Le Roy had sat a few evenings earlier. He turned to the particular page where he expected to find the ill-fated queen's characteristic script. He started back, and the book slipped from his knee. He took it up again. Yes, his eyes did not deceive him. The letter was not there! It had been carefully, dexterously removed!

He held the album to the window, for it was already twilight. Curiously enough, the pages exhaled a faint but unmistakable perfume of violet de Parme. Could it possibly be that Pierre Le Roy had extracted the letter?

Gilder dared hardly suspect him, and yet—Le Roy knew that the interesting document was worth money, and he was poor!

Sorely puzzled, he put the book aside, and sat thinking, thinking. The twilight slowly deepened. Could he, after all, have overlooked the letter? He turned once again to the album, but it was now too dark to see. He rose to light his table lamp or a candle, but could find no matches. Brelson, he knew, was at preparation, and there was no use in calling him. He went down himself to ask the matron for a box of matches.

Passing the pupil room, he saw Monsieur Noël standing in the doorway, looking anxiously within. The professor held his white handkerchief in his hand, and was moving it to and fro in a very peculiar way. Gilder could almost have fancied that he was making a signal to one of the boys who were at preparation.

Miss Megson and her brother were at dinner, but one of the maids produced a box of matches from her pocket, and Gilder returned to his den on the top passage. He did not at once light his candle, but sat in the darkness, thinking about his missing autograph. Could it have been stolen? If so, his intended letter to the London agent would be purposeless. He thought of the reputation attaching to the Megson house. He had heard of things being stolen from the boy's sock boxes. Again and again his mind unwillingly turned to Pierre Le Roy and the betraying perfume of violet de Parme. His whole judgment of character was hopelessly wrong if Le Roy was dishonest. Never had a boy's eyes looked more frank than his!

Presently he heard Monsieur Noël go cautiously, quietly into his room. Both doors—his and Gilder's—were wide open, but he did not seem to be aware of the monitor's presence in the darkness. Gilder saw him lighting his reading lamp. As he did so, the glass chimney chinked against something, as if his hand trembled in holding it. Then again the professor took his mysterious letter from its envelope and read it eagerly under the light. He sighed deeply, and muttered to himself in an excited undertone.

The envelope dropped upon the floor, and from where he sat Gilder could see its two blue foreign stamps.

There was a cautious step in the corridor. Monsieur Noël looked round anxiously. His face was agitated with some pent-up emotion. Then, to Gilder's surprise, Pierre Le Roy revealed himself and stole into the opposite room.

Monsieur Noël seemed to have expected him, for he showed no surprise at the boy's entrance. Possibly it was to Le Roy that he had been signalling. Their greeting was peculiar. Standing at his full height, the man raised his right hand in a dignified, perfectly serious military salute. Then he held forth the open letter.

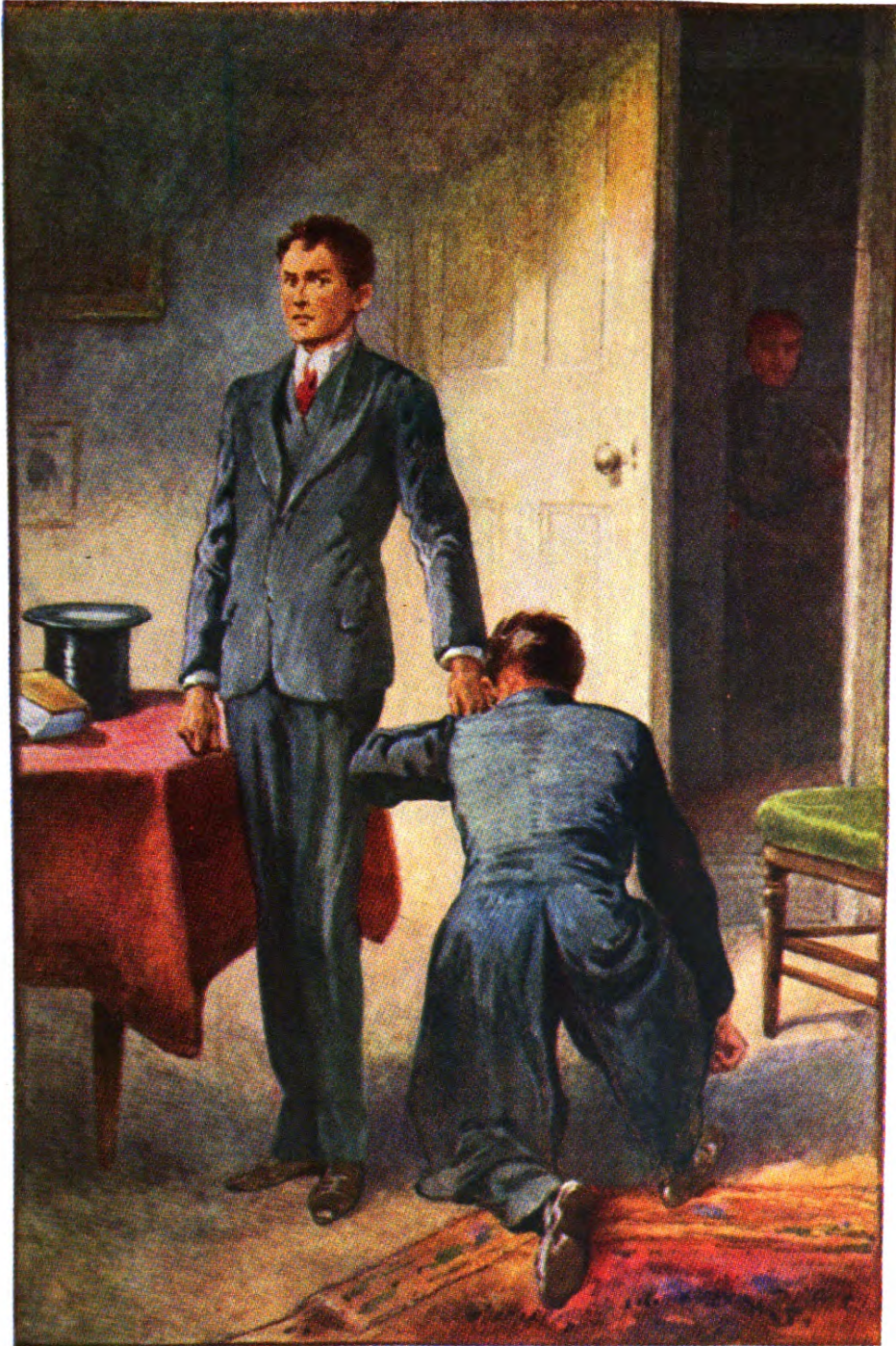
"Here is terrible news, your Highness," he said in a voice too low to reach Gilder's ears.

Young Le Roy took the letter brusquely, and read it, leaning over the table. There was silence for some moments. Then Gilder heard a prolonged moan. Le Roy staggered back. The letter fluttered from his hand, and he gripped the edge of the table as though to support himself.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he cried, fixing his eyes in seeming helpless appeal upon Monsieur Noël, who now stood facing him. His chest was heaving, his sensitive nostrils quivered. His breath came in quick, short gasps from his suddenly pale lips. He repeated the exclamation in an awed whisper, and his hands went up to his eyes; his shoulders shook.

Monsieur Noël bowed his head, clasping and unclasping his fingers nervously. Then he spoke, very slowly, very gently, but in a language which was absolutely strange to him who sat in the darkness watching this mysterious scene.

Le Roy uncovered his eyes, which glistened in the lamplight, and answered—answered volubly, excitedly, in the same strange foreign tongue, while the tutor stood listening in an attitude of respectful humility. Then, to Gilder's further astonishment, Monsieur Noël went down on one knee, took hold of Le Roy's outstretched hand, and pressed it reverently to his lips, for all the world as if the young fellow had been a king.



"MONSIEUR NOËL WENT DOWN ON ONE KNEE, TOOK HOLD OF LE ROY'S OUTSTRETCHED HAND, AND PRESSED IT TO HIS LIPS" (p. 34).



## CHAPTER V.

### THE RETICENCE OF PIERRE LE ROY.

THIS incident of a tutor humbly kneeling at the feet of one of his pupils, and actually kissing the boy's outstretched hand in courtly obeisance, was to Gilder so unexpected, so astonishing, so entirely unparalleled in its novelty, that he had become an unwitting witness of it before he realised the meanness of his own position.

Yet how could he have foreseen that Le Roy's entrance into Monsieur Noël's room was going to lead to a situation so dramatic, so obviously private? He had not meant to spy upon them. Until it was too late there had been no apparent reason why he should reveal himself or make known his presence. He was in his own study. It was mere accident that the two doors were open, giving him a view of the interior of the opposite room; and now, when the two foreigners had gone so far, he did not dare to embarrass them by making them aware that they were not alone. He could only remain where he was, seated at his table in the darkness, and bow his head upon his arms, so that if he should be discovered they might suppose that he had been asleep.

They continued to speak together, earnestly, in that strange, outlandish tongue of which Gilder could comprehend no single phrase or sentence; for it was neither Greek nor Latin, German nor French, nor any other language that entered into the school curriculum. Le Roy's mellow voice was sharply decisive and a trifle dictatorial; Noël's was deferential. Gilder judged by their tones that it was no insignificant matter of everyday life that they were debating; but he did not attempt to determine whether their subject was one concerning something that

had taken place in the school—some personal misunderstanding that they were striving to straighten ; or if their conference had reference to affairs entirely apart from the fact of their presence here in Haddisthorpe.

An intense curiosity concerning them took possession of him.

For one brief instant it occurred to him as possible that they were engaged in some secret conspiracy. Could they be Russian revolutionaries or anarchists ? he asked himself. But this idea was absurd and unworthy, and a stifled sob from Pierre Le Roy assured him that in their earnestness there was mingled something of personal grief.

Presently he was conscious of a smell of burning, and he looked up with a start of alarm. The doors were still open. Monsieur Noël stood by the lamp, above which he held a piece of flaming paper. Gilder saw that it was an envelope ; he could see the blue flame devouring the two stamps on its corner. He assumed that the letter it had contained was already destroyed ; for there were some ashes of charred paper beside the lamp.

"Shut the door," Le Roy muttered, speaking now in French. "If Gilder should come up he must not discover me here, you comprehend ? And——"

The door was gently closed. Gilder saw and heard no more.

At the same moment one of his schoolfellows came up the stairs and along the corridor, walking very silently. Gilder cautiously struck a match and lighted his candle, and when Brelson entered the room, sniffing suspiciously, he found his fagmaster burning an odd fragment of note-paper.

"Ugh ! I thought I smelt something burning as I came along the passage," Brelson remarked. "I'm always afraid of fire in this crib. It would be an awful trap to get out of if Megson's were to catch fire." He glanced at the candle. "You've only just lighted up, I see," he added. "Have you been sitting in the dark ?"

"How do you know I've only just lighted up ?" Gilder questioned him. Brelson was always finding out things of this sort.

"I merely noticed that the wax had only begun to melt around the wick," he said carelessly. "I've got a pair of ripping kippers for your tea, Deerfoot." (That was his Indian name for his fagmaster.) "Wax-Wing is cooking them. And he's making some toast, too."

"Since you're so clever at detecting things, Brelson," said Gilder, disregarding his remark about the kippered herrings and the toast, "perhaps you will bring your alert brain to work on an enigma that is perplexing me. Someone has been kind enough to help himself to a valuable autograph out of my album, and I want to find who it is."

Brelson at once assumed his Red Indian expression of concentrated wisdom and calm serenity.

"Haou!" he exclaimed. This was supposed to be an expression frequently employed by the best-blooded Redskins. He rang the changes on two or three such ejaculations. "Which autograph?" he inquired, laying hands on the album which Gilder had left on the window seat.

"My letter of Mary Queen of Scots," Gilder told him.

He grunted in prescribed Indian fashion.

"Ugh! Worth heaps of money. You ought to have kept it under lock and key. It's worth all the rest of your collection put together."

"Yes, I know it is valuable," Gilder agreed. "Indeed, I believe it would fetch quite five pounds."

Brelson stared at him stonily.

"Five hundred would be nearer the mark," he declared.

Gilder laughed. Brelson frowned.

"I never joke," he objected. "I happen to know, because I read in a newspaper about a letter of Queen Elizabeth's being sold at auction for over nine hundred pounds; and one written by Mary Queen of Scots is surely worth half the money. Besides, it was a love letter written to Lord Darnley, and that would make it worth heaps."

Gilder was astounded at this information. Over nine hundred pounds for a paltry letter! It was not credible. But if his missing autograph was worth being put up to auction, then its loss was all the more gravely suspicious, its theft all the more culpable.



"You were evidently aware that I possessed such a letter in my album, then?" he said, regarding Brelson with unaccustomed austerity.

"Hew! Everyone in the school knew it," Brelson returned; "and I believe some of the fellows have even seen it. If I had liked I could have earned lots of money by letting them look at it for a halfpenny a time. But I never showed it to anyone."

He had opened the album at the desired page, and now, taking a magnifying glass from his pocket, he examined the space where the letter had been inserted. He even put his nose to the page and sniffed.

"Did Le Roy show interest in this particular page when he looked at the album?" he asked unexpectedly. Gilder wondered how he knew that Le Roy had examined the album at all.

"I don't wish you to mention any names, Brelson," he warned him.

"But you want to find out who has taken the thing, don't you?" queried Brelson.

"Naturally," responded Gilder; "but I am exceedingly anxious not to make a fuss over the affair."

"The person who stole—I mean abstracted—it had dirty fingers," Brelson ruminated. "He has left his mark behind. That may help us. Le Roy is uncommonly particular about keeping his hands clean, though."

He closed the book and went to the door.

"Where are you going?" Gilder asked, detaining him.

"Merely to put a question to Monsieur Noël," he said.

"He is busy," Gilder objected, knowing that Le Roy was still in Monsieur's room. "You mustn't disturb him just now. Go down and look after my tea. And I don't want any buttered toast. I'm in training."

Brelson closed the door behind him, and soon afterwards Gilder heard Le Roy steal quietly out into the passage.

On the following morning when he went into pupil-room to separate two fellows who were having a stand-up fight, Gilder noticed Le Roy sitting apart. He had taken

no interest in the affray. He saw Gilder moving in his direction, and he rose and strolled away, as if to avoid him. But Gilder went after him and cornered him. His face was pale, and his eyes were hollow and surrounded by dark shadows.

"You are looking rather seedy this morning," Gilder said.

"Am I?" the other responded gloomily. "That is probable. I did not sleep very well last night."

"Indeed? I hope you are not unwell. You must keep in good form, you know, if you are to do anything at football. Perhaps you had better see the doctor?"

Le Roy smiled. It was an infinitely sad smile. His right hand was up at his neck, his fingers were easing his collar, which was not at all tight.

"Is your throat sore?" questioned Gilder, with the horrible thought of diphtheria.

Le Roy blushed and lowered his hand, and then Gilder observed that instead of the orthodox school necktie of bronze and white stripes, he wore a narrow black bow. His lips twitched, his eyelids trembled. He shook his head slowly, and a tear rolled down his cheek. He was obviously oppressed by some secret trouble.

"I—I beg your pardon," Gilder stammered in sympathy.

"Thank you," Le Roy murmured, and turned away.

There was something exceedingly strange and inexplicable about this boy's behaviour. Why was he so secretive? What was the meaning of his sensitive nervousness this morning? Why had the tears come into his eyes? It seemed as though he were forcibly crushing down some hidden grief, or was it the burden of some haunting guilt that was oppressing him? It was no business of Harvey Gilder's to inquire. He was not by nature inquisitive; but he was excessively perplexed. And all the time the episode of the previous evening was recurring to him, increasing his perplexity, arousing his keenest curiosity.

Le Roy did not know—he had not guessed—that Gilder had witnessed his strange scene with Monsieur Noël in

the little room across the passage. But after all, what had Gilder learned? Only that Monsieur Noël had received from some foreign country a letter which appeared to be of importance to him, and even of greater import to Pierre Le Roy. This, and the fact that Noël and Le Roy were able to converse in a language which he, Gilder, could not identify. The professor had knelt at his pupil's feet, and that was a most remarkable circumstance, calculated to puzzle and amaze any English schoolboy. It was true that they both were foreigners, and, as Gilder reflected, foreigners are in the habit of behaving peculiarly in moments of emotion. Could it be that Monsieur Noël had been beseeching Le Roy's forgiveness for some injustice or offence that he had committed? Brelson had said that they were at enmity one against the other. Perhaps they had been merely making up their quarrel when Gilder saw them standing towards each other in the attitude on the one side of proud dignity, and on the other of obsequious humility. This theory did not explain the effect which the letter had exercised upon Le Roy. But they had apparently agreed to destroy the letter, and it was obviously of no intrinsic significance.

Gilder tried to dismiss the mysterious incident from his mind, to forget that he had been a witness of it. But his endeavour was not successful. He resolved, however, to say nothing concerning the occurrence to any one. If it had been mean in him to watch and listen, it would be a hundred times more mean in him to betray what he had seen.

In the afternoon, when Megson's were pitted against Hibbert's fifteen on their own ground, Le Roy played like one inspired. His passes were positively brilliant in their rapidity and well-timed judgment. Gilder wanted to compliment him. But Le Roy had been unusually prompt in leaving the ground at the close of the contest, and could not be found.

In the village Gilder encountered his fag coming out of a haberdasher's shop, where he had been purchasing some coloured beads for the decoration of his war bonnet.

"Do you happen to have seen Le Roy anywhere, Brelson?" his fagmaster inquired.

"Ugh," grunted Brelson, pointing down the village street. "Tuck-shop—chocolates."

This mention of the tuck-shop reminded Gilder anew that he had to go there to plead with Miss Prew. He had promised her faithfully that he would pay his account on the next Monday morning; but now, owing to the mysterious disappearance of the autograph he had meant to dispose of, he knew that he could not fulfil his promise, and he desired to tell her so.

When he went into the shop, there was no sign of Le Roy. Miss Prew smiled to him most graciously.

"Thank you, Mr. Gilder, for paying your little bill," she said. "I knew you would keep your word, and I'm sorry I threatened you."

Gilder looked at her in confusion. What did she mean? Had some generous fairy come to his rescue?

"Who paid it to you?" he asked eagerly.

"Really, I don't know," she answered. "There was such a crowd of boys in the shop at the time. The money was pushed across the counter in a piece of paper with your message on it, 'With H. Gilder's compliments.' Who was it that you sent?"

"I never sent anyone," Gilder returned in perplexity. "May I see the piece of paper?"

Miss Prew went to her desk and brought a crumpled half-sheet of note-paper, which he recognised as coming from his own stock. The words upon it were as she had repeated them. But the writing was obviously disguised to imitate his own. He folded the paper and pocketed it.

"Thank you," he said; and he went out, hoping to overtake Le Roy before he reached Megson's. Somehow he could not help connecting him in his mind with this incident, as he had been forced to connect him with the purloining of the Mary Stuart autograph.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE FACE IN THE MOONLIGHT.

TETLEY and Arlingford attached themselves to Gilder as he went along the village street, and he walked with them. It was never his policy to hold aloof from juniors or to put on "side" simply because he happened to be in the headmaster's division and was monitor of a house. They were all three in football rig, and all three bore the insignia of a good coating of Essex mud.

"You dribbled splendidly this afternoon," Gilder remarked approvingly to Arlingford, "and you picked up from that scrum in rare form. As for you, Tetley, you hadn't much chance, but you did your level best. If Marriott had passed to you that time instead of to Le Roy you would certainly have scored a goal."

"Yes," agreed Tetley, "but Le Roy got it, so I suppose it's all the same to you."

"Le Roy did awfully well, I thought," put in Arlingford. "He has improved his play immensely."

"Somebody must have been coaching the fellow," suggested Tetley, who was not kindly disposed towards Le Roy, mainly because Le Roy excelled in everything he attempted and left other boys of his own form far behind him in lessons. "He seems to come in for a lot of surreptitious coaching. I don't mind it a bit in footer, because it's all the better for our fifteen that he should get rid of his awkwardness; but when a fellow butters a master and gets him to help him in studies it's different. Mr. Megson's a bit too generous in his favours to Le Roy."

"Don't be jealous, old chap," smiled Arlingford, who was the son of a naval officer, and always showed that he was a gentleman. "Le Roy asked for his help with

that Euclid problem, and I'm sure Mr. Megson would help anyone of us if we went to him in a similar difficulty. Any master would. Look how Monsieur Noël helped me when I got stuck over those wretched German verbs!"

"I'd see Noël far enough before I'd ask his help in any mortal thing," grumbled Tetley.

"You don't appear to have a very deep admiration for Monsieur Noël?" remarked Gilder.

"No; but I've got a very deep hatred of him," Tetley admitted.

"But why?" pursued Gilder. "I am sure he is a scholar and a gentleman."

"If becking and bowing and being beastly polite to all and sundry are signs of a gentleman, why, of course, he's one," Tetley sneered. "Some people like that sort of thing. I don't. His politeness is the thing I can stand least. I never look at him without wanting to jump on him."

"It's a case of mutual antipathy between you," ventured Arlingford. "You'll never hit it off until you've had a thundering big row. And you're drifting towards one."

They came up with Le Roy in the avenue; but Brelson and some others were with him, and Gilder could not say more than curtly commend his playing. He received the compliments coldly, as if in looking into Gilder's questioning eyes he had divined what was in Gilder's mind.

Gilder was wondering in the first place if he were the sort of youth who would stoop to a dishonesty. But he found it hard to doubt him. His face was inscrutable. In the second place, he was wondering if it could possibly be Le Roy who had saved him from disgrace by paying his account at Miss Prew's. It was just conceivable, he argued, that the person who had appropriated the letter from his album and bartered it for its money's worth might in a whim of fancied justice compound with his conscience by apportioning some of the money to paying the debt of the person whom he had robbed. But then Gilder reflected that Pierre Le Roy could not easily have known that he owed three pounds to Miss Prew.

Monsieur Noël crossed the lawn in front of the boys with his finger in a book that he had been reading while sitting in his favourite seat under trees. As he approached the porch, he glanced round and paused, allowing them to go past him. They all, excepting Tetley, who was purposely looking another way, lifted their caps to him, and he bowed with engaging courtesy. Le Roy went by him without either of them betraying by so much as the raising of an eyebrow that any secret understanding existed between them.

If they were not each acting a part, and acting it with incredible cleverness and deception, then they were little more than strangers to each other, and surely Gilder was mistaken in supposing that they were hiding a mutual secret. At that time, and indeed afterwards also, their demeanour in public was purely the ordinary and commonplace one of tutor and pupil; nothing more. The episode of the previous evening had led Gilder to believe it possible that they had known one another before either of them came to Haddisthorpe. But it was patent that he had made a mistake.

When he had changed his clothes, he went out again to spend the evening with Fearon in his study in the school house. Not until he was halfway across the field path did he reflect that he might have taken the precaution to lock his room door. He was not in the habit of locking it. It was a recognised rule in the school that no study doors should be locked. But he had proof that some person had entered his den during his absence, and besides, as a monitor, he had privileges. He did not think it worth while to go back, however.

He found that Fearon had his own troubles to talk about. They did not get through much work. It seemed that Runciman was not proving himself a satisfactory head of the school; that he was, as Fearon put it, "riding the high horse with a vengeance, and giving the youngsters a most awful time." He was unduly favouring some who were willing to be his satellites, overlooking their misdemeanours and setting them to spy and sneak upon those whom he had singled out as his victims.

Fearon implored his chum to go back and, as he said, "oust the usurper from his seat"; but that, of course, was out of the question, and Gilder said so; whereupon Fearon twitted him and declared that he was like Achilles sulking in his tent. Gilder retorted that it was more Fearon's own duty to interfere if things were going wrong. But I regret to record that Fearon had a tinge of timidity in his composition, and that he shrank from confronting Runciman. More than once Gilder had known him to be accused of actual cowardice. Brelson's Indian name for him was Little Bittern, because he was supposed, like that now rare bird, to assume a protective disguise on the approach of danger.

Fearon was told of the loss of the autograph, and of how someone had been good enough to pay Gilder's account at the village shop. Without any prompting, he coupled the two incidents together, reminded his friend that Monsieur Noël and young Le Roy were both present when Gilder particularly referred to the value of the Mary Queen of Scots letter, and even went so far as to suggest that the professor and Le Roy might be confederates in the theft.

"They are both French," he said, "and they are both as poor as rats. That was an easy way of getting hold of some money."

Gilder objected that the fact of their both being French was no sign of their guilt, and that a master, even though poor, was not likely to join with a pupil in committing a felony. "Besides," he pursued, "how can you suppose that either of them knows where and how to get money in exchange for an autograph, however rare?"

"They could easily send it to one of the dealers in London," Fearon explained, "and if it was as valuable as you fancy, they would get an advance upon it, or perhaps even the whole amount, as soon as the dealer ascertained that it was genuine. Possibly they already have the cash. You don't know on what day the thing was taken. It's a pity you can't find out whether either of them has received a letter from London or Paris during the past week."

Gilder was silent. Was it possible that Monsieur Noël's



mysterious letter had contained a remittance of money sent in some roundabout way from abroad? Was it possible that his private conversation with Le Roy in that strange foreign language had had reference to such a transaction as Fearon was premising?

He did not breathe a word to Fearon concerning that clandestine conversation, but Fearon's suggestion had certainly awakened his suspicions.

"Keep an eye on those two," Fearon advised. "Watch them, and find out if they are flush of money. Take notice if they have any secret talks together; and, more than all, be careful how you let either of them into your study."

Gilder shook his head.

"I hate that idea of shadowing them as if I were a detective," he protested, "and I'm not going to demean myself by doing any such thing. Let us get on with our work, and forget about the whole affair."

Most of the fellows were supposed to be in their dormitories when he got back to Megson's, and the servant who admitted him and handed him a lighted candle remarked that he was very late. On the second floor he surprised Brelson and Dewsbury stealthily crawling on all fours along the dark passage like a pair of marauding savages on the war trail. Their heads were decorated with feathers, their faces were daubed with red raddle, and they had blankets over their shoulders. They dragged long spears behind them. Brelson had what looked like a scalp dangling from the girdle of his pyjamas, but Gilder afterwards learned that it was a fragment which he had cut from a fur rug in Number One dormitory.

Brelson explained that Wax-Wing and his other braves had been raiding an encampment of belligerent palefaces, and that there had been a sanguinary encounter. There was evidence of this in the circumstance that Dewsbury's nose was bleeding. Gilder sternly recommended the Redskins to retire to their own reservation, and went up the farther flight of stairs quietly, looking back from the half landing to make sure that his orders were obeyed. He heard Brelson give a peculiar call, like the startled cry

of a lapwing. It was answered from the ambush of the staircase cupboard, and presently a dozen stealthy savages crawled silently across the passage and took refuge in their own encampment in Number Three dormitory.

Assured that there would be no more raiding or scalp-hunting that night, Gilder left the half landing and, mounting the further flight of stairs, strode along the narrow top passage towards his own room. Here he came to an abrupt halt, astonished to see a dark figure glide out from his study into a bright shaft of moonlight that came in through the barred window at the end. He put his candle on the top of the linen chest that stood against the wall.

"Who is that?" he cried, hastening forward. He caught at a shoulder and drew the intruder round so that the moonlight shone into his startled face.

It was the face of Pierre Le Roy.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A QUESTION OF NATIONALITY.

"WHAT have you been doing in my room?" Gilder demanded to know, tightening his grip on Le Roy's arm, which was surprisingly hard and muscular.

Le Roy was silent. He did not attempt to break free. His face was like marble in the wan moonlight which came in through the gaps in the moving ivy that half-curtained the window.

"Explain yourself," Gilder urged. "What were you doing?"

"I have done nothing—seen nothing," Le Roy answered coldly, resolutely. His voice was irritatingly calm.

"That is absurd," Gilder rejoined hotly. "It is preposterous. You could not have come up here and gone into my room without a motive. You knew that I was not there—that I was out of the house. It is not the first time that my study has been invaded during my absence. I have missed things, too—things of value. I've a good mind to search you."

Le Roy drew back, releasing himself.

"What?" he cried, roused to indignation, "You ac-cuse me? You think I have steal something?" He opened his jacket and flung out his arms, with the empty hands held palms uppermost. "Search me, by all means! Search me!"

Gilder shook his head. "No," he declined. "I will not search you."

Le Roy dropped his hands to his sides.

"Take your candle, then, into your room," he pursued. "Take the light and search the room, and see if I have disturb anything."

Monsieur Noël's door opened as he spoke, and the professor stood looking at the two youths in curious scrutiny.

"What is the disturbance, then?" he questioned quietly. "Ah?" he added, glancing with cleverly assumed severity at Le Roy, as if he were totally ignorant of his motive in being upstairs. "It is you? What you do up here, then?"

"I found him coming out of my study," Gilder explained, "and I want to know what he was doing."

"Naturally," nodded Monsieur Noël. "He have no right to enter your study. He have no right to be up here on this landing at all at this time of ze night. It is forbidden—absolutely. I imagined it was yourself who I hear enter three or four minutes ago." He turned to Le Roy. "You must explain yourself," he commanded sternly.

Le Roy met the professor's accusing scrutiny.

"I have nothing to explain, sir," he returned with an obstinate scowl, "and I do not understand why Gilder should make all this consternation over a trifle, or why he should accuse me of stealing, simply because he see me coming out of his room."

"I have not accused you of stealing," Gilder said more coolly; "but within the past few days someone has taken a certain valuable autograph letter from my album—a letter which, as it happens, you knew that I possessed—and you must excuse me if your being in my study has aroused my suspicion."

Le Roy again shrank back.

"After that I say nothing," he muttered. "It is enough that you suspect me. When you discover what a mistake you have made, perhaps you will then apologise."

"Return to your own chamber, Le Roy," commanded Monsieur Noël in a stern voice, "and you will request Arlingford, your prefect, to put you down for the punishment."

"Yes, sir." Le Roy bowed to him submissively. "And what is to be my punishment, if you please?"

"That I shall afterwards decide, when I 'ave speak

with Gilder," returned Noël, watching him until he reached the stairs.

Gilder took up his candle. Monsieur followed him into his room, waiting until the monitor lighted his reading lamp and made a rapid search of the apartment.

The papers on the writing table were as Gilder had left them; his autograph album was in the bookcase, under his Liddell and Scott.

"Nothing seems to have been disturbed," said he, with a nod of satisfaction.

"I heard him enter," Monsieur Noël declared. "I supposed it was yourself until I hear you call, 'Who's that?' He was here no longer than three minute, I assure you," he added, as though excusing Le Roy. "Nevertheless, it is better you make certain he have taken nothing. It is 'orrible to think there may be a thief among our confrères. You say you have miss a valuable autograph? Do you suspect Le Roy, for example?"

Gilder looked at him straight, remembering Fearon's suggestion of possible complicity between him and Le Roy.

"I can only tell you that a letter, written by Mary Queen of Scots, worth several pounds, has lately been taken out of my album," he answered.

"*Tiens!*" Monsieur exclaimed, in genuine concern. "That is serious. In future I recommend that you lock your door. I will lock mine also."

"That ought to be unnecessary," Gilder argued. "I would rather trust to the honour of my companions than to locks and keys. They are English, and——"

"English?" Monsieur interrupted, curling an end of his black moustache about his forefinger. "And is it then because Le Roy is—is not English that you suspect him? But I also am not English, Monsieur Gilder. It is possible that you suspect me? *Hein?*"

Gilder tried to smile.

"I will confess that you are a bit of a mystery to me, sir," he made bold to say.

Monsieur Noël raised his eyebrows, shrugged his

shoulders, and showed his even white teeth in an amused smile. "*Comment?*" he asked.

"How? Oh, well, for instance, it perplexes me to understand how you, a man of the world, should bury yourself in a dead-and-alive hole like Haddisthorpe, as if you were a political exile. I should have thought you were much more in your proper position commanding a regiment of cavalry or holding some diplomatic post in Paris or St. Petersburg."

The tutor's face reddened; he moved uneasily.

"You too much flatter me," he said, with a sickly smile. "I am, as you perceive, a poor and unimportant scholar."

"You nevertheless have the grand air of a Parisian," persisted Gilder. "You are supposed to be a Parisian, and yet the other day you did not recognise my picture of Nôtre Dame. A Londoner would not fail to recognise a picture of St. Paul's or Westminster Abbey. Perhaps, however," he added hesitatingly, "perhaps you are a Russian?"

"A Russian?" Monsieur laughed, as though the remark amused him. "No, no," he answered emphatically, "I am not a Russian."

There was an awkward pause. Gilder broke it by saying:

"Is Le Roy a Parisian, sir?"

"Le Roy?" the other repeated with indifference as he turned to the shelf and idly examined the titles of the ragged school-books. "But how should I know? I have never put such a question to him. Certainly he speak French remarkably well." He faced Gilder once more, resting his folded arms on a tall pile of books and papers at the corner of the table. "But what will you? Even that may not prove him to be Parisian. It is not alone in France, *vous voyez*, that one hear French spoken with the *bon accent*—the perfect pronunciation. You have under your Breetish Government—in your Breetish colony—subjects who speak the French and the English with equal facility—in the Channel Island, *par exemple*—in Canada also."

"Canada?" echoed Gilder, grasping at the implied suggestion. "Is Le Roy a French Canadian?"

Monsieur Noël looked at him with a curious light in his eyes, and drew himself to his full height.

"Monsieur Gilder, you embarrass me with many question which I cannot answer," he said coldly. "It is no concern of mine what a man's nationality may be. I never make the inquiry of Le Roy. It is not polite to be inquisitive in such personal affair."

The boy in front of him took this to be an intentional rebuke to his own curiosity.

"Pardon me, sir," he said. "But somehow I had the idea that you knew a lot about Le Roy. I now find that you are as much in the dark as I am myself."

The professor stared at him stonily, but the muscles of his clean-shaven cheeks were moving as though he were shutting his teeth very tightly.

"Good night," he said abruptly, and he carefully closed the door before crossing to his own room.

Gilder stood for many minutes thinking. He had gained nothing by his questions—nothing but the important fact that Monsieur Noël was not a Russian, and the vague idea that Pierre Le Roy was possibly a French Canadian.

Brelson was unusually self-absorbed when he brought in Gilder's breakfast the next morning. He apparently expected to be punished for his last night's raid on Long dormitory.

"If you take my advice, Brelson," Gilder said, "you will in future confine your Indian warfare to the outside of the house. I hear you had a regular scrimmage in Long dormitory before I came in last night. That sort of thing mustn't happen again."

Brelson fumbled with the bread-plate.

"It was an awfully fine rag," he muttered in reminiscent enjoyment.

"I daresay," Gilder smiled, "if it was you who stage-managed it. You and Dewsbury looked just like real Redskins crawling along in ambush. How many braves have you in your tribe now?"

"Twenty-three," Brelson answered, "and all picked

men. There will be twenty-four when Le Roy joins us. He's reading 'The Last of the Mohicans'—that's our text-book—and there's hope for him. He's invented a new sort of catapult, and he knows a lot about blazing trees and finding your way across the prairie by the stars. He knows heaps about birds and flowers and animals, too. He can tell the name of any bird by its notes. I don't know where he learnt it all. He says he merely picked it up by living a lot in the open air and noticing things. He's about the best weather prophet I ever came across."

"He ought to be a valuable recruit," remarked Gilder, breaking the top of his first egg. "When is he to be initiated?"

"As soon as he pays his subscription," said Brelson. "He hasn't got much pocket-money, and he spends most of it on chocolates."

"That reminds me, Brelson," interposed Gilder, drawing a crumpled piece of paper from his waistcoat pocket and passing it to him. "Do you happen to know whose writing that is?"

Brelson took the open paper with his left hand. In his right he held Gilder's teapot. When he saw the writing his face went suddenly red, and the teapot fell with a dull crash at his feet.

"Butter fingers!" cried Gilder angrily. "There's all my tea wasted, and the new carpet spoiled!"

The fag stared stupidly at the steaming tea-leaves and broken crockery.

"Don't stand there like a ridiculous stone image," Gilder urged impatiently. "Run and fetch something to wipe up the mess you've made!"

When Brelson returned with his own teapot and a dustpan and brush, Gilder had almost finished his breakfast.

"Where's that bit of paper I handed to you?" he asked, watching his fag's awkward efforts to remove the stubborn tea-leaves.

In his absent-mindedness Brelson put the wet dustpan on the white tablecloth; then slowly he produced the paper from his trousers pocket and looked at it.



"Do you know whose writing it is?" Gilder questioned, pouring out a cup of tea. "I believe it's disguised. I want very particularly to know who wrote it."

Brelson moved towards the door and closed it.

"Do you know?" Gilder repeated, wondering at his fag's silence.

Brelson nervously fingered a corner of the tablecloth.

"Y-e-s," he faltered timidly. "I know. I—I did it myself."

Gilder started back in amazement.

"*You* did it?" he cried. "What do you mean? Do you tell me that it was you—*you*, my fag—who paid my account at the sock-shop?"

Brelson wriggled uncomfortably.

"Yes," he confessed. "I paid it. You told me you couldn't pay it yourself, and it's a dead certainty that Miss Prew would have reported you to the Head, and I wasn't going to let you get into a row. I did it to save you. I—I hope you don't mind, Gilder?"

Gilder bit his lip in vexation. He had been thrown into a most awkward predicament.

"But I do mind. I mind very much," he declared, rising from his chair and striding to and fro. "What do you suppose the fellows will think of me if they hear that I've allowed my fag to pay my bills for me? You'd no business to do it, Brelson, and I've a mind to give you a jolly good hiding for your impudence. Of course," he added more softly, "your intentions were good and generous, and you have really succeeded in saving me. I'm obliged to you. But you have only transferred my debt from Miss Prew to yourself, and I've got to pay you instead of her."

"I didn't intend that you should pay me back," Brelson muttered.

"Oh, didn't you?" For an instant Gilder wondered if he had here found the culprit who had taken his missing autograph. "Where did you get the money from?" he demanded to know.

"I borrowed it," Brelson admitted reluctantly—so

reluctantly that it seemed he was hiding something of the truth.

"Indeed?" nodded Gilder. "Well, I will pay you back in a day or two, when I get a remittance from home. I had intended to get the money by selling that letter of Mary Stuart's."

Brelson started nervously. Gilder turned upon him and put his hands on his shoulders.

"Brelson," he commanded. "Tell me straightly and honestly. What do you know about the theft of that autograph? Was it——?"

He stopped, not daring to accuse him.

"I hope you don't think that I myself touched it?" Brelson said proudly. "I didn't, honest Indian, I didn't. I don't know who it was that took it."

Gilder released him, and strode backward and forward with his hands deep in his pockets.

"I have always trusted you, Brelson," he presently said, "and I believe you now. But what are your suspicions?"

The fag, thus appealed to, assumed his Indian inscrutability.

"Ugh! I had rather not tell you," he responded. "One of the chief clauses in our code is that if any man in the tribe sneaks he's to be tied to a tree and tortured. But I may as well tell you that it's none of the tribe that I suspect—and a good job too. If it was, and we could prove it against him, he'd be scalped, as sure as mud."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### CONCERNING A CIGARETTE.

MR. MEGSON'S rheumatism kept him in bed that morning, and Monsieur Noël requested Gilder to read prayers, a duty which he himself usually shrank from performing, probably because of his consciousness of his foreign accent, of which some of the less serious-minded of the boys were disposed to make fun.

When prayers were over Monsieur Noël called for attention, and at once requested Le Roy to stand forward. Nobody seemed to know the reason of this unusual proceeding. Le Roy stepped out, not at all abashed.

"Your name is down for punishment," began Monsieur Noël. "For the next week, all your leave is stopped; you will write out fifty lines of the 'Iliad,' and you will also, here and now, make a public apology to Gilder, stating the nature of your offence."

"Hear, hear!" shouted one of the fellows at the back.

"Silence!" commanded Monsieur Noël. "Arbuthnot, that is your second offence this morning. Your next half-holiday is forfeit. *Maintenant, Le Roy!*"

Le Roy stood with his hands behind him, looking more than usually aristocratic. Gilder, who knew what was coming, felt sorry for him in his humiliation, and would have told him to stand back, but that Monsieur Noël, guessing his intention, restrained him. Le Roy spoke fearlessly, and with a less pronounced accent than usual.

"My offence is that last night, after lock-up," he said, "I went upstairs to the top passage, where I ought not to have gone at that hour without permission. I entered Gilder's study, knowing that he was absent. He caught me coming out, and I believe he suspects me. He thinks I

steal something." He paused, as if waiting for Gilder to deny or withdraw the accusation. "But I declare I take nothing," he went on. "I touch nothing, nothing absolutely. I acknowledge it look suspicious. I had no right to go into that room when Gilder was not there, and I apologise."

Gilder accepted his apology, but felt most uncomfortable. It was painful to see him standing there in front of his schoolfellows confessing a fault which seemed so exceedingly trivial. But his confession, while appearing to be candid and ample, was incomplete—or so at least Gilder believed it to be; for Le Roy had omitted altogether to state his reason for entering the room, and it could only be assumed that his present attitude was one of impudent bravado.

When Gilder was putting on his overcoat, to go to the school, Brelson helped him.

"You ought to have asked him what he wanted in your study," he murmured. "I am perfectly certain he was up to something discreditable."

A moment later Arbuthnot and Lewis passed by.

"It isn't the first time that he had been up there in Gilder's absence," Arbuthnot remarked, as if he wanted the remark to be heard.

The stoppage of Le Roy's leave for a week and of Arbuthnot's next half-holiday threatened to deprive Gilder of their services on the football field; but, as it happened, the weather during the next six days made it impossible for them to have any outdoor games. Heavy rains turned the playing grounds into lakes, and the lanes and footpaths into quagmires of mud. To keep themselves in training, they were obliged to resort to the gymnasium, or content themselves in giving a larger proportion of their leisure to reading and study.

It was then that Gilder first realised how much Megson's justified its reputation for dampness, cold, and discomfort. The moat ditch overflowed its banks and flooded the cellars. Everything within and without was wet and clammy and dismal. Water trickled down the walls of his room and dripped from the ceiling; even his books began to smell

dank and mouldy, his pictures cockled in their frames, and his fencing foils and mathematical instruments required frequent cleaning to preserve them from rust.

He took Fearon's advice and, investing in some coals at his own expense, had a fire lighted in his study. Lewis and Arbuthnot, who shared a room beneath, followed his example, and he heard that they charged a halfpenny to everyone below the rank of prefect who went in to warm himself or to dry his knees.

Le Roy occupied a cubicle in the corner of Number Two dormitory. There was a broken rain-pipe just outside, and the rain soaked in through the wall to such an extent that, as Arlingford remarked, it would have been cruel to expect any fellow to sleep there; so the housekeeper, who, in spite of her general dislike of boys, rather favoured Le Roy, decided to remove him to more comfortable quarters. He was at the head of Upper Fifth, and it was due to him to have a study to himself.

The only study available for him was a small one on the half landing of the main staircase, by which Monsieur Noël and Harvey Gilder approached their respective dens, and Gilder often saw him going in or out of it with his books under his arm. On such occasions they only exchanged formal greetings, and never paused to talk. Le Roy seemed to have no chosen companion. Many pitied his loneliness and wondered why he was always so sad and silent, but perhaps their pity was misplaced, for he was well content to sit alone studying.

No one in the school denied that he was a brilliant scholar. All the boys in his own form were envious of his aptitude in learning. Tetley was positively jealous; but then Tetley was a notorious dunce; while there were many branches in which Le Roy was in advance even of the Sixth. This was especially the case in his knowledge of modern European history and politics, in which he was acquainted with many out-of-the-way facts not to be found in the school text-books. As a linguist, he was astonishingly clever.

Mr. Eyre-Loftus, who took the upper forms in classics, once corrected him in his use of a certain Greek verb.

Le Roy protested that he was right. The Head referred him to his class book.

"Pardon, sir," said Le Roy, "but the class book itself is wrong. If you will consult your library edition of Demosthenes I think you will find that the verb is there used as I have used it."

The book was brought and Le Roy was proved to be right.

It was not surprising that his French was beyond reproach; but his German was equally perfect. His form fellows, however, had their compensations; for in some subjects he was notoriously backward.

"He may be a dab at languages," said Arbuthnot, who was sensible of his own shortcomings in that direction, "but he's fearfully rocky at mathematics."

One very wet afternoon Brelson overtook his fagmaster on their way from the school to Megson's.

"I've just got a letter from my brother," he said. "He's in a London bank. I wrote to him, asking him to find out the market value of an autograph like the one you've lost. I think you ought to see his reply."

He produced the letter from under his macintosh. Gilder read it in the shelter of his umbrella. Its contents certainly interested him. This is how it ran:

DEAR TONY,—You are a nuisance expecting me to run all over London inquiring about the value of autographs. I have only been to one shop, and that was the best, where they told me that a letter written by Mary Queen of Scots has fetched as much as eight hundred pounds. Strangely enough, one came into their hands only last week. It was a love letter written by Mary Stuart to Lord Darnley, and they bought it for a millionaire collector, paying seventy-five pounds for it. I daresay they will make their millionaire give them four hundred for it at least. The astonishing thing is that the one purchased last week came in a roundabout way from Haddisthorpe School. So I expect you know the mug who parted with it for less than a tenth of its value.

The mater and Edith have gone on a visit to the Bishop, and the governor is occupying his evenings playing bridge at his club. Your terrier has four pups, mongrels every one of them.—Yours,  
Bob.

So the purloined autograph had been sold for seventy-five pounds! That enormous sum of money had been as good as stolen from Gilder's album! Gilder positively trembled in his excitement at realising this fact.

"Thank you, Brelson," he said, giving back the letter. "This is no joke. There is a thief among us at Megson's, and I am determined to find him."

"You'd better begin by putting a few questions to the fellow who was trespassing in your study the other night," Brelson sapiently advised.

An hour or two later Gilder went to Le Roy's room, intending to wring from him a confession of his theft. Tetley came out as he approached, shutting the door behind him and hurrying downstairs. Gilder entered and was met by the unmistakable warm flavour of tobacco smoke.

"Ah?" he exclaimed. Le Roy was in the very act of picking up a lighted cigarette from the edge of his table. He quickly threw it into the fireplace. "You are smoking," Gilder continued accusingly in his most severe monitorial tones. "You are aware that it is against the rules. How dare you? You must be punished for this?"

Le Roy looked extremely distressed. It was too late for him to dissimulate or to deny. He turned and crushed the smouldering cigarette under his foot.

"If you are satisfied that I have smoked," he said placidly, "I will take the punishment; but I would recommend you first to interrogate the fellow who has just gone out from here."

Was he attempting to shuffle the blame upon Tetley? Ignoring for the moment his reason for opening the door, Gilder ran downstairs. He found Tetley in pupil room, where preparation was going on. In answer to the monitor's demands, Tetley reluctantly declared, as Gilder expected him to declare, that it was Le Roy's cigarette. He had gone up to Le Roy, he said, merely to ask him about a certain French verb.

"You are positive that you saw Le Roy smoking a cigarette?" pursued Gilder.

Tetley nodded. "M'yes," he answered with nervous hesitation.

"Were you also smoking?" Gilder then questioned.

"Certainly not," Tetley denied. "There was only one cigarette. It was Le Roy's."

The words had hardly left his lips when Le Roy himself brushed past, and, like a panther, leapt upon him, dealing him a blow full in the chest that staggered him.

"*Liar!*" cried Le Roy.



## CHAPTER IX.

### IN THE FORM OF A CROWN.

“LIAR!” Le Roy repeated, as Tetley reeled back under the impact of the unexpected blow. His handsome, aristocratic countenance was pale; his dark, indignant eyes were unusually bright; his lips were tightly closed; but he was perfectly self-possessed. He stood on guard, ready to receive the return attack. It came immediately.

Quickly recovering his balance, Tetley stepped up to him, looking furious, towering over him by a good three inches. Before Gilder could interfere he had thrown out his fist, aiming at Le Roy’s exposed face. The blow was swiftly, dexterously guarded, but it was followed by another. In an instant the two were hotly engaged.

“A fight! A fight!”

The excited cry rippled round the room. Books and exercises were deserted, and there was a headlong rush over forms and desks to the middle of the floor. Gilder was pressed aside by the crowd, but he managed to force a way forward and to thrust himself bodily between the combatants.

“Stop this!” he commanded, holding them apart.

“Leave go of me! Let me get at him, the frog-eating Frenchie!” cried Tetley. He wrenched himself from the monitor’s grasp, and fiercely struck out at Le Roy.

“Shame, Tetley!” The voice was Fearon’s. “Shame! Striking a man when he’s being held!”

At the same moment Monsieur Noël elbowed his way into the midst of the crowd. He seized Tetley roughly by the collar and violently flung him to the floor.

“Miserable scoundrel!” he hissed savagely between his teeth. Then at Gilder he turned a flashing glance of

reproach. "I am surprised you permit such a disgraceful scene, Gilder!" he said. "You, a monitor!"

"Le Roy struck the first blow," someone explained. "Tetley didn't start it."

"That signify nothing," retorted the professor, glaring at Tetley, who was struggling to his feet. "If he must fight, let him do so with one who is equally so strong and tall as himself!"

Monsieur Noël had instinctively taken Le Roy's part, not doubting that Tetley was the aggressor. Gilder thought this curious, and not a little unfair.

Tetley stood up, rubbing his elbow, and boldly faced Monsieur Noël as if he meant to strike him.

"You shall answer for this," he growled menacingly. "I shall pay you back for throwing me like that; see if I don't."

The Megson boys afterwards had cause to remember that threat. Noël and Tetley had always disliked each other, but this incident marked the real beginning of their enmity.

Monsieur Noël was now in charge of the room. Gilder turned his attention to Le Roy, drawing him away. Blood was dripping from his nose.

"Come with me," urged Gilder, and he took him out and along the corridor to the downstairs lavatory. Fearon alone accompanied them.

The lavatory was lighted by a hanging lamp. There was no gas at Megson's. Fearon went to one of the wash-basins and turned on the water-tap.

"It was plucky of you, I must say," Gilder remarked to Le Roy. "Plucky to stand up like that to a chap so much bigger than yourself."

Le Roy's handkerchief was at his nose, which was bleeding freely. He made no response.

"What began it?" Fearon inquired, snatching at a towel.

"A misunderstanding over a breach of the rules," Gilder explained, leading Le Roy to the basin. "I accused this one of smoking a cigarette in his study, and because Tetley supported my accusation and bore out the facts,

Le Roy called him a liar and went for him like a Trojan."

"Why, but Tetley's one of the best boxers in the whole school," observed Fearon. He bathed Le Roy's face with a wet sponge. "He will want to have it out with you to the finish," he went on. "You ought to take a few lessons, Le Roy. You didn't show much skill, or he wouldn't have tapped your claret in a single round."

"They won't try it on again if I know it," Gilder objected. He took the towel, and drawing Le Roy towards him, began to mop his face, supporting his head on his left arm. Being so near to him, he should, if Le Roy had been smoking, have detected him by his breath, but Gilder was not aware of any smell of burnt tobacco about him.

The blood had dripped upon his waistcoat. Gilder opened two or three of the top buttons. In doing so, he inadvertently uncovered a sort of locket which Le Roy wore round his neck, suspended by a black silk ribbon. Le Roy put his hand up to it and pulled himself away with a sharp little cry of consternation, quickly concealing the thing. But Gilder had already seen what it was that he sought so nervously to hide. It was a miniature portrait in a massive gold frame. The gold ring at the upper edge was studded with diamonds set in the form of a coronet or crown. The painted picture was a portrait of a very beautiful and majestic woman. In his hurried glance, and in the dim light, Gilder was not sure whether her hair was very fair or silvery white.

He moved abruptly to get another towel, not wishing to betray that he had noticed anything extraordinary.

"What made you call Tetley a liar?" Fearon asked.

Le Roy deliberately buttoned his waistcoat over his miniature and glanced at himself in the looking-glass, pressing his wounded nose between a finger and thumb to make certain that it had not been put permanently out of shape.

"He tell Gilder a lie about me," he answered slowly. "That is why I call him a liar. If he had not done so I should have taken the blame on myself, as I intended

to do when I came down. I did not want him to get into a row and be detained from the football, you understand. But I hear him say it was I who smoke the cigarette. That was not true. Certainly the cigarette was in my room when he came in to beseech me to do his French lesson for him. Someone who occupy the room before me left the cigarette on one of the shelves, and I throw it in my waste-paper box. There Tetley found it. He light it, and smoke while I do the translation for him. Then he hear someone approach down the stairs, and he run out, leaving the lighted cigarette on the edge of my table."

"Yes," Gilder nodded, disposed to accept this plausible explanation. "That was where I saw it when I went in. But by the guilty way in which you nipped it up and flung it into the fireplace, I naturally inferred that it was you who had been smoking it."

"I have never smoke in all my life," Le Roy responded proudly, dabbing his nose with a corner of the towel.

"Beastly mean, that was of Tetley," Fearon declared. "I shouldn't have thought it of him!"

Here in the lavatory, where they were not likely to be interrupted, Gilder had an opportunity of speaking with Le Roy as he had meant to speak when going down to his study; but now as he looked at him he held back, delaying his accusation. There was something about Le Roy which disarmed the monitor—his delicate sense of honour, his proud uprightness, his courageous love of truth and justice—something which forced Gilder to refrain from making a direct charge against him. Yet the mystery of the stolen autograph had to be solved in spite of all scruples. Gilder was about to speak when Fearon intervened.

"Shall you fight Tetley if he challenges you?" he asked.

Le Roy glanced appealingly in Gilder's direction.

"Gilder has forbidden it," he faltered; "yet, if I am challenged, certainly, and in spite of Gilder, I will fight, and with any weapon that Tetley may choose."

Fearon smiled in surprise.

"Oh, but, of course, I mean with fists—in the English way," he said. "We never fight duels in England, you know. You French are different."

"With the fists I am not expert," rejoined Le Roy.

"Are you expert with the pistol and the sword, then?" pursued Fearon, winking at Gilder.

Le Roy gave an almost imperceptible shrug to his shoulders.

"Oh, well," he said, "I can shoot—yes; and I can do a little of the fencing, although lately I have not had the advantage of practice. I have no foils, you comprehend, and I know not how I could borrow a pair."

"Does that mean that you would like to borrow mine?" smiled Gilder. "I have no objection. Since Elkin left I have not once used them. One cannot fence without an opponent, you know, and Fearon is a bad second to Elkin."

"Yes, I know I'm a duffer," acknowledged Fearon, "but you haven't lately given me much chance of improving my fence. Are you aware that you promised to let me have a bout with the foils one night this week? I mean to keep you to it. Indeed, that's why I'm here."

"All right," Gilder assented. "I'm not busy. Let's go up to my den now. Perhaps Le Roy would care to come up, too. Would you, Le Roy?"

He bowed politely and looked pleased.

On their way upstairs he went into his own room, ostensibly to get a clean pocket handkerchief. As he entered, he began to unbutton his waistcoat.

"I believe he's gone in there to lock away that portrait that he had hanging round his neck," Fearon conjectured as he went along the top passage. "You saw it, didn't you? I wonder who the original is? Rather distinguished-looking, I thought, from the glimpse I got of the face."

"Distinguished, and even beautiful," Gilder agreed. "Whoever she is, Le Roy must be tremendously fond of her to wear her portrait in that affectionate way. But what surprised me was the diamonds. I suppose they

are real. He's not the sort of chap to wear pinchbeck jewellery, even hidden under his waistcoat."

"I don't exactly understand your attitude towards this fellow," Fearon presently resumed as he turned up the light of the table lamp. "Sometimes you speak of him almost tenderly, as if you thought a lot of him; at other times you're fit to jump on him for a thief and a scoundrel. What about that blessed autograph letter of yours? Haven't you found out who stole it yet?"

"No," answered his companion. "I have only discovered that the fellow who did steal it got seventy-five pounds for it."

Fearon whistled in astonishment at the bigness of the sum.

"Have you told the Head about it?" he inquired.

Gilder signified that he had not.

"No? You must, then. A theft like that can't be allowed to go unpunished. Seventy-five pounds? Cinders! If I'd half of that I should consider myself wealthy. Have you made certain that neither Noël nor Le Roy nicked it?"

Again Gilder shook his head and acknowledged that he had done practically nothing.

"Then set about doing something immediately," Fearon recommended. "It ought not to be difficult to spot the thief. A fellow couldn't very well have that much money without betraying it. Depend upon it, the chap in Megson's who is most flush of cash is the one you've got to drop on."

They had taken down the fencing foils, cleared a space in the room, and were fastening each other's padded waistcoat when Le Roy came bashfully in.

He had changed his clothes and put on a clean collar and a fresh necktie, and he now wore a pair of patent leather pumps and clocked stockings. Harvey Gilder was very precise about his own dress, and his example was already being imitated at Megson's, where the boys were beginning to emulate each other in the variety of their waistcoats, the modish cut of their collars, and the nattiness of their footgear; and Le Roy, who strove

always to assume the habits and character of a British schoolboy, was not behind his companions in this particularity of dress, recognising that, just as it was the rule to encourage a studied neglect of costume on the playing fields, so it was proper to be scrupulously neat in class or at church or when paying a visit to an upper boy's study.

As on a former occasion, Le Roy brought into the room with him that faint aroma of Parma violet soap which Tony Brelson had remarked. His fine straight nose was now slightly inflamed, but it had stopped bleeding. He quietly watched the preparations for fencing.

"By the way," Fearon surprised Gilder by saying, "I'm awfully short of money. Do you think you could lend me half a sovereign?"

Gilder frowned. Fearon always had more money than he, and Gilder knew for a certainty that he had got an allowance from home on the previous evening.

"No, old chap," he responded. "I'm sorry I can't. As a matter of fact, I'm stone broke. But what do you want money for now? We're not going to fence for stakes!"

"H'm!" Fearon murmured gloomily, stroking his upper lip, where already there were signs of a sprouting moustache. "Then I suppose I must raise it somewhere else." He glanced at Le Roy, and then Gilder understood his intention. He wanted to discover if Le Roy possessed enough money to justify the suspicion that he had lately received the sum of seventy-five pounds from London. "Perhaps Le Roy can oblige me. Can you, Le Roy? Can you lend me ten shillings for a day or two?"

Le Roy looked genuinely distressed. He rubbed his nose as if it pained him. Then he thrust his hand into his hip pocket and brought out some coppers and silver. Without counting it, he said:

"That is all the money that I have—four shillings and sevenpence-halfpenny. I wish I had more. Will you oblige by taking this?"

He offered the small sum with pathetic insistence.

"Thanks, awfully," said Fearon, turning away; "but I couldn't dream of taking it when you have so little. Please don't mind. Let us get on with the fencing."

Some minutes later, Le Roy moved nearer to Gilder and said to him in an undertone:

"Tell Fearon he might borrow the money from Lewis. Lewis, he have very much money always."

"Lewis?" repeated Gilder. "H'm!"



## CHAPTER X.

### A MASTER OF FENCE.

FEARON had accurately described himself when he said that he was a duffer at fencing. His opponent would have run him through twenty times over if the foils had not been protected.

Yet one or two parries that he made drew forth an exclamation of praise from Le Roy, who looked on with lively interest.

After a particularly vigorous bout, Fearon stood aside, exhausted.

"Let Le Roy have a turn, now," he suggested.

"Would you care to, Le Roy?" Gilder invited.

Le Roy blushed.

"Thank you, if I may," he responded. He took off his jacket, folded it neatly, and then turned up his shirt sleeves above the elbow.

Fearon, who watched him, was amazed at his fore-arms. They were white and smooth, but the muscles stood out like knitted bands of steel, and as he gripped the foil they moved like swelling waves; yet he held the weapon lightly, without pressure. He performed the salute with masterly grace and dignity, and came on guard with an ease of movement that was admirable. Before their blades touched, it was obvious that Gilder stood facing one against whom it would be difficult to hold his own.

Le Roy roused Gilder to the engagement by two sharp beats on the floor with his right foot. Fearon had never before realised the true force of the *appel*. Their weapons clinked together. Gilder's pressed against Le Roy's, but it might as well have been pressed against

a stone wall. At first, the younger boy's play was only defensive, and Gilder made one or two attempts in direct attack; but Le Roy parried, and when the other lunged, he touched him with a counter hit by merely straightening his arm. He moved his foil as if he were dusting something with a long feather; yet when Gilder encountered a parry in supination, it was then that he felt the full power of Le Roy's biceps muscle and the iron firmness of his wrist. On completing a parry his point was never deflected from the direct line. His skill was astonishing. Gilder had been taught by his father, who was accounted the best swordsman in his regiment. Fearon wondered where Pierre Le Roy had learned his art so well!

Very soon Gilder's wrist grew painfully tired, and he had not yet touched his opponent once. Le Roy let him rest a few moments. Then again they engaged in quarte; Gilder disengaged; Le Roy parried him in sixte. They engaged again in sixte, and Le Roy varied his defence by stopping Gilder halfway in septime. Gilder was like a child in his hands. He never could catch the young foreigner unprepared; Le Roy had him always under control. And all the time he stood cool and calm, while Gilder grew hot and reckless.

"You're a perfect marvel!" Gilder panted, when once more they paused. "That feint of yours when you made your blade glide lightly down mine and then lunged was new to me."

"That was the *coulé*," Le Roy nodded, with a calm smile. "Yes, it is a useful feint, but it is not so good as the *froissé*. Let me show you."

He was giving an illustration of it, and their foils were again clinking, when Gilder became aware that they were being watched from the doorway. He stepped back, lowering his blade.

"Ah?" It was Monsieur Noël who uttered the exclamation of interested surprise.

Le Roy glanced sharply round at him, lashing the air with his foil, apparently annoyed at the interruption.

The professor coughed uneasily.

"Pardon, my friends," he said. "I did not intend

to disturb your pleasure. Continue. I will watch you."

"Won't you come in and sit down, sir?" asked Fearon, making room for him on the couch.

"Perhaps you would care to have a turn with the foils yourself, sir," Gilder added. "I am a bit tired."

"*Can* you fence, then, Monsieur Noël?" questioned Le Roy in well-simulated surprise. "You—a school-master?"

"If I cannot, perhaps you will instruct me," returned Noël, somewhat coldly, and both Fearon and Gilder remembered how these two were alleged to be enemies. "I at least know the rudiments of the art, and I am willing for once to be your pupil."

Gilder handed him his foil. He did not put on the mask, nor did he remove his black coat, but merely buttoned it over his ample chest and rolled up his cuffs. Fearon and Gilder stood with their backs to the fire watching the two foreigners going through the theatrical manœuvres of the salute. Their inequality of size promised an unequal contest. Noël's tall figure seemed to overwhelm Le Roy; but the two onlookers did not expect that he would display anything like the skill of his younger opponent. In this, however, they were mistaken; for they quickly perceived that Noël was a complete master of his weapon; that, indeed, he was a most accomplished swordsman.

For a few minutes their blades crashed and scraped and chinked together. Then they warmed to their work, and it was thrust and parry, parry and riposte and counter-riposte for a long time before either got an advantage. Le Roy made a dexterous feint, guiding his foil with wonderful finger action, and quickly cut over from *quarte* to *sixte*.

"*Touché!*" he cried; but in an instant his foil fell from his hand, and Noël had got in with a smart lunge on the target.

"You have beaten me," Le Roy acknowledged, wiping his perspiring forehead.

"Yes, he has beaten even you," said Gilder; "but——"



"THEIR BLADES CROSSED AND SCRAPPED AND CHINKED TOGETHER" (p. 72).



"But what?" questioned Le Roy, fixing his eyes upon the speaker in quick inquiry. It seemed that he awaited the completion of the remark with considerable anxiety. Monsieur Noël, too, appeared to have become suddenly apprehensive.

"It doesn't matter," Gilder resumed. "I was only going to say that while I was watching you, it occurred to me that this was not the first time that you two have crossed swords together. You seemed to know each other's play so well."

Le Roy drew a deep breath, but swiftly covered his confusion in a forced smile.

"That is rather droll," he said awkwardly. And to Monsieur Noël he added: "Gilder thinks it curious, sir, that we fence in similar style and employ the similar tricks. I cannot account for it—can you?—unless it be by chance that we have learned under the same master. One Bernhoff was my instructor. You do not know him, perhaps?"

Monsieur Noël looked momentarily puzzled. He frowned at Le Roy.

"Bernhoff? Bernhoff?" he repeated questioningly; and then his face brightened. "Ah, yes!" he mused, with his eyes half closed. "I have the remembrance of one with such name, who was a confrère of mine. I teach him a little the fencing. And you learn from him—here—in England? You astonish me! *Tiens!* that is curious. I supposed he was dead, many years ago, before you would have been of an age to handle the fencing foil. I think it cannot be the same."

Le Roy's eyes were fixed upon him with singular intentness.

"Probably not," he said hollowly. "I do not know that my instructor ever mentioned you."

Somehow this brief conversation of theirs impressed Harvey Gilder as being just a trifle insincere and forced. Plausible though its explanation was of their similarity of fence, it did not wholly dispel his half-formed belief that Monsieur Noël and Pierre Le Roy had met and known each other with more than common familiarity before

their coming to Haddisthorpe. It was true that all along, during their residence in Megson's, they had posed as strangers one to the other. Were they indeed and in truth strangers? If not, what could be their object in maintaining so needless a deception?

An incident which occurred immediately afterwards did not at all tend to remove Gilder's doubts.

During the latter part of the fencing bout Fearon had retired to an easy chair by the fire and had taken up an old copy of the *Times*. He was still reading when Noël repeated the name of the man who had been his confrère.

He looked up languidly.

"Did you mention the name 'Bernhoff,' monsieur?" he inquired. "That's rather funny. I was just reading about a fellow with that name, only his is the Count von Bernhoff. I suppose he's no relation, though, to the man you were talking about. This Johnnie is a Chancellor, or something of that sort, to the King of Leskovia." He dropped the newspaper on the floor. "I say, Gilder, where *is* Leskovia, anyway?" he inquired, with a puzzled expression.

"I don't exactly know," Gilder admitted, looking to Le Roy for the information, "somewhere in South-Eastern Europe, I imagine. What about it?"

Fearon stood up and stretched himself lazily before replying.

"Oh, there's a revolution going on there," he explained. "They've assassinated the Crown Prince, and everything's upside down."

Both Le Roy and Noël seemed to be listening with acute attention. Evidently they were alike interested in this phase of foreign politics of which Fearon had been reading.

"Never mind all that rot," Gilder carelessly objected. "I want to have a turn with the foils with Monsieur Noël. Will you oblige me, sir?" he asked.

"Certainly," returned the professor in a peculiarly abstracted tone; "but I should prefer to 'ave some protection for my body. Your padded waistcoat is too

small." He glanced about the room. "Ah, the journal will do admirably, if you will allow me to use it?"

He picked up the newspaper, slowly folded it, and made a very decent chest protector, which he buttoned under his coat.

Fearon wondered why so expert a swordsman should consider any such protection necessary. If it was not required in fencing with Le Roy, it assuredly could not be needed in a contest with a less skilful fencer.

The professor whipped the air with his foil, then pressed the buttoned point of the weapon on the floor, bending the flexible steel.

Gilder stood ready.

They had barely performed the salute when there came to them a loud, thrilling yell from one of the dormitories on the floor beneath them.

"What on earth is that?" cried Gilder, lowering his foil. "Some fellow's met with an accident!"

Snatching up his coat and struggling into it as he ran along the passage, he went to inquire into the cause of the alarming disturbance. Monsieur Noël, Fearon, and Le Roy followed him.

They found that the yell that had rung through the house was but a wild, exaggerated war-whoop from Brelson and his Indian braves, who were engaged in performing a war dance on the middle passage. They had captured Lawrence Minor, one of the youngest boys in Megson's, prowling round as a scout from the enemy's camp, and were torturing him at the stake, while they danced about him in savage glee, as much to the little fellow's enjoyment as to their own.

Gilder quickly dispersed the yelling mob, and the Redskins had only time to strip the feathers from their heads and wash the paint off their faces when the bell rang for prayers.

After prayers, Gilder spent some minutes in conversation with Mr. Megson. Then he went quietly upstairs to do his work.

Coming to the half-landing he saw that there was a light in Le Roy's study. He gently pushed the door



ajar and looked within. At the table sat Monsieur Noël. He was speaking in a subdued voice, yet there was unmistakable anger in his tone. The newspaper which he had carried away under his coat was spread out in front of him. The door then creaked. He stopped and sprang to his feet in strange agitation. From beyond him Gilder caught the sound of a stifled sob.

Looking in the direction whence it came, he perceived Pierre Le Roy lying across his cot. He was staring at the intruder with startled eyes that were wet with tears.

In his hand, which was on the white pillow, he clasped something that sparkled in the flickering candlelight as he pushed it out of sight.

## CHAPTER XI.

### AN ADROIT EQUIVOCATION.

THE situation which Gilder had surprised on peeping into Le Roy's room was disconcerting. It was impossible to associate the young fellow's distress with the contents of the newspaper which the tutor had spread out upon the table, and from which Monsieur Noël seemed to have been reading. Neither the newspaper nor the circumstance that Le Roy was clasping in his hand the miniature portrait with its frame of gold and diamonds appeared to Gilder to have any conceivable bearing upon Le Roy's mental condition. Why was he in tears? And why was Monsieur Noël so evidently disturbed by the unexpected opening of the door?

Gilder's instinctive surmise was that he had been reproving Le Roy for some serious delinquency; that possibly he had even been inflicting personal chastisement. He boldly entered, for they had both observed him, and it was too late to withdraw.

"Excuse me, sir," he stammered, "I am afraid I intrude."

Monsieur Noël moved from the table, and with slow deliberation folded the newspaper which he held in front of him. Gilder glanced at Le Roy, who now sat up, furtively drying his eyes with one hand while with the other he thrust the miniature further under his pillow.

"What has he been doing, sir?" the monitor questioned, "nothing very wrong, I hope."

Monsieur gravely shook his head.

"I could not reproach him while he was a guest in your study just now, you understand," he said dully. His voice was less firm than usual. "Also, I did not

then know the full gravity of his disgraceful encounter with Tetley. I have since heard, however, that it was Le Roy who commence the fight; that he strike the first blow. It appears they quarrel about a cigarette which have been smoked here in this room this evening. Tetley and Le Roy have both broken the rule. I punish them both severely. While Mr. Megson cannot attend to the discipline of the house, I am his substitute, and I do my duty."

Gilder innocently accepted the adroit explanation, never doubting that it was genuine.

"I am sorry you should think it necessary to punish him," he ventured to intercede. "I assure you he was innocent in the matter of the cigarette smoking. Tetley, and Tetley alone, was guilty of that. As for their fighting—well, if I had been in Le Roy's place, I should have done just the same. I am only sorry he happened to get the worst of it. But——"

Monsieur Noël interrupted him with an impatient gesture.

"It is of no avail you make excuse for him, Gilder," he protested. "I am in authority. The incident is at an end."

Gilder felt that he could not without loss of dignity charge a master with an act of injustice in the presence of a pupil. But he inwardly rebelled against treatment which had brought tears into the eyes of a strong, robust fellow like Le Roy, who was not one to whimper and sob because of a little physical pain. He had borne the stroke of Tetley's heavy fist without complaint. His school-fellows had known him receive without a murmur a kick on the shin which would have made most fellows squeal. He was anything but a coward. And yet Noël had hurt him enough to make him weep!

"Very well, sir," said Gilder, "you are in charge of the house while Mr. Megson is ill, and it's no business of mine to interfere. But I insist that Le Roy has done nothing to deserve such punishment. Listen!" And he made a full explanation of the Tetley incident; at which Monsieur looked rather nonplussed.

Le Roy had risen to his feet, and he now advanced into the middle of the little room.

"Thank you, Gilder," he said with unexpected tenderness. "It is awfully good of you to stick up for me this way. I hope Monsieur Noël understands now."

Monsieur regarded them both with perplexed curiosity.

"If I have made a mistake," he said falteringly to Le Roy, "then I regret exceedingly. I apologise. I implore your pardon; and I withdraw the imposition which I set you. For the present, therefore, it is better you leave Monsieur Homer alone. Also, I do not now stop your leave." He held out his hand. "You accept my apology? Yes? Very good."

Le Roy promptly took the proffered hand and held it, Gilder thought, much longer than the occasion warranted. He did not appear to cherish the slightest resentment. His forgiveness was spontaneous and complete.

"Ah, Le Roy, he have got a generous nature," Monsieur Noël remarked as Gilder accompanied him up to the top passage. "He pardon my mistake as if I confer a favour on him. I am much touched by his noble forgiveness."

"I am greatly afraid Tetley won't forgive you so readily, sir," Gilder said. "He is a hot-tempered fellow. I hope you will be careful of him."

"Careful? How?"

"He might do you some harm."

"That is not probable. I do not fear him." Monsieur snapped his fingers all unconscious of danger.

"Monsieur," said Gilder as they were parting, "why was Le Roy in tears just now? You did not thrash him, did you?"

Monsieur Noël stood silent for some moments, listening to the driving rain and the drooping sprays of ivy beating on the windows.

"Why was he in tears?" he murmured in a vague, absent tone. "Ah, 'ow shall I say? I do not comprehend." He laid a finger gently on Gilder's shoulder and then spoke more decisively. "Gilder," he said, "it is not necessary that you disturb yourself about Pierre Le Roy. He can very well take care of himself."

I think he sometimes feel desolate—what you call lonely ; that is all. There are some boys who cannot endure to be absent from their people. They are oppressed by the *nostalgie*—the 'ome-sickness. And when they are spoken to severely, as I spoke to Le Roy, or when they imagine the world is against them, then they give way to the melancholy, and it takes very little to provoke the tears, *vous voyez.*"

"Yes," Gilder reflected aloud, "I daresay you are right, sir. It is home-sickness that is the matter with him. French people are always emotional that way."

"Precisely," agreed Monsieur Noël, going aside to his door. "We are not like you English. Ah!" he exclaimed in sudden recollection. "I have left the journal in his room! Pardon. I will go back for it."

"It doesn't matter in the least," Gilder assured him. "I've done with it."

Monsieur hesitated, and glanced along the dimly-lighted landing as though he were conquering a desire to return to Le Roy. He turned the door-handle. "Good night," he bowed, and went into his room.

Next morning, when Harvey Gilder was passing rather earlier than usual through the school hall, Mr. Eyre-Loftus greeted him in his customary kindly way, and drew him into his library. He often had private talks with the monitors about the work of the school, and Gilder was not at all disconcerted.

"I have just heard, Gilder," the Head began, giving his gown a hoist about his shoulders, "and from a source which I need not indicate, that you have been made the victim of an impudent theft. I am somewhat surprised that you have not yourself told me of it. But let that pass. I respect your reticence. I refer to the theft of an interesting autograph letter from your collection. An autograph does not on the face of it seem an important article to lose, but I am led to understand that the one in question was of considerable value, owing to its rarity and its intrinsic historical interest; and, after all, a theft is a theft."

"It was of more value than I knew, sir," Gilder

returned. "My album, from which it was removed, was given me by my father, who began the collection years ago at Sandhurst, and it has a good many very rare autographs in it. The one that I have lost was extremely rare. It was a letter written by Mary Queen of Scots, and was undoubtedly genuine."

"Of course," observed Mr. Eyre-Loftus, "you are not the only one in the school with this hobby of collecting the signatures of prominent persons, historical and otherwise. Doubtless there are other autograph albums in Haddisthorpe as well as your own? Have you examined any of these to assure yourself that the missing letter has not been surreptitiously transferred to one of them?"

Gilder smiled at his ingenuous theory.

"It was not necessary to do that," he informed him. "The fellow who took it need not have been a collector. My belief is—indeed, I am certain—that it was taken for the sake of the money it would bring."

"Ah, that's what I wanted to get at." Mr. Eyre-Loftus nodded judicially. "Now, what was its approximate value?"

"Eight hundred pounds."

Gilder was not surprised at the look of astonishment that leapt into the master's ordinarily placid countenance.

"*What?*" the Head exclaimed incredulously. And then Gilder detailed the information he had gathered from Brelson's letter, intimating that the stolen document had been sold for seventy-five pounds.

At this the Head showed very natural concern.

"That is tantamount to your having been robbed of seventy-five pounds, then!" he declared in consternation. "This is serious, Gilder, exceedingly serious; and the culprit must be discovered at all costs. I am astonished at his audacity—amazed! It is most despicable! Whoever he is he cannot remain longer in the school. He must be expelled. This is not mere pilfering. It is a robbery studiously planned and executed. What is your theory? What are your suspicions? Tell me candidly, please."

Gilder told him exactly the manner in which he had missed the autograph letter, declaring that he knew it to be in its place since he went to Megson's.

"Did anyone else than yourself know it to be there?" the Head inquired.

"Yes," Gilder answered. "Four persons certainly knew."

"Kindly name them."

"They were Brelson, Le Roy, Fearon, and Monsieur Noël," Gilder reluctantly informed him.

Mr. Eyre-Loftus meditatively tapped the table with the tips of his fingers.

"Fearon is out of the question," he decided. "He is your companion, and you know as well as I do that his honour is unimpeachable. Monsieur Noël may also be set aside, I think. Indeed, I may as well tell you that it was he who informed me of the theft, and that he is as anxious as I am to trace and identify the culprit. Brelson? He, of course, has the run of your study, and he probably knew that the letter was worth money. I will interrogate him privately. What are your feelings concerning Le Roy? Have you known him to be in your study during your absence, or in circumstances which would admit of his meddling with your album?"

This demand was extremely embarrassing. Gilder saw that if he answered candidly he must inevitably inculpate Le Roy. And yet he was painfully aware that to tell the truth was his only possible course.

"Yes, sir," he answered. "I saw him coming out one night, and he did not clearly explain why he had entered my room. But this was after the time of the theft, and I hope——"

"I cannot help what you hope, Gilder," the Head retorted with irritation. "If he has been in your room once, he may have been a dozen times. I am determined to get at the truth, and Le Roy must be examined. That will do for the present. Oblige me by telling the hall prefect that I wish to see Brelson and Le Roy as soon as they come in. And I shall want your album brought to me. Send for it at once."

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE INSIGNIA OF THE DISMAL SWAMP.

"HAOU!" ejaculated Tony Brelson.

He stopped in his silent walk and bent forward, shielding his eyes from the morning light, and peering searchingly across the prairie. Dewsbury, who had been walking behind him in prescribed Indian fashion, halted also and, with his hand to his forehead, peered in the same direction. The attitudes of the two boys resembled the pose of the noble savage depicted in "The Last of the Mohicans," indicating an awakened interest in some far-off object.

"Hew!" responded Wax-Wing, pointing along the trail that crossed the meadow they had just entered.

They looked at each other and exchanged a nod of silent understanding. Then they crept onward, Dewsbury treading in Brelson's footprints on the soft path.

In advance of them walked Pierre Le Roy. He went slowly, meditatively, with his eyes bent on the ground. The light, elastic spring seemed to have gone out of his step. His two schoolfellows pursued him, still walking one behind the other as Indians are supposed to walk. When they overtook him, beyond the footbridge, they put him between them. He looked at them blankly, almost as if he were unconscious of their presence.

Brelson admired his placid inscrutability. It appealed to him as a personal recommendation. He had the belief that Indians are inscrutable, that they never in any circumstances show surprise, or betray their emotions, or reveal their inner thoughts by so much as the movement of a facial muscle.

"Ugh!" he grunted. This was a sure intimation that he was here in his rôle of Redskin.



"Ugh!" echoed Wax-Wing. "Speak, Son of the Morning."

It was evident that Brelson had something to say, but he hesitated to begin. He would have preferred, had he been sure that he could make himself intelligible, to speak now in the flowery language of a scalp-hunting warrior; but this was not possible, and he shrank from the danger of bringing ridicule upon himself.

Le Roy glanced imperturbably from one to the other as they stood at either side of him, each with his arms folded, each looking exceedingly serious and determined.

"Well, messieurs?" he then said with the proud dignity which Brelson so much admired. "What will you?"

"The little Chief Medicine Calf Son of the Morning will say," muttered Dewsbury.

Brelson frowned. He did not want to be hurried in his business. He shoved his hands in his side pockets, which was not at all an Indian action. Had he worn his war bonnet and robe he would probably have assumed an attitude more in character with his part.

"The chiefs and counsellors of the Tribe held a grand pow-wow in their lodge last night," he began, and, abandoning all further effort at masquerade, he added, "We have elected you as a brave of the White Feather."

"Indeed?" nodded Le Roy. "I am sure I feel very much the honour. Then I am no longer what you call an outsider?"

"You'll make a tiptop Indian," pursued Brelson. "It is not every fellow that we would allow as a member, you know. We're awfully exclusive. You've got to be a gentleman, first and foremost. We don't admit anyone who isn't well born. Wax-Wing, here, is the son of a barrister, and my own father is a clergyman. I'm the grandson of a bishop. Of course, we know that you are an aristocrat, because of your name—*Le Roy*—although you've never told any of us anything about your father."

He paused, discreetly giving Le Roy an opportunity to supply the desired information.

Le Roy caught his breath sharply.

"My father?" he said very solemnly, and his eyes flickered curiously. "He is dead. But he was a gentleman; oh, yes; he was very much a gentleman."

Brelson nodded in silent satisfaction.

"You've got to swear the tribal oath over a war arrow stuck in the ground," he presently pursued. "We've not got one with us just now. But that ceremony can wait. Wax-Wing here will give you a copy of the Code to study, so that you may know our laws and all that they bind you to. Some fellows fight shy of us because of our Code. They say they won't bind themselves to its solemn rules and strict penalties. Gilder, who is one of our honorary chiefs, framed most of them."

"Yes?" said Le Roy. "In that case, then, I am beforehand sure that your laws are not unjust."

"Unjust?" repeated Brelson. "Solon himself couldn't have improved on them! They're a model of wisdom and justice. My pater, who, as I've told you, is a clergyman, has read the Code, and he found nothing to criticise, which is saying a lot. And, after all, they're not difficult rules to observe, are they, Wax-Wing?"

Dewsbury grunted. "No," he declared. "I've never found them hard. They're not much. It's easy enough for a fellow not to use bad language, to be polite and not to act meanly, not to sneak or tell lies or take things that don't belong to him, if he only makes up his mind to it. What most fellows stick at are the rules against flinching when you're hurt, and ridiculing people's personal defects, and giving them insulting nicknames. They want to know how a chap at school can help flinching when he gets a master's cane across his back or when he gets a kick on the shins at football; and they complain that if you're not to be allowed to take notice of people's personal defects, then all the fun of life is gone. But Wallace told me only yesterday that nobody in the school ever takes a rise out of him now because of his stutter and his red hair; and even Lewis is never any longer reminded that he is a Jew."

"Yet," interposed Le Roy, "there are many of the boys who taunt me because I do not happen to be English.

I know not why—I do not understand—but they say I eat the frog. *Pourquoi?* I have never eat the frog!”

“It wasn't one of our tribe who said such a thing as that, I am quite sure,” averred Brelson. “We're fearfully strict against making fun out of foreigners. Rule twenty-seven says that we've got to treat people of other countries with kindly consideration. That rule was made because of Wallace, who is Scotch. There's hardly anything that doesn't come into the code. It includes all the Ten Commandments and a lot besides; always allowing a sort of margin for independent action. Because you could never get schoolboys to be straitlaced prigs. We're not prigs and milksops, or anything of that sort.”

“For instance,” added Dewsbury, “we have no rule against fighting. If a fight comes off, we're there to a man; and if one of the combatants is a member of the tribe, we stick up for him and defend him to the last drop of blood in our veins.”

“That's a good thing for you, Le Roy,” went on Brelson, “as you will discover when you have your stand-up fight against Tetley.” He glanced at Le Roy. “When is it coming off?” he asked.

Le Roy hitched his books to a more comfortable position under his arm.

“It is not yet fixed when it shall be,” he answered calmly. “That depend upon Tetley. I have challenge him. It is his privilege to make the appointment, you understand.”

“It's awfully plucky of you to challenge him,” remarked Brelson. “You show by that, if by nothing else, that you ought to be one of our braves. He's lots bigger and heavier than you, and he knows how to box in quite a scientific way, because it was Gilder who taught him to spar, and Gilder has been dux of Haddisthorpe ever since he had his historic fight with Bully Briant. I'd give anything to see you conquer Tetley, though. It would be a ripping fine honour for the tribe, and you would be made a chief right off and wear a chief's feather.”

The three of them were walking on, now, in the direction

of the school, Le Roy being between the two younger boys.

"Of course," said Dewsbury "We only wear our real feathers and our war paint when we're on the trail. The pigeon's feathers that we stick in our caps at other times are merely our tribal badge. Gilder calls them the insignia of the Dismal Swamp."

"Indians count a lot by their feathers, you know," added Brelson. "It isn't everyone who understands them, and heaps of people make mistakes, thinking that a warrior is entitled to wear as many feathers as he jolly well likes. Fortesque once attempted to steal a march on us other braves. Coming back from long leave, he brought with him a splendid arrangement of feathers in all the colours of the rainbow, which his sisters had taken the trouble to make up into a fearfully swagger war bonnet, all trimmed round with beads and ribbons. He wore this fantastic head-dress at the next pow-wow he attended; but of course he was requested to chuck it in double quick time. The feathers ought all to have been white, with black tips and scalp locks. White eagle plumes, they ought to be; but ours are swans' feathers, mostly, since there are no eagles handy. But even if Fortesque's had been right in colour, he couldn't have worn them; because, you see, an Indian isn't allowed to wear a feather at all until he wins it as a reward for some distinguished deed, like stealing a horse, tracking a mocassined foot over a bare rock, leading a successful raid, or killing a buffalo bull."

"Still Water ought to have one if he beats Tetley in the fight," remarked Dewsbury.

"Yes," agreed Brelson. "That will be counted as a coup. And I think he ought to have one for being so plucky as to challenge him."

"And if Tetley should beat me, then I suppose it will be he who shall win the feather?" inquired Le Roy.

"Tetley isn't one of the tribe," Brelson reminded him. "He's a paleface. We've got to have some palefaces in the school. Otherwise there'd be no hostiles. All

the long dormitory fellows are hostiles—squatters, trappers, and desperadoes generally. They think a lot of themselves; but they're not properly organised, as we are."

He paused. They had come within sight of the school buildings, and many of their schoolfellows were near.

"What I want you to join us for," he continued, "is because you are a naturalist and a good tracker, and are handy with your fingers. You're the sort of fellow who can go into the woods with nothing but a knife, and make everything you need. Gilder told me one time when I was in his study that you spent the holidays camping out on Bartle Broad, and that you cooked all your own food. That was the Indianest thing I've heard for a long time. You're just the man we want."

"I shall be greatly honoured," said Le Roy.

"You needn't trouble about the entrance fee and subscription," said Brelson. "It will do any time."

Le Roy thrust his hand into his hip pocket and to the surprise of Brelson, who believed him to be practically penniless, he produced half a sovereign.

"If you have the change?" he said, offering the coin.

"Ugh!" grunted Brelson, shaking his head.

"I've got plenty of change," interposed Dewsbury.

When the financial part of the transaction was at an end, Brelson took from his pocket-book a white feather, the end of which had been dipped in ink and finished off with a tuft of horse hair to make it look more Indian.

"Wear this at the side of your cap the same as we all do," he instructed. "And now," he added, "we may as well have your mark."

He produced a small tin box which contained a pad that had been moistened with a violet coloured pigment, composed of crushed elder berries. He opened his book of the tribe at a page where he had written the name Still Water—the name by which Le Roy was to be known. Le Roy dabbed his right forefinger on the pad and then impressed his mark in the violet pigment under his tribal name.

"There goes the bell!" cried Dewsbury. "Quick! We shall be late!"

The three of them ran across the gravel playground and in at the school porch. There they were met by Ashover, the hall prefect, who tapped Le Roy on the shoulder.

"Mr. Eyre-Loftus wishes to see you in his room, Le Roy," he said. "And you, too, Brelson; but Le Roy first. You are to go to him at once, before school."

Le Roy turned very red in the face, and then pale.

"But why?" he demurred. "What for shall he want me?"

"I am sure I don't know," answered Ashover. "Go and see for yourself."

Owing to Mr. Megson's illness, and the absence of one of the assistant masters, Gilder was deputed to take the fifth form in mathematics that morning. It was an unusual course for Mr. Eyre-Loftus to adopt, but he was in a difficulty, and Gilder had volunteered to take Mr. Megson's place. He was just entering the class-room when Mr. Eyre-Loftus detained him.

"I have discovered the culprit in the matter of your missing autograph, Gilder," the Head said very gravely. "I am sorry to say that it was stolen and sold for seventy-five pounds by the boy Le Roy."

"*Le Roy!*" Gilder gasped.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### BRELSON IN A QUANDARY.

“LE ROY—guilty of theft?” Harvey Gilder breathed the words in a half-stifed tone of incredulity. He raised his questioning eyes to the Headmaster’s gravely troubled face. “I cannot believe it of him, sir,” he said. “Le Roy is too much of a gentleman to do a thing like that.”

“I should have said so, too,” returned Mr. Eyre-Loftus, “and I am sorry, exceedingly sorry, to suspect him. But from what I have heard, I do not find it possible to come to any other conclusion. Brelson, I am certain, is innocent; and I cannot suspect either Monsieur Noël or Fearon; whereas the evidence against young Le Roy is almost convincing. You see, Gilder, he knew that you possessed that particular autograph letter, and he knew that it was uncommonly valuable. He had access to the album in which you kept it, and he does not deny that he has been alone in your study during your absence. Yet he resolutely refuses to explain his reason for entering the room. I have always believed him to be hard up; but it has come to my knowledge that at the present moment he has a considerable amount of money in his possession, and I cannot help thinking that this circumstance supports the suspicion that it was he who received the seventy-five pounds sent to some boy in this school by the London dealer.”

Gilder shook his head dubiously.

“I do not know where you got your information from, sir,” he objected, “but last night I happened to discover that he had no more than four shillings and sevenpence to call his own.”

“Ah, he had more than that this morning, however,”

asserted the Head. "Besides, I should say that if he indeed be guilty of this theft, you would be about the last person in the school to whom he would disclose the fact that he had a suspicious amount of money in his possession. It would be his object rather to make you suppose that he was as poor as you have always believed him to be."

"Probably so," acknowledged Gilder. "But at the same time, sir, I do not think him capable of practising such deception. I should rather think that he was trying to shield someone else. In any case there is no proof against him, and I hope you will not think it necessary to take any action in the matter until your impressions are turned into certainties. You will wait a bit, sir, won't you?"

"If you wish for delay—yes," nodded Mr. Eyre-Loftus. "It is a grave charge to make against any youth, and I should prefer to have absolute proof before venturing to make a direct accusation."

The Headmaster had admitted that it was Monsieur Noël who told him of the theft and sale of the autograph. Gilder reflected now upon the alleged enmity between Noël and Le Roy, and he judged it probable that Monsieur had informed against Le Roy in the hope of inculpating him and proving him guilty of an offence which must have the inevitable result of his being summarily expelled from the school. Gilder was not sure in his mind that there actually existed any serious enmity between the two foreigners; but that there was some mysterious secret between them he was convinced, and it seemed to him that it was a secret that made them afraid of each other.

More than once, when trying to understand their relative attitudes, he had come to the vague belief that Le Roy had some powerful hold upon Noël; that possibly he knew something about the professor's past life which he had threatened to reveal, and that when Monsieur Noël had been seen kneeling at Le Roy's feet and speaking to him in that strange language which they alone understood, he had been imploring him not to betray the secret which he had discovered. It seemed possible to Gilder that



Monsieur Noël, still fearing betrayal, was now striving to get Le Roy out of his way by bringing this charge of theft against him, and so ensuring the boy's dismissal from Haddisthorpe.

Gilder went into the class-room and immediately the clatter of many voices ceased; heads were bent diligently over the desks. Le Roy sat apart from his class-fellows, looking exceedingly gloomy as he turned over the pages of his exercise book. During the morning he concentrated his attention on his work with remarkable industry, seldom lifting his eyes or paying any regard to his surroundings. He seemed studiously to avoid meeting the monitor's glance. It was evident that there was something preying seriously upon his mind and that he was trying to forget it in close attention to his tasks. Yet when Gilder came to examine the results of the morning's work, he was surprised to discover that Le Roy had hardly even attempted to solve the mathematical problems set him, and that what he had done was inaccurate. Gilder reproved him, and Le Roy looked up with a steady gaze, which was almost impudent in its unflinching boldness.

"Pardon," he said in excuse. "I am at fault; but this morning my brain is so much distracted, I find myself incapable to do the task."

Gilder could only suppose that it was Le Roy's recent interview with the headmaster which was disturbing him; but long afterwards he learned what it was that caused the young fellow's excessive gloom at this particular period, and then he marvelled at the strength of will which enabled him so successfully to dissimulate his emotions and disguise his piercing grief.

"Well, Brelson, what is your trouble?"

Brelson had gone upstairs to Gilder's study to deliver a letter which had just come by post, and he lingered as though he wanted to say something.

"I am in a sort of a fix," he answered, standing near the window, with his hands in his trousers pockets. "Still Water—I mean Le Roy—paid his subscription this morning. He has sworn the tribal oath over the war arrow, and now he is a full-blown brave. It's

my duty to stick up for him. I've got to stick up for him through thick and thin. And yet—" he broke off and went closer to Gilder: "do you know that I was had up before the Great Chief this morning?" he asked anxiously.

Gilder opened his letter and glanced at the postal orders which it contained.

"Yes, I know," he nodded. "He told me that he intended to interrogate you about that stolen autograph. But you didn't mind that, did you? He did not suspect you of having anything to do with it?"

"No." Brelson turned and faced his fag-master. "But he asked me some fearfully awkward questions. I had the greatest difficulty in the world in answering them without breaking the tribal laws. If Still Water hadn't been admitted, it wouldn't have mattered so much. But if I had said anything that wasn't to his credit, I should have been tortured at the stake without mercy and perhaps had my feathers taken from me."

Gilder smiled.

"I see your difficulty," he said. "But does the law against sneaking impose silence even when the Great Chief himself commands you to tell the truth about one of our tribe? I should have thought not. This is the supreme advantage of our having elected Mr. Eyre-Loftus as honorary Great Chief. I pointed that out to you long ago when you were framing the Code. You are bound to obey him, whatever happens; but as he is the supreme chief of the tribe, then your obedience cannot count against you, even though in obeying him you incriminate one of the braves."

Brelson breathed a sign of relief.

"I am glad you put it in that way, Deerfoot," he said, "because now I can't be accused of sneaking. After all, though, I didn't really sneak. I didn't say too much. There was no wrong in telling Great Chief that Still Water paid Wax-Wing with half a sovereign this morning."

"Half a sovereign?" repeated Gilder. "Indeed? Where did he get it? Do you know?"

Brelson shook his head. "No," he answered, "I don't know. And it was no business of mine to wonder why the Chief wanted to know if Still Water had any pocket money or not. He asked a lot of things, and I answered them all more or less straightly, excepting a question he put to me about your autograph album, and then I was fairly ambushed; because he expected me to mention names, you see, and I couldn't do that. But I think I managed fairly well."

"In what way?" questioned Gilder.

"Well," Brelson went on cautiously, "he asked me to name every fellow in Megson's whom I knew to have seen your album, or who knew that you had in it a letter written by Mary Queen of Scots. I told him that I had never seen anyone actually looking at the book, and that, as every fellow in the house knew you had such an autograph, there wasn't a bit of good in my naming anyone. Then to my surprise he produced the album itself. It seems you had given it to Fearon to take charge of, so it was in the school. He told me to show him the page from which the missing autograph was taken, and when I'd done so he examined it closely.

"'I see there is a finger-mark here,' he said; 'I wonder if it was here before the autograph was taken?'

"'No, sir, it wasn't,' I told him. And I lent him my magnifying glass that I use for making fire, and he saw for himself that a good part of the mark came over the square where the removed letter had been.

"'Yes,' he said thoughtfully, 'that is evidently the finger-mark of the thief.'

"I looked at it, too; and then, turning from him, I opened my Book of the Tribe, and he must have heard me make an exclamation of surprise. He caught sight of my book and demanded to know what it was. I handed it to him and he asked me a whole catechism of questions about it. He seemed to be greatly interested in the organisation, and especially in the Indian names, although, of course, he knew all about the tribe. He couldn't help knowing about it, unofficially.

"'Who is the individual dignified by the name of

the Great Chief?' he asked me. 'Some Sixth Form boy, I suppose?'

"'No, sir,' I answered. 'If you please, that is yourself.' And he looked as if he were ready to laugh. But instead, he told me to go to my class-room and leave the book with him."

"Did he say what he wanted it for?" inquired Gilder.

"No, but I guessed," returned Brelson. "He wanted to find out if there was a finger mark of any of the braves that corresponded with the mark in the album. He behaved awfully nicely over it. When we were at the beginning of the French lesson he came into the class-room and called me to him, and with a smile gave me back the book in an envelope addressed in his own writing to me in my Indian name of Son of the Morning. 'By the way, Brelson,' he said, as I was taking it, 'there is one of your warriors called Still Water, I see. Do you mind giving me his civilised name?' I expect I went red at that question, but there was no harm in telling him that it was Le Roy, was there?"

"Not at all," agreed Gilder. "You did not commit yourself to any statement; and yet Mr. Eyre-Loftus appears to have gathered all the information he wanted."

"It was only this morning that Le Roy stamped his mark in the tribe book," said Brelson. "I don't suppose that he was aware he'd left a similar mark in your album to betray him."

Brelson was going from the room when Gilder called him back and held out to him three postal orders which he had just received from home.

"Here is the money that you paid to Miss Prew on my behalf," he said. "You borrowed it, I think you told me. Perhaps the fellow you borrowed it from will be glad to have it back. I believe I can guess who it is. It is Lewis, is it not?"

Brelson did not answer; but as he folded the postal orders and thrust them in his pocket, his crimson countenance told Gilder that he had guessed aright.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE TRIBE OF THE WHITE FEATHER.

THE tribe of the White Feather, of which Tony Brelson was the moving spirit, was an organisation which in some respects partook of the nature of a secret society. In the beginning, a number of boys banded themselves together for the purpose of indulging in surreptitious feasting. The food supply of Haddisthorpe School was scanty, and, if wholesome, exceedingly plain. And in order to supplement it the fellows combined to set apart a certain proportion of their pocket-money and pool it for the purchase of a common stock of dainties, to which were added the contents of any hamper that might come from the indulgent parents of any particular member of the band.

At first they held nocturnal feasts in the dormitories, but they were confronted by the difficulty that the dormitories afforded no facilities for cooking, and they decided to hold their revels out of doors, where they could build a fire and enjoy themselves undisturbed by any fear of prowling prefects and meddlesome masters. Out of doors, too, it was possible for fellows from the different houses to meet and share the edible luxuries which they helped to provide.

On Bartle Broad—the wide expanse of water at the rear of Megson's—there was a small wooded island, included in the school property and counted within bounds. Pudney Island presented a suitable camping ground, which was rendered none the less attractive by being a considerable distance from the school and therefore difficult of access.

It was Arbuthnot who suggested the island as a meeting

place, and at first it was intended that the Megsonites should keep it to themselves; but Brelson and two or three of the other fellows at the school heard of the plan and they claimed the right to join in the enterprise.

They hired two boats and rowed out, taking with them a stock of potatoes, some slices of raw ham, a few loaves of bread, with tea, condensed milk, and cooking utensils. They made a fire of faggots and fir cones and their experiment was a complete success—the more so because it had in it a spice of adventure. Its adventurous side, indeed, was the element which appealed most forcibly to the boys engaged in it, and Brelson, who at that time had been reading stories of North American Indians, conceived the idea of banding his companions together as a tribe of Redskins.

He silently matured his plans, consulting with Gilder before disclosing them. The novelty of his suggestion came as a relief to the monotony of a dull half, and about a dozen of his companions joined him with an enthusiasm only less keen than his own; and they all set about reading "The Scalp Hunters," "The Last of the Mohicans," and all other stories that they could lay hands on, from which they might gain enlightenment on the habits of the Noble Savage.

They had free permission to use the island as a reservation, and boats could be procured at a trifling cost. The whole country side lent itself to the adoption of Indian nomenclature. It needed no great stretch of fancy to call the marshes "The Dismal Swamp," to convert the meadows into "prairies," the lanes into "cañons," the streams and ditches into "creeks." Bartle Broad, which was brackish, had its name changed into "The Great Salt Lake," and the region beyond bounds, with its defined frontier, was known as the "Territory of the Paleface."

At first, imagination played a large part in this game of make-believe. But Brelson was not content with a method so unreal; he wanted to introduce the more actual and visible conditions of Indian life. They should dress like Indians and have an encampment of lodges

made by their own hands. No material was to be bought if it could possibly be fashioned from original sources. Brelson objected to Woodward using nails and hemp rope in the making of a wig-wam, and he would even have denied the use of lucifer matches if fire could have been successfully obtained by the method employed by the Indians; but he had not learned the secret of the rubbing stick, and he submitted so far as to consider the burning glass a legitimate substitute.

Under Gilder's advice, he organised the tribe on practical lines. Admission was by election. No boy was allowed to become a brave unless he agreed to obey the strict rules of the Code, and the rules themselves were formed under the advice and with the approval of the senior scholars, who gave their assurance that the Code in no way conflicted with the recognised laws of schoolboy honour and discipline. Chiefs and counsellors were chosen, and to their authority even Brelson himself yielded in dutiful obedience. His own position in the tribe was that of warrior and medicine man, and as he was supposed to know more than most of his companions about the ways of Redskins a great deal of the management was left in his hands.

He took charge of the weapons, and soon he had gathered a most formidable array of war arrows, jagged and barbed and double barbed. They were frightful-looking things—as frightful almost as the scalping knives. He dispensed the marked feathers as tokens of reward for brave deeds, and he taught his fellows how to make mocassins, how to paint their faces with water colours, and how to blaze trees and follow a trail of footprints. He encouraged them to study the signs of the weather, and to know the points of the compass by the moss on trees, which, he averred, was always more plentiful on the north side of the trunk, as the longer branches were to the south.

But the strength of the tribe of the White Feather lay in the strict observance of the Code. Each rule had its special penalty, and disobedience was followed by swift punishment.

Pierre Le Roy had been accepted as a brave hardly

more than half a dozen hours when on leaving the dining-hall at Megson's he was accosted by a small boy who wore the white feather and who silently handed him a fragment of charred stick and two discs of white paper.

"What will you, then?" questioned Still Water.

The small boy went by the tribal name of Four Wolves, because he had once told an incredible yarn in which four wolves were prominent actors. He grunted:

"Ugh. It means that Still Water is to meet the Chief Big Horn in Dead-tree Gulch when the sun is two hours past noon."

Le Roy knew that Dead-tree Gulch was but another name for Primrose Lane; a deep cutting leading through the plantation downward to the waterside, where the boats were moored. Thither he went at two o'clock, wearing a white pigeon's wing feather in the front of his cap. At the end of the lane he was met by Chief Big Horn, who wore many feathers round his head and down his back, and whose school clothes were hidden under an ample red and yellow blanket.

Big Horn was one of his own form fellows whom he knew by the name of Sandwith, and who was reputed to be the best marksman with the bow and arrow. He nodded as Le Roy drew near, and then turned and led the way to the landing-place, against which there was a large boat. By the clever addition of a false gunwale of bark and painted canvas, the boat had been made to resemble an Indian canoe. Four braves knelt by the thwarts with paddles ready. Their faces were smeared with ochre and red raddle, which, added to the feathers and their bead-trimmed jackets, gave them a very real appearance of savages.

Big Horn stepped lightly into the boat and signed to Still Water to follow him. When they were seated, he grunted and the canoe was shoved off. The paddles were dipped with precision and the strange-looking craft moved out into the lake, gathering speed as the paddles worked in unison.

Le Roy's eyes were fixed on the wooded island. From among the trees there arose four distinct columns of smoke.



"Why?" he laconically asked of Sandwith.

"The braves know the meaning of the signal," returned Big Horn. "Well do they read in it a message bidding them all come to the council of the warriors."

When the canoe drew within a few strokes of the island, many Redskins in full war paint stole out from among the trees, moving stealthily downward to the beach. One, whom Le Roy with difficulty recognised as Brelson, took up a position at the water's edge.

He stood silent and statuesque, with one foot on the trunk of a fallen tree. He wore a superb headdress, ornamented with long white feathers and rabbits' tails—the labour of many days. In his right hand he held a long spear, decorated with feathers and tufts of horse-hair, and in his left a mystery drum from which were suspended many scalps. Behind him on the rising ground, where a score or so of the braves were gathered, there was a great wig-wam, so realistic in shape and ornament that it might have been fashioned by Indian hands, only that its cover was of canvas instead of buffalo hides. The poles projected from its apex, and its circumference was decorated with paintings of galloping horses, buffaloes and rising suns. Beyond it were two smaller lodges.

As Le Roy stepped ashore, a chief of the tribe emerged from the doorway of the principal lodge, looking at three of his companions who were squatted cross-legged by the fire.

"Warriors, let the prisoner be bound," he said as Le Roy approached.

Le Roy recognised the voice as that of Arbuthnot, the boy whom he had thrashed and flung into the ditch for having betrayed the Fifth Form on the occasion of the rebellion against the French master. Arbuthnot was known in the tribe by the name Silence, because he was an inveterate talker.

Not understanding why he should be called a prisoner, Still Water stood calmly by. Presently two of the taller warriors went up to him and seized him by the arms, leading him to the tree nearest the fire. Before he knew

what they were doing they had flung a lasso round him and were securing him by arms and legs to the tree. He did not struggle; he only wondered at the meaning of these strange proceedings. But they were handling him roughly.

"What will you, then?" he cried, straining at the rope. "For what will you bind me like this?"

"Wait!" commanded Arbuthnot, stepping forward in front of him. And putting forth his hand, he snatched the feather from Le Roy's cap, and handed it to Brelson, before squatting down beside Lewis.

"Speak, Son of the Morning," he said.

Holding the feather in his fingers, Brelson stood with his spear resting on his arm.

"Warriors," he began, "the prisoner was elected to be a member of our tribe. We accepted him as our brother, believing him to be worthy. Great is his skill as a hunter; fleet of foot he is; as a follower of the hidden trail there is none his equal. But now, even before he has been initiated into our secrets, he is to be accused of breaking one of our sacred rules."

He paused for a moment.

"To accuse is not to condemn," he went on solemnly in a tremulous voice. "And if we accuse him whom we name Still Water, it is that he may either confess his fault or else prove his innocence here and now."

"Go on!" interrupted Lewis; "none of your Indian oratory! Tell us what he has done!"

"To put it briefly, then, and in plain English," Brelson resumed, "you all know that some fellow in Megson's has lately stolen a rare autograph letter from the Chief Deerfoot's album. But you do not all know, perhaps, that the fellow who stole it has sold it for seventy-five pounds."

There was a murmur of astonishment from the braves. Silence gave a grunt of understanding, Lewis, whose tribal name was Golden Slipper, raised his eyebrows and whistled incredulously.

"Those seventy-five pounds have been as good as stolen from Deerfoot," pursued Brelson, "and stolen

by a member of this tribe. The thief is now in our midst, and we are here to convict him of his guilt. I have spoken."

Arbuthnot rose with a clod of earth in his right hand. With his left he pointed at Le Roy.

"There is the thief!" he shouted. And at that there was a wild Indian yell and the braves pressed nearer to their unprotected victim, menacing him with their clubs and tomahawks, and scalping knives. Arbuthnot raised his hand to fling the clod of earth into the prisoner's face.

## CHAPTER XV.

### ORDEAL BY FIRE.

LE ROY boldly scanned his schoolfellows. Their painted faces gave them a peculiarly grim and savage aspect. He saw Arbuthnot's hand uplifted to fling the clod of earth, and he swiftly ducked his head. The missile, intended for his exposed face, struck the tree and scattered its fragments of clammy turf about his hair and neck. His cap had fallen off. Dewsbury picked it up and looked round in search of Brelson.

Golden Slipper elbowed his way through the crowd of smaller boys, flourishing a tomakawk.

"Let's scalp him!" he cried, making a grab at Le Roy's uncovered brown hair, gripping a lock of it tightly in his fingers.

But Silence shouldered him aside.

"No," he proposed with a laugh; "let's burn him at the stake!" He looked at the fire, some two yards away from the tree. "Fetch some more fuel, you youngsters!" he commanded.

"Shame!" cried a voice from the rear. "Give the fellow a chance, can't you?"

Le Roy wriggled. He was working the ropes looser; but his struggles made the strands bite into his firm muscles. A hand caught at his wrist from behind the tree.

"Keep quiet, Still Water," someone whispered. "Have patience. They shall not hurt you."

Then Little Chief Medicine Calf—Brelson—slipped in front of him and turned upon him a quick nod of encouragement. Understanding it, Still Water remained quiet with his back firmly pressed against the tree.

Arbuthnot and Lewis, meanwhile, were moving the burning twigs closer to their victim's feet on the windward side, and adding fresh fuel to the embers. The dry bracken and ling caught the flames and crackled. Still Water could feel the increasing heat, and the smoke came in choking wafts about his face, making his eyes nip painfully. A spark alighted on his forehead. But he stood resolute, immobile, confronting the wild, yelling, gesticulating savages.

Many of them were dancing around him, uttering strange, meaningless cries. No master, no monitor, no prefect even, was near to interfere in their barbarian rites, and the sight of their victim bound to the tree with the leaping flames creeping closer and closer to his feet filled them with boyish glee. It was truly realistic; almost too much so, for there was an element of cruelty in it all. Some of the bolder of them seemed disposed to carry the thing too far, approaching dangerously near with their weapons. Yet none dared to touch him. Even Arbuthnot and Lewis, who were the leaders and instigators of the occasion, stood back, merely watching, or encouraging the younger boys to excesses which they themselves shrank from committing; feeling a little anxious, perhaps, lest the performance should go to a culpable extreme.

Brelson, in his yellow robe, decorated with coloured beads and tufts of hair, and his magnificent head-dress of feathers and rabbits' tails, looked a veritable picture of an Indian chief as he stood calm and motionless, holding his mystery drum in front of him and clasping in his right hand the shaft of his long spear. Behind him was the wig-wam, backed by the ruddy boles of the stone pines, and beyond the shadowing trees the waters of the mere glistened in the grey afternoon light. The whole scene and its accessories were in harmony with his ideas. He stood calm and statuesque; but his eyes were watchful of all that was going on, and his whole boyish frame was tingling with suppressed excitement.

"Now!" cried Lewis, when the fire had kindled to threatening proportions. "Force him to confess!"

"That's what I'm going to do," returned Arbuthnot. He caught up a stout pine faggot and thrust an end of it into the heart of the fire. Holding it by its cold end he turned to Still Water. "You've got to confess," he declared sternly. "We all know now what you were up to when you went into Gilder's study. Confess that it was you who took the autograph of Mary Stuart out of his album and sold it for—how much was it?—seventy-five quid!"

Brelson moved a step nearer. Dewsbury was at Le Roy's other side. They were both alertly watching Arbuthnot's hand.

The braves round about had abruptly checked their antics, and now they stood in a wide circle looking on in expectant silence, astonished at the prisoner's placidity.

"Come, be quick!" urged Arbuthnot. "Confess it was you, or else prove that you are innocent." He snatched the burning faggot from the fire, knocked out the flames, and held the glowing end in Le Roy's direction, moving it inch by inch nearer to his face.

Le Roy gazed at him steadily, his nostrils quivered, his lips twitched; but he did not speak.

Arbuthnot glanced aside at Lewis.

"You see he doesn't deny it," he declared, so that all could hear him. "He can't deny it. He is guilty. He is proved to be the thief!" Again he turned to Le Roy. "Confess that you're the thief," he commanded.

Le Roy remained silent. He pressed his head back against the tree. His dark eyes were fixed on the burning faggot as it was thrust slowly nearer and nearer. Its glowing end showed bright and dull in turns as he breathed upon it. He could feel its heat upon his face. The pungent smoke made him cough. What did Arbuthnot intend to do? How far would he dare to go?

The burning faggot began to tremble. Arbuthnot was by far the more nervous of the two. He evidently realised that it would have been very much greater fun if Le Roy had resisted and struggled instead of brazenly and unmurmuringly daring him to do his worst. Le Roy, on his part, was not afraid. He had confidence in his

companions, and he bore his ordeal knowing that they would not allow him to suffer any personal injury.

Arbuthnot frowned and muttered impatiently between his teeth. He could not understand how his victim could remain so implacable when the fiery scorching brand was within a span of his nose, when even already the beads of perspiration were appearing on his face.

"One!" he counted. "Two——"

He hesitated. "THREE!"

Suddenly Brelson lifted his spear and brought it down with a resounding crack upon Arbuthnot's fingers. At the same instant, Le Roy's bonds dropped free at his feet, loosened by Dewsbury, and with a cry he leapt forward and caught Arbuthnot by the throat and shook him with all the strength of his muscular arms, violently flinging him to the ground.

Arbuthnot's war-bonnet, with its array of feathers, dropped into the fire, where it was slowly consumed. His friend Lewis helped him to his feet, and he made a mad rush at Le Roy. But Still Water was ready for him, and met him with a blow on the jaw, delivered straight from the shoulder. Arbuthnot staggered back into the arms of Brelson, who seized him, helped by Sandwith.

With this sudden turn of the situation there was as sudden a turn of sympathy in favour of Le Roy. The younger boys, who had been bullied and coerced into a sort of false loyalty to Arbuthnot, were delighted now to see someone bold enough to stand up against him. They did not know whether he was right or wrong in attempting to force a confession from Le Roy, but they could not suppose that he would dare to accuse him unless he had some private knowledge of his guilt. Besides, the Little Chief Medicine Calf Son of the Morning himself had practically charged Still Water with the theft.

Le Roy's stubborn refusal to confess even under threatened torture had filled them with admiration. He had exhibited that unflinching contempt of pain and danger which all schoolboys admire. Surely, if he had been guilty, he could not have faced his accusers as he had done, without even a momentary blush of



"WITH A CRY HE LEAPT FORWARD AND CAUGHT ARBUTHNOT BY THE THROAT" (p. 106).





shame, without for an instant lowering his steadfast gaze! Surely his attitude was itself a silent evidence of his innocence! - He had borne his ordeal, confounded his persecutor. Arbuthnot had not dared to injure him; but who could say that he would not have done so if Brelson had not so opportunely intervened?

Brelson's conduct during the whole of this afternoon's game had been somewhat mysterious. He had issued a summons to the warriors and braves to assemble in the encampment, and the word had gone round that there was to be a trial of one of the members of the tribe for violating the laws of the Code. But Brelson had been half-hearted in assuming his privileges as a chief, and for some reason known only to himself and his "blood-brother," Wax-Wing, he had relegated the position of judge to Arbuthnot. Brelson's method of interfering in the proceedings just at the point where they were becoming most exciting had been a surprise to the younger braves. It seemed to them that there had been some sort of collusion between him and the prisoner, and that the simultaneous stopping of the ordeal and the loosening of the prisoner's bonds had been pre-arranged.

Le Roy stood waiting for Arbuthnot to return to the attack. His lithe body, in its closely buttoned jacket, swayed gracefully as he glanced from side to side at the eagerly watchful faces of his schoolfellows. His own face was slightly paler than usual, and his eyes were very dark and bright.

Presently Dewsbury strode up and planted Le Roy's cap upon his head. When he drew away his hands there was a spontaneous cheer from the surrounding braves, for they all saw that Still Water's cap was now decorated with two very gorgeous white feathers.

The cheer roused Arbuthnot to an indignant sense of his own humiliation. He struggled, but Brelson and Sandwith restrained him.

"Let me get at him!" he cried. "What are you holding me back for?"

"*Cave! Cave!*" shouted one of the younger boys from the fringe of the crowd.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### SIX PER CENT.

IN the excitement, none had observed that a boat was approaching the little island, and Arbuthnot was still struggling to get at Le Roy when the compact circle of onlookers was broken, and Harvey Gilder stood in their midst. He wore a single white feather in the side of his cap, signifying that he remembered his duty towards the tribe when entering the reservation.

"What's all the row going on here?" he cried, looking round at the painted faces. They were difficult to recognise. "Is Golden Slipper here?—and Silence?" He caught sight of the two he had named. Lewis was now helping Arbuthnot to wrench himself free. "Oh, I see," Gilder nodded. "What has he been doing, Brelson? Why are you holding him as if he were a captive?"

Brelson and Sandwith drew back, releasing Arbuthnot, who glared at Le Roy and then turned and entered the wig-wam with his hand at his cheek.

Gilder followed him, staring curiously at the Indian lodge, and wondering how the tribe had contrived to manufacture it with such truth of detail in imitation of a real Redskin tee-pee. He saw some bundles of wicked-looking arrows and spears and long bows, and a rack of tomakawks neatly arranged.

He laid a hand on Arbuthnot's shoulder.

"You had better wash that mess off your face and make yourself look like a respectable Christian," he said. "And look smart, too. Mr. Eyre-Loftus wants you. What's up with your jaw that you're rubbing it that way? Have you been fighting?"

"No," growled Arbuthnot, "not exactly fighting;

but we should have been in another minute. Le Roy landed me one just now ; and all for nothing, too. What does the Head want me for ? ”

“ To have a little conversation with you, I believe,” returned Gilder. “ He wants Lewis as well. Perhaps you can guess what for.”

“ I’m sure I can’t,” denied Arbuthnot, searching for his cap.

Gilder backed out of the wig-wam and found Lewis in hot dispute with Brelson and Sandwith, whom he was accusing of unfairness in stopping what might have been a good fight. Le Roy and Dewsbury were strolling down the slope to the water’s edge.

“ You may as well stop to see the end of it, Still Water,” said Dewsbury. “ The fellows will think you are afraid of Arbuthnot.”

“ But I am not afraid of him,” returned Le Roy. “ I will make him fight me another time. I go now because there are some things which I wish to do, you understand. I come out here because they say I must. I did not know they intend to treat me that way. I think it was not fair play. I have no concern with Gilder’s album—absolutely none. Everyone make a great mistake if they think I have steal the Queen’s letter.”

“ That’s all right,” urged Dewsbury in a comforting tone. “ We know that you’d nothing to do with it. You don’t seem to see that this affair was only a trick of Brelson’s. Brelson didn’t think you would hold on so long ; neither did I. We thought you’d let out who it was.”

“ But that would have been what you call sneaking,” objected Le Roy. “ If Arbuthnot had shoved the burning stick right in my face, still I should not have spoken.”

They halted at the side of Gilder’s boat.

“ Brelson was right when he said you’d make a good brave,” said Dewsbury in sincere commendation. “ Of course, it was awfully fine of you not to betray the other chap ; but even if you had done, you wouldn’t have had to pay any penalty. Because, you know, we all wanted

to find the thief and enjoy the fun of expelling him from the tribe."

Gilder and Brelson joined them just then, and Lewis and Arbuthnot came slowly behind. Brelson had taken off his robe and head-dress, and wiped some of the paint from his face.

"Jump in," ordered Gilder. "Le Roy, are you coming ashore with us?"

"If I may," said Le Roy.

"Wax-Wing, you'll put my things away in the lodge, won't you?" Brelson asked. "Gilder wants me to go with him."

Lewis and Arbuthnot were left to find their own way back to Megson's.

Gilder took the oars, and Le Roy and Brelson sat facing him in the stern of the boat. Dewsbury pushed them off with a boat-hook.

"I want to have a talk with you two," began Gilder as soon as they were beyond earshot of the island. "The Head has been exchanging telegrams with a man in London, and he has found out about the sale of that autograph." He smiled at Le Roy. "That's a glorious pair of feathers you've got in your cap, Still Water," he remarked. "Do they mean that you've been made a chief?"

It was Brelson who answered.

"One of them signifies that he's a warrior," he said. "The other means that he has won a grand *coup*. He will soon be entitled to wear a war-bonnet the same as mine, only I expect Silence and Golden Slipper won't agree to that, after what Still Water did just now."

Brelson had already told his fagmaster of Le Roy's first experience as an Indian.

"What Lewis and Arbuthnot think need not matter very much, however," said Gilder, pulling an easy stroke. He glanced at his fag inquiringly. "Have you paid those three pounds that you borrowed from Lewis?" he asked.

Brelson moved uncomfortably.

"Yes," he answered.

"Did you pay him any interest on the loan?" pursued Gilder.

Brelson shook his head. "Not yet," he replied.

"Ah," nodded Gilder; "then don't. What interest does he charge?"

"Six per cent.," answered Brelson. "Six per cent. a month."

Gilder looked astonished.

"The young swindler!" he exclaimed. "That's exorbitant! It's preposterous. Are many of the fellows in his debt, do you know?"

"Rather!" returned Brelson, with emphasis. "He's banker for the whole school. His father's a diamond merchant, and Lewis is easily the richest fellow in Haddis-thorpe. He gets ten shillings a week pocket-money, and makes heaps more by lending it to chaps that are hard up."

"Go on; tell me all about him," urged Gilder; for Brelson had stopped abruptly. "Who is the largest debtor—do you know?"

Brelson hesitated.

"I suppose it's Runciman," he admitted at length. "Runciman owes him more than twenty pounds."

"Indeed?" cried Gilder, resting on his oars. "And yet you have allowed Lewis to be a member of the tribe—him, a common usurer who stoops to the meanness of making money out of his companions?"

"I didn't know that he was a usurer until a few days ago," protested Brelson. "It was only when I asked him to lend me those three pounds that I learned he charged interest. That put me on his trail, and it was after that that I discovered that more than half the school was in his debt."

Gilder turned to Le Roy.

"Did you know of it, Le Roy?" he questioned.

Le Roy shrugged his shoulders.

"But yes," he answered quietly. "It was because of that, you comprehend, that Lewis was able to influence the election of Runciman as head of the school."

"Ah!" Gilder dropped his oars in the water and gave two or three vigorous pulls. Then again he paused. "It seems to me," he remarked, "that there has been a

good deal too much secrecy in Haddisthorpe. It's all very well for fellows to refrain from sneaking, but when things of this sort go on, it's time to speak out."

"Pardon," interposed Le Roy; "but it was not Lewis who stole your autograph letter, Gilder."

"No; I know it wasn't," returned Gilder. "He did not actually take the letter, but he was a party to the theft, and it was he who managed the business of selling it. He got his father to go to the London dealer and do the bargaining. No; it wasn't Lewis. Do you happen to know who it was, Le Roy?"

Le Roy looked across the water to where Lewis and Arbuthnot were following in a second boat.

"I saw him doing it," he answered. "I had the occasion to go up to Monsieur Noël's room—it matters not for why—and I discovered someone with your album open on the table. Afterwards I went into your study and examined the album, and then I saw which letter it was that had been taken. It was the one which you had told me was worth much money—five pound, you said it was worth."

"Ugh!" grunted Brelson. "I suppose it was then that you left the mark of your finger on the page?"

"Ah! you have recognised the finger-mark?" cried Le Roy in consternation. "Yes; I made the mark by accident. There was some water on the table which got on to the cover of the album. I had touched the cover of the book, not knowing it was wet, and the colour made a stain on my finger which I unconsciously transferred to the space where the letter had been, you understand."

"You ought to have told all this before," reprimanded Gilder. "Brelson, here, thought it was you yourself who had taken the letter, and so did I for a bit, because I had seen you coming out of my room one night. And this morning, when Mr. Eyre-Loftus compared the finger-marks in my album and Brelson's tribe book, he was ready to convict you of the theft."

"Yes," added Brelson; "it was the finger-mark that put me on the wrong trail. If it hadn't been for that, and if I had followed up my first suspicions, I should

have dropped on the culprit days ago, and without putting him to the test that I employed just now on the island."

"How?" Le Roy turned his inquiring, dark eyes upon the boy beside him. "But you suspected it was I when you accused me while I was bound to the tree!"

"I wasn't certain," retorted Brelson. "I wasn't certain just at the first. But I was positive it was either you or Arbuthnot; and when I saw the way you looked at him, I didn't need to wait until his hand began to tremble to make sure that you were innocent and Arbuthnot guilty."

"It was Arbuthnot, was it, Le Roy, whom you saw in the act of taking the autograph from the album?" questioned Gilder.

Le Roy nodded. "Yes," he said. "But he did not know that I had seen him."

Gilder pulled the boat in to the landing-place and stepped ashore. He waited until Lewis and Arbuthnot also landed.

"On further consideration," he said to them in his most severe monitorial tone, "I have decided that it will not be necessary for you to trouble Mr. Eyre-Loftus just at present. He will see you later on. In the meantime, you had both better go indoors and pack up your boxes. You, Lewis, will please to leave out your ledger, in which, I understand, you keep an account of the amounts that you have put out to usury among your school-fellows. Mr. Eyre-Loftus will require it."

The two boys started back in alarm.

"Pack up our boxes?" Arbuthnot stammered guiltily. "What for? Have measles broken out?"

Lewis gave a hollow, unnatural laugh.

"Do you mean that we are to be sent home?" he asked.

"You are to be sent home—yes," returned Gilder. "You are both to be expelled."



## CHAPTER XVII:

### THE RAID ON LONG DORMITORY:

LEWIS might have distinguished himself as a scholar if he had given as much thought to his lessons as he bestowed upon the keeping of his accounts of loans made to his school-fellows. Mr. Eyre-Loftus, who examined his ledger, declared that the boy had shown quite a remarkable skill in book-keeping. Here every transaction was minutely recorded in debit and credit columns with such accuracy that one could tell at a glance the history of each loan, with name and dates, the amounts advanced, the amounts paid back, and the amount of interest due to the lender.

In the early days of his business in usury Lewis had dealt in modest sums of from threepence to a shilling, and had been willing to take as security for the loan a cricket ball, a pen-knife, a watch-chain, or some other article of value equal to the sum borrowed; and the interest charged had varied in its percentage according to his regard for the boy whom he thus accommodated. But gradually his business had increased until it was no uncommon thing for him to lend as much as ten shillings at a time, and even on some pressing occasions as much as a sovereign.

It did not matter to Lewis that he was acting illegally in extorting interest at the rate of something like sixty per cent. per annum. He had seemed to believe that he was justified in being extortionate in view of the risk that he incurred in lending money to minors whom he could not legally compel to pay back even the principal, letting alone the interest. He had a passion for money-making, and he was unscrupulous in his methods. He

would willingly lend to anyone who offered him a sufficient security; and if the money were not duly repaid he had ways of his own of proving to his debtors that they were in his power.

Brelson had not been far wrong when he declared to Gilder that nearly half the fellows in the school were more or less deeply in Lewis's clutches. His debtors were so much under his thumb that he could force them to do almost anything for him by threatening to expose them to their parents. And it was only one example of his power that he had been able to force so many of them to vote in favour of Runciman at the election for captain of the school.

He had found it profitable to employ Arbuthnot as his agent, and to offer him a commission of a halfpenny in the shilling, paid by the borrower. Boys who were hard up found it pleasanter sometimes to borrow from Arbuthnot rather than Lewis, and they never knew that it was from Lewis that the money came.

Runciman, for example, just about the time of his promotion to be head of the school, wanted to borrow four pounds. His debt to Lewis was already ominously large, and he had mortgaged nearly everything of value that he possessed, including his gold watch. He went to Arbuthnot, asking him for the loan. Arbuthnot in his turn secretly applied to Lewis; but Lewis had not so much cash to lay his hands on. The two usurers put their heads together. How were they to get a new supply? It was then that Arbuthnot conceived the daring plot of pilfering from Gilder's autograph album. He had read in a magazine article on rare autographs that a letter written by Queen Elizabeth or by Mary Stuart was of almost fabulous value. Gilder was known to possess a letter written by Mary Queen of Scots, and had been heard to value it at as much as five pounds. Arbuthnot said nothing even to Lewis of his scheme, but he watched his opportunity and succeeded in abstracting the document from Gilder's album. He then took it to Lewis, whom he persuaded to negotiate the sale. Lewis sent the letter to his father, and the diamond merchant, proud

of his son's business acumen, forwarded the purchase money by return of post, thoughtfully deducting twenty per cent. as commission on his own accord.

It was credited to Lewis that until after the money had come from London he was not aware that the autograph had been stolen. But when Gilder discovered the loss, and began to make inquiries concerning it, Lewis was culpably silent, and he was consequently deemed to be knowingly a confederate with Arbuthnot in the theft.

When it was known at Megson's that Lewis and Arbuthnot had been dismissed from the school, the boys who had been their unhappy victims were in high glee, believing that the money they owed to the two usurers would not now need to be paid. It is true that they were excused from paying any interest on the borrowed money, but they were not allowed to escape from their responsibilities. Mr. Eyre-Loftus placed the work of settling all financial grievances in the hands of Harvey Gilder. Lewis and Arbuthnot between them still had about fifty pounds left of the money they had received by the sale of the queen's letter. This sum was handed over to Gilder, and in return Lewis was content to accept twenty pounds down in full payment of what he called his book debts, which were to be collected by Gilder.

After Lewis and Arbuthnot had left, the moral tone of Megson's quickly improved, and Gilder found his duties as monitor much more easy, giving him more time to devote not only to his studies, but also to football. As captain of the renovated Megson fifteen, he led his team to victory in the second trial match of the season, and he had hopes of being able to win the challenge cup in the final tie.

Tetley and Le Roy both distinguished themselves in the trial match, and it was remarked upon as a curious circumstance that these two worked uncommonly well together on the field, passing and generously yielding chances to each other, notwithstanding that they were still at enmity and were only awaiting a fitting opportunity to bring off their fight.

Since the afternoon of his ordeal on the island, Le

Roy had become a great favourite with the braves of the White Feather tribe. They admired him for the way in which he had refused to flinch from the burning faggot that had been held within scorching distance of his face, and for the way in which, on being released from his bonds, he had flung himself upon Arbuthnot. But what they admired most in him was the fact that, knowing he was himself suspected of a serious crime, he had yet resisted the temptation of bearing witness against the actual thief.

"Still Water is easily the Indianest brave in all the tribe," Brelson remarked to his fagmaster one morning when Gilder questioned him on the subject. "He has proposed ever so many new rules for the Code. He's got the same idea as I have myself, that the value of a tribe like ours isn't so much in imitating the Redskins' habits and dress as in encouraging fellows to be handy with their fingers, and do things for themselves without being dependent on the help of civilisation. Irving Minor brought a bundle of shop-made arrows when he came back on Monday, but Still Water said that arrows are no good unless we make them ourselves. Mixon is reading up natural history so as to know about birds and animals the same as the Indians do; but Le Roy objects and says, rightly enough I think, that Indians never read books, but get all their information at first hand by studying the birds and animals off their own bat."

"He is quite right, too," agreed Gilder. "He is an advocate of original research, like Mr. Eyre-Loftus, who declares that he would rather any day have a pupil who learns things by observation than one who depends on what he cribs from a book."

"Still Water is that sort," continued Brelson. "Yesterday morning, when we were going across the field to school, he said to Dewsbury that it was a pity we weren't there a bit sooner, for we might have seen a water wagtail, and when we asked him what he meant he pointed to some mud, where there were a bird's footmarks. Dewsbury asked him how he knew that it was a water wagtail's trail, and then Le Roy pointed out that the bird had walked

and not hopped, and told us, which we didn't know before, that the wagtail is the smallest English bird that walks. But he knows more about Indians than anyone. I really believe that you were right, Gilder, when you said he might be a French-Canadian. There's lots of Indians in Canada, you know."

"I am surprised that you have not yet discovered his true nationality," remarked Gilder. "Have you never asked him to tell you his history?"

Brelson shook his head.

"I've asked him lots of things about himself," he answered, "but it isn't a bit of good. He's as secretive as any sphinx. He will never give himself away. That's one of his characteristics that I admire. If you've read much about Indians you must know that they're tremendously secretive, and that they'd sooner be scalped or flayed alive than tell anything that they don't want to."

If Brelson failed to penetrate the mystery in which Le Roy so securely wrapped himself, he had at least the gratification of knowing that no one else in the school was more successful. Le Roy seemed always to be on his guard against inquisitiveness on the part of his school-fellows, and he seldom by any chance let fall any expression or recalled any fact or circumstance which could lead to a betrayal of his secret.

It is probable that when he appeared to be least careful he was most on his guard; but there were occasions when Brelson could almost have believed that he was merely shamming to be a foreigner, and that, after all, he was as British as any boy in Megson's. Frequently, when engaged in an animated conversation, he would seem to forget his foreign accent and to speak pure and well-pronounced English. And often he would pick up knowledge and acquire skill so quickly, so unerringly, that it was hard to believe that he had ever been ignorant or unskilful. Sandwith once produced a peg-top in which Le Roy showed great curiosity, saying that he had never had one in his hands before. He watched Sandwith spin it, and then himself tried. After the second trial he could spin it every time, and nothing would persuade

Sandwith that he had not told a falsehood when he averred that he had never before had a peg-top in his hand.

Tetley, who grew more and more jealous of Le Roy's cleverness in lessons and his increasing skill in games, went about saying that the fellow was a rank impostor who ought to be exposed. But no one attempted to expose him, and Tetley observed with dismay that Le Roy was beginning to be regarded much more as a favourite in the school than he himself could claim to be. This annoyed him greatly, and he took advantage of every opportunity that came in his way of humiliating Le Roy in the eyes of their companions.

One night, after lights out, the word went round that the fellows in number three dormitory, who were all members of Brelson's tribe, were planning to make a raid on Long Dormitory, in which Tetley occupied a cubicle; and that Le Roy was to lead the assault.

The excitement in Long Dormitory was intense, for the Redskins had been unusually active of late, and there had been many successful raids and much innocent bloodshed.

Tetley got out of bed, and quietly marshalled his forces of hostile palefaces to repel the attack, arming his companions with pillows, slippers, leather straps, and other convenient weapons. The defenders hid themselves near the door and waited.

At about ten o'clock the attack began. Big Horn and Wax-Wing, Hawkeye and Knapweed crept in silently, with wooden scalping knives in their mouths. They were closely followed by some ten others, and when the last marauding savage was within, the defenders pounced out unexpectedly from their ambush and the battle began. Pillows were flung about or used as clubs, and slippers and straps were wielded noisily; wet sponges were squeezed down the backs of many of the braves, who failed to gain possession of a single scalp.

The raiders had been taken entirely by surprise, and their repulse was complete. They were driven from the room, and someone shut the door. Elated by their victory, the defenders waited for a second attack. Their

strategy was to hold the door for a time, and then suddenly let it fly open and fall upon the enemy as they rushed in, Tetley stood by the door with a sheet, which he intended to throw over the first Redskin who entered.

Hardly was he ready when someone turned the handle of the door and pushed vigorously. Suddenly the door was released and flung open, and a figure tumbled into the room, plunging head foremost into Tetley's sheet. Tetley swiftly wrapped it round him and bore the struggling intruder to the floor, sitting on him and belabouring him with the heel of a slipper.

To his surprise, there was no cry of pain or consternation, and the figure was considerably more bulky than he had expected Le Roy's to be. While he mercilessly plied his slipper, his comrades had banged to the door and were guarding it. Tetley called to them to help him, for a strong hand had seized him by the arm and a closed fist was digging into the small of his back. The body on which he sat astride moved under him with a sudden upheaval, flinging him violently over. Then he felt himself being lifted high in air. The door was opened, and he was carried struggling into the lighted corridor, where he was dumped down in a sitting posture against the wall.

"So, Tetley, you would play on me a trick, eh?" panted Monsieur Noël, staring down at him angrily.

"*You?*" gasped Tetley, alarmed at his mistake. "I didn't know that it was you, sir!"

"No, probably not," returned Monsieur Noël; "but now you know, and I recommend you not to forget. I shall see that the incident does not escape your memory. Return to your dormitory!"

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE BATTLE OF ELDER-TREE CAÑON.

ON the following morning Tetley declared his conviction that it was Le Roy who had told Monsieur Noël of what was going on in Long Dormitory. He did not pause to make inquiries, or he would have learned that Le Roy had taken no part in the raid ; that, indeed, he had been in bed all the time until, curious to know the cause of the commotion, he had gone to his study door and peeped over the banisters at the moment when Monsieur Noël was trying to force a way into the dormitory.

At breakfast Tetley passed a folded note along the table with Le Roy's name written on it.

Opening the slip of paper, evidently intended for himself, Le Roy read the pencilled words :

“Meet me after two this afternoon. Crawford will tell you where. H. Tetley.”

Le Roy handed the note to Sandwith, who sat next to him.

“You needn't ask Crawford to tell you,” whispered Sandwith, “if it's going to be a serious battle, Elder-Tree Cañon's the place. I'll be your second, if you like. I hope you're in good fighting form !”

By mysterious signs and secret whisperings it got to be known in the school that the postponed fight between Tetley and Le Roy was to take place that afternoon. Someone vaguely told Gilder that two of his fifteen were detained to do impositions, and he had, perforce, to take substitutes ; but as there was no match on that afternoon, but only practice, Gilder did not concern himself greatly.



At two o'clock Brelson was crossing from his classroom in the school towards the main staircase, when he observed Monsieur Noël pick up a newspaper which Mr. Davy, one of the other masters, had left lying on a bench. He opened the paper hurriedly, apparently searching for some particular section of news, which, when found, he read with avidity. A few moments afterwards Brelson again passed him and saw him replace the newspaper where he had found it. There was a strange look of agitation on Monsieur Noël's face.

"Do you happen to know where Le Roy is, Brelson?" the professor asked.

"He is just coming down, sir," Brelson answered, glancing in the direction of the staircase. "Shall I go and tell him you want him? Oh, here he is!"

Le Roy came lightly down the stairs, buttoning his jacket over his football shirt. He approached Monsieur Noël, who again took up the newspaper and handed it to him, pointing to a column that was folded outward. Le Roy went aside and read it with the same agitated, eager interest that had been betrayed by Monsieur Noël.

Brelson wondered what the item of news could be that was of such evident importance to them both. He saw Le Roy drop the paper on the bench and go out into the open air looking extremely disconcerted. Monsieur Noël accompanied him, resting a hand on his shoulder and speaking with him very earnestly.

Sandwith, Dewsbury, and others of Brelson's particular companions trooped noisily down the stairs. Brelson joined them, and in passing the bench he snatched up the discarded newspaper and furtively concealed it under his jacket. He had seen Mr. Davy throw it there as though he had done with it, and there was no harm in taking it.

He imagined for a moment that Monsieur Noël and Pierre Le Roy might have been studying the odds on some horse race. His curiosity was excited, and he wanted to discover what it was that could be of such vital interest to them. That it was of extreme importance to

the younger foreigner he felt sure, for afterwards when Le Roy joined his companions, who waited for him on the gravel playground, he was extremely pale and nervous, whereas a few minutes earlier he had been peculiarly buoyant and light-hearted.

"Buck-up, Still Water!" urged Sandwith. "You're not funkng at the last minute, are you? You're not afraid of being licked by a blooming paleface?"

Le Roy shrugged his shoulders, and a sigh escaped him.

"I am indifferent—absolutely indifferent," he responded slowly. "If Tetley lick me, I care nothing—nothing. The cause for which we are to fight is so little, so unimportant."

"But it was you who challenged him," Sandwith protested. "You can't draw back."

"I know." Le Roy shook himself. "Therefore I shall fight him and take the consequences."

A crowd had gathered in the sheltered hollow, behind the plantation, and a ring had been formed. Le Roy entered it, followed by Sandwith, and saw his opponent standing ready, backed by Crawford, who was acting as his second.

Le Roy slowly took off his jacket and quietly rolled up his shirt sleeves. It was obviously not the first time that he had engaged in such a battle, and he was known to have taken lessons in boxing at Haddisthorpe. He seemed, in Brelson's judgment, to be in excellent fighting form, but his opponent was taller by at least two inches and bulked heavier, and Tetley's envy and jealousy of Le Roy, and his desire to excel him in some one art gave him an energy which Le Roy lacked.

"Ready?" cried the umpire.

"Ready!" responded the two seconds.

Tetley stepped into the centre. Le Roy met him. They sparred for an opening. Tetley led with his left, but Le Roy got beyond range. His opponent followed him, and shot out a hard blow which glanced off Le Roy's uplifted arm. With an agile spring Le Roy was back again in the centre. For some moments there was feinting on both sides, and then a thud and a smack. The first

was a heavy blow on Le Roy's ribs, the second was Le Roy's left hook counter on Tetley's cheek. Then they broke away and sparred and feinted again, Tetley pacing swiftly round several times with cautious steps as Le Roy turned slowly to correspond. They were both extremely lively on their feet. Tetley rushed in and jabbed with his right and left at Le Roy's face, but Le Roy's strong guard arm was quick to ward each blow.

"Time!" cried the umpire.

Coming up for the second round, Tetley feinted once or twice, and then threw a stiff, half-round blow with his left at Le Roy's jaw. There was a sharp crack like a pistol shot, and presently a thread of red moisture trickled from the corner of Le Roy's lips. A roar of applause arose from Tetley's side of the ring. Le Roy wiped his chin with the back of his hand, and the sight of the crimson stain nettled him. He rushed in with his head down, but was stopped by a skilfully delivered upper-cut from Tetley's right, and he staggered forward with both knees on the grass.

Tetley was not yet injured, and he breathed easily as he leaned against Crawford's knee. Le Roy's face was flushed; he had been getting the worst of it, but he was still sufficiently courageous to enter the third round.

For many minutes they sparred and parried and feinted, traversed the ring, and then traversed it again. Then Le Roy, seeing an opening, lunged forward at Tetley's face with all his might behind a blow straight from the shoulder. Tetley staggered back with his hand across his eyes, but kept his feet and rushed in. They clinched. Tetley's left arm wrapped itself round Le Roy's neck, and by main force he drew Le Roy's head down into chancery, peppering quickly-repeated blows on his forehead.

At this instant Brelson was flung aside, Sandwith was thrown upon his back, and Monsieur Noël strode into the ring and seized both combatants in his strong grip, wrenching them asunder and holding them apart at arm's length. The circle of excited onlookers scattered in



"MONSIEUR NOËL . . . SEIZED BOTH COMBATANTS IN HIS STRONG GRIP." (p. 124).



confusion. Tetley wriggled and struggled and broke himself free. Then Monsieur Noël caught Le Roy in his embrace, lifted him, and carried him bodily away.

Brelson followed him silently in among the trees and saw him lay Le Roy on his back on a bank and begin to wipe the boy's face with his own handkerchief, leaning over him anxiously, with astonishing solicitude. Then both of them spoke, Monsieur Noël chidingly, Le Roy with pleading. Brelson caught the tone of their voices, but the words were strange to him; he could not understand them. He crept nearer, listening. Yes; he was not making any mistake. The language they were speaking was neither French nor German, neither Latin nor Greek, nor any other tongue that he had ever heard.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE PROFESSOR'S MESSAGE.

BRELSON went about his fagmaster's room needlessly tidying the books, straightening the pictures, and in other ways delaying his exit.

"May I ask what you are hanging about here for, Brelson?" Gilder asked, looking up from the table at which he was working. "If there's anything you want to talk about, I am sure you needn't be shy. What is it? Are you anxious to tell me about that fight? You were there, of course. You are usually present when there is anything exciting going on. Who had the worst of it—Tetley? I noticed that he'd got damaged. I never knew him to be worsted before, and as for his allowing himself to get a black eye, it's altogether unprecedented."

Brelson went nearer to the table.

"He's got two black eyes, and can hardly see out of either of them," he declared with a nod of satisfaction. "The blow was straight from the shoulder, and it landed him full on the bridge of the nose. Le Roy got it awfully hot, though. He allowed himself to get into chancery. He wasn't half quick enough; and everyone says he'd have been badly beaten if Monsieur Noël hadn't come up and separated them."

"Le Roy ought never to have challenged a man like Tetley," observed Gilder. "He might as well have pitted himself against Mr. Eyre-Loftus in construing Thucydides. He hadn't the ghost of a chance."

Brelson strolled to the window and looked out across the grey land. Then he returned to the table.

"Something rather queer happened at the end of the fight," he said. "Noël hadn't paid much attention to

Tetley. He was wild with him, of course, and said something about severe punishment. But it was with Le Roy that he was mostly concerned. He was like a squaw protecting her solitary papoose, and he seemed to be fearfully anxious about whether he'd been injured. He picked Le Roy up in his arms and carried him out of the ring and laid him flat on his back, and then began to examine him and attend to him like a regular doctor."

"That was very good of him, certainly," remarked Gilder.

"Yes, it was good," agreed Brelson; "but it was also queer, I thought. I couldn't understand it myself, believing, as I've always believed, that Noël dislikes Le Roy. But that wasn't the only thing that puzzled me. What surprised me more than his unexpected tenderness was that I heard them talking to each other, not in English, but in an outlandish patter of which I couldn't understand a single word. They spoke it quickly, too; as if it were natural to them."

"Indeed!" Gilder listened with new interest. "That was decidedly queer. Did they know that you were listening?"

Brelson shook his head.

"No," he answered; "as soon as Noël heard me behind him he suddenly altered his tone and began to speak French; and then I understood him well enough. He reminded Le Roy that he'd warned him many a time against Tetley."

Gilder leaned back in his chair, reflectively nibbling the end of his pen.

This was the first evidence he had received that anyone else than himself had heard Prosper Noël and Pierre Le Roy conversing in an unfamiliar tongue.

"It was extraordinary, of course, their talking in a strange, incomprehensible, foreign language like that," he casually observed; "but I don't know that it affects the honour of the school, Brelson; and I hardly see why you should concern yourself about the incident. It has nothing to do with you or me, or anyone else."

"Perhaps not," Brelson admitted; "but, all the same,



there's something odd about those two, and somehow I can't help being a bit inquisitive. Why should they try to hide the fact that they can both talk a language that nobody else in the school can understand? It seems to me that there's some secret between them, and that they're not such strangers to one another as they've always tried to make themselves out to be. I've watched them, though, and I've more than once seen them look at each other in a way that could only mean that they're confederates, or something of that sort."

"Confederates?" Gilder repeated the word with an amused smile.

"Well, there's something rocky about them both, I'm convinced," Brelson went on. He drew a newspaper from the inner pocket of his jacket and unfolded it. "This afternoon," he said, "I saw Monsieur Noël point out something that he'd found in this newspaper which he handed to Le Roy. Le Roy read it and turned fearfully white about the gills. He moved as if he had been struck. I believe it was what he read that made him indifferent about entering the fight immediately afterwards. I've not been able to find out what it was that disturbed him so; but it was on this outside page. Perhaps you can discover. I'll leave the paper here with you."

He laid it carefully on Gilder's table and went away. Gilder continued with his studies, but presently his curiosity drew him towards the newspaper, and he scanned the columns which his fag had indicated in search of some name or reference which might be connected with Monsieur Noël and Pierre Le Roy.

Among the reports of law cases he found a paragraph concerning a disputed legacy in which the name of de Nolhac appeared. The name was not widely unlike Noël, he thought. Another case which for a moment arrested his attention was that of a claim upon certain gold-bearing land in Alaska. He asked himself if this might be the matter in which the two foreigners were interested. There was a vague idea in his mind that Le Roy was a French-Canadian, and Alaska was just over the Canadian frontier. He read the report through, but it did not

enlighten him. He turned to the foreign news on the same page, and came upon an account of some disturbances in Algiers between a tribe of Kabyle people and some French soldiers, and it occurred to him as possible that Noël or Le Roy, or perhaps both of them, had some connection with the French colony of Algiers, and that the language which had so puzzled himself and Brelson was some Arabic dialect.

He threw the newspaper impatiently aside, and went on with his work, vexed at having wasted his time to so little purpose. Had he continued his search, a reference to the revolution in Leskovia might have excited his keener curiosity, and possibly the item of news in relation to that political upheaval would have supplied some key to the identity of at least one of his house companions. But Gilder was not so inquisitive as his fag, and to Brelson—even though he had read the paragraph which had agitated Monsieur Noël and caused Le Roy abruptly to lose interest in his combat with Tetley—the name of Leskovia suggested no surprising conclusion, and accordingly it followed that the mystery remained for the time veiled and inscrutable.

In the ensuing weeks of that term very little of moment occurred at Haddisthorpe. Football absorbed all the time and energy that were not devoted to lessons, but even the football matches were not particularly thrilling, since there were no other schools in the neighbourhood against which to play, and the contests were hardly more than mere trials of house against house.

The final tie for the school challenge cup was between Runciman's team and the Megsonites, and Runciman's fifteen won the trophy by two goals and three tries to two goals and two tries. Gilder was disappointed. Notwithstanding that his fifteen had suffered by the loss of Lewis and Arbuthnot, he had yet drilled his men so well that he had been justified in hoping for the cup, and indeed everyone believed that the Megsonites would have had the victory but for Tetley's failure to take a chance at a critical moment. Fearon, Runciman, and Arlingford were travelling towards the south line at top speed when

Le Roy interposed. He passed to Tetley, who might easily have scored a goal, and ought certainly to have gained possession of the ball had he not allowed Fearon to slip in front of him and take the ball the full length of the field, winding up the run by sprinting across the line and gaining the third try for his side.

Gilder's disappointment at being beaten by so narrow a margin was acute, but he consoled himself with the remembrance of his victories in cricket, and his disappointment, although poignant at the time, was soon forgotten in the terrible and mysterious tragedy which happened at Haddisthorpe just before the Christmas holidays.

Most of the boys were then in training for the school sports, and on a certain Saturday Runciman, who said that he wanted a lot of exercise, decreed that there was to be a paper chase, in which all who were old enough and physically fit were to join.

The winter weather was cloudy, and a damp sea-mist hung upon the marshes, making the trees stand out like ghostly sentinels along the lanes. Gilder and Fearon were the hares, and they started off with their bags of "scent" in the direction of Alvington, a village six miles off. The hounds were allowed fifteen minutes' law. But Brelson, who prided himself on his skill in tracking, declared that he would have been just as well satisfied had the time allowance been half an hour. His braves were all with him, each wearing a tribal feather in the front of his cap, and many of them had boots with india-rubber soles to enable them to run silently.

The hounds gathered in the green playground at the back of the school.

"Gilder's sure to give us a lot of false scents," Brelson remarked to Sandwith and Le Roy, who were with him near the outer gate. "He's awfully tricky at that sort of thing. But we shall run them to earth miles before they get to Floxley Mill. The ground is moist, you see." He pointed to the mud in the gateway. "Those foot-marks with the nails in the heels are Fearon's," he said; "those with the wide toes are Gilder's. If we follow them, we needn't look out for scraps of paper."

Runciman blew a shrill whistle, and at once the forty or fifty hounds made off in the direction taken by the two hares. Their wild yells startled the birds in the thicket as the pack of them passed into the stubble field. The last of them were hurrying through the gate when Monsieur Noël met them and glanced at them searchingly. He had come up from the village, and there was a letter in his hand. He caught at Dewsbury's arm and ran with him a few paces.

"Where is Gilder?" he questioned, crushing his soft felt hat lower about his brows. "Do you know?"

"He's one of the hares," Dewsbury answered. "I daresay they're a couple of miles away by now, sir. Do you want him?"

"Yes," returned Monsieur agitatedly. "It is most necessary that I speak with him." He continued running at Dewsbury's side.

"I'm afraid you won't see him for hours yet, sir," Dewsbury returned. "Can I give him a message from you?"

"No; I will see Le Roy instead," panted Monsieur. "Is he also running in this chase?"

"Yes; he's in front with Arlingford and Sandwith," Dewsbury told him. "You can catch up to him if you run quickly."

Monsieur Noël quickened his pace, but Le Roy had got a long start of him, and he soon realised that it was useless for him to continue. At the first stile he stopped, panting, and holding his side. Tetley and Crawford came behind him and stared at him, thinking he was ill.

Crawford stopped.

"Are you ill, sir?" he asked.

"No—no," Monsieur Noël answered promptly. "It is only that I am not accustomed to the running. I want Le Roy. He must come back. You will run after him, will you? And——" He thrust his hand into his inner pocket, and drew from it a long leather case. "Give him this; he will understand."

Tetley had returned to the stile.

"Come along, Crawford!" he urged impatiently. "What are you stopping for?" He flung an angry look at Monsieur. "What are you jawing about? Come along!"

Crawford took the leather case that the professor pressed into his hand, wondering what it might be, and wondering more than all why it was so necessary that it should be delivered to Le Roy in the midst of a paper chase.

"All right, sir," he shouted back as he leapt the stile.

"Has he got the cheek to ask you to do his errands for him in playtime?" questioned Tetley. "Well, you are a cuckoo, and no mistake! Chuck the thing in the ditch. What is it?"

Crawford ran on at Tetley's side.

"I'm sure I don't know," he answered. "It's something that he wants me to give to Le Roy."

He examined the leather case as he trotted at Tetley's heels through the narrow path of the thicket. He even went so far as to draw off the loose lid. Then he came to a sudden halt.

"Tetley!" he cried excitedly. "Tetley, look here, quick!"

Tetley turned back and saw what it was that Crawford had discovered. The leather case contained a long and formidable-looking dagger, with an ivory handle mounted with bands of silver. Crawford drew the weapon from its sheath. The bright steel blade, which was double-edged, tapered to a fine sharp point. At sight of the thing Tetley drew back.

"Is it *that* that he wants you to give to Le Roy?" he cried. "What for? What does he expect Le Roy to do with it?"

Crawford thrust the dagger back into the case and met his companion's astonished gaze.

"Goodness only knows!" he muttered.

## CHAPTER XX.

### WHAT GILDER SAW IN THE PLANTATION.

"I SAY, Harvey, where are we? Do you know?"

Fearon and Gilder had passed through the villages of Alvingham and Medlingthorpe without a stop, laying their scent as they ran. They had crossed the river by the foot-bridge at Floxley old mill, and had turned southward for home at an easy trot by the road at the side of Bartle Broad, when the mist thickened and obscured their way. Once or twice they had heard the foremost of the hounds behind them, but they had put on speed and laid a false scent, and not since about a mile beyond Medlingthorpe had they seen any sign of their pursuers. And now they were on the homeward lap, crossing the marshland somewhere in the direction of Haddisthorpe. The white fog enveloped them as a shroud, obliterating all landmarks.

"I say, Harvey, where are we? Do you know?" questioned Fearon. "We ought not to have left the road. We're lost!"

"Lost?" echoed Gilder. "Not a bit of it. We're all right if we keep straight ahead. We shall come to Haddisthorpe Bridge presently."

"No, we shall not," declared Fearon; "we've gone off the track. I'm certain we came along this way only a few minutes ago. Look!" He pointed to the ground. "There are our footprints leading in the other direction! We're going back towards the road!"

Gilder stooped to examine the footprints.

"You're right," he acknowledged; "we must have doubled that time when we crossed the drain! I say, this is awkward! I hope the hounds have given up the

chase. Some of those youngsters will get lost, and there'll be no end of trouble in finding them all."

Fearon led the way forward, but the farther he went the more doubtful he became of his direction. At length he drew to a halt at the side of a ditch.

"This is the place where we came over, I believe," he said; "we shall get back to the road this way." And he leapt the narrow stream.

Gilder followed him, but suddenly called him back.

"We've gone all wrong!" he cried excitedly. "Those were not our own footmarks that we noticed. They can't have been! Just look at the impression you have yourself made in the mud here. Your boots have got big nails in them; the others hadn't, and mine are square toes; both the others were pointed!"

Fearon stared at the marks and admitted his error.

"Cinders!" he exclaimed ruefully. "We've lost our reckoning altogether now. I haven't the ghost of an idea where we are, although, of course, we can't be very far from Haddisthorpe. We ought to have some of Brelson's trackers with us now. It would test their skill to find their way out of this labyrinth."

They stood together, wondering which way to turn. They could see the forms of the bushes and trees dimly through the fog, but the trees were unfamiliar. Gilder strode towards one of them and walked round it.

"Your mention of Brelson has given me an idea," he smiled. "I remember the youngster once saying that he could tell the points of the compass by a tree. The moss grows mostly on the north side, and the biggest branches are always to the south. According to his way of reckoning we have been coming eastward, and that ought to be right for home." He strode to another tree and confirmed his judgment. As he glanced at the rough bark, he noticed a deep cut across it at a height about three feet from the ground. "Do you see that mark?" he inquired of his companion. "That's a blaze made by one of Brelson's tomahawks. It has been done for fun, but it should prove a useful guide to us now in this beastly fog."

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He went from tree to tree, and presently discovered that the blazed track led in a precise and direct line. The blaze was always on the north side of the tree. Following Brelson's trail, the two hares came at length within sight of a bulky, dark object that loomed grimly through the mist.

"We're all right now!" declared Gilder. "I know where we are. That is the old hulk that they say is haunted, and we can get along to the bridge by the river path."

They walked nearer to the desolate hulk that was stranded high and dry on the foreshore and grown round about with nettles and rank grass. Gilder started back a step, and clutched at his companion's arm.

"Listen!" he whispered in an awed tone.

The murmur of voices reached them, seeming to come from the inside of the abandoned vessel. One was a man's deep voice, the other might be a boy's. Gilder heard the murmured words, but did not understand them, for they were spoken in the strange, guttural, foreign tongue in which Prosper Noël and Pierre Le Roy had carried on their secret conversations.

"Queer!" muttered Gilder.

Fearon had already moved away from him to the footpath. As he rejoined him, Gilder looked backward over his shoulder, but saw only the black, dismantled hulk and the shadowy bushes dimmed by the white mist.

"That's queer!" he reiterated, falling into the measure of Fearon's trotting step.

"What's queer?" asked Fearon.

"Why," returned Gilder, "queer that Noël and Le Roy should be talking together in such a place."

"What makes you think it was them?" questioned Fearon. "You didn't see them, did you?"

"No; but it was them, nevertheless," Gilder declared. "Le Roy must have dropped out from the paper-chase. I wonder why?"

"I shouldn't be surprised at some of the hounds having passed us," suggested Fearon. "I daresay a lot of them



took our false scent at Medlingthorpe. In that case they'll be home long before us."

He had hardly spoken when there came the patter of many feet on the wooden bridge some fifty yards away.

"There they are!" cried Gilder. "Don't let us run into them! Lie low till they've all gone over."

They waited under one of the dripping trees, listening. When the last stragglers seemed to have passed across the bridge the two hares stole out and trudged homeward to the school.

Brelson and Dewsbury, who had kept together throughout the chase, followed them across the playground. A few minutes afterwards Le Roy entered alone. Lastly came Arlingford and Crawford, who, as responsible prefects, had followed in the rear to ensure that none of the younger boys dropped out and got lost in the fog.

Anxious to discover if any of his pack had gone astray, Runciman had the roll called. Every boy answered to his name excepting Tetley.

Inquiries were made for the missing boy. Someone said that he had been home a long time, and that he had gone into the school buildings. Therefore Runciman was satisfied with the afternoon's sport, in spite of the fact that he had failed to run the hares to earth. And the boys dispersed to their various houses.

When Gilder returned to Megson's he had a second roll-call, and Tetley again was absent.

"Has anyone seen him?" he inquired. "Who was it that said he'd gone into the school?"

No one seemed to know anything definite concerning him. Crawford had run with him as far as Medlingthorpe, but had there missed him, and had not seen him since. Le Roy had passed him on Floxley Bridge, and he had then appeared to be all right. Sandwith had seen him running on ahead, beyond Floxley, and he was then alone, following up the trail.

Gilder decided to give Tetley half an hour's grace, and went up to his room. But the half-hour went by and tea was over, and still Tetley did not put in an appearance.

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Mr. Megson entered the common room while the younger boys were at their evening meal.

"Do any of you happen to have seen Monsieur Noël?" he asked.

Brelson, who was carrying out his fagmaster's tray, said:

"Shall I see if he is up in his room, sir?"

"Yes," returned Mr. Megson, "although I don't think you will find him there. I am beginning to get rather anxious about him."

Gilder was changing his clothes when Brelson went into his study. The fag laid his tea without speaking, then crossed the passage, and peeped into Monsieur Noël's room.

"What do you want in there, Brelson?" questioned Gilder.

"I'm looking for Monsieur Noël," Brelson explained.

"He is all right; you needn't trouble about him," observed Gilder. "He will be here presently. Which way did you fellows come along to the bridge? You didn't follow on our track all the time."

"Oh yes, we did, though," declared Brelson. "Wax-Wing, Still Water, and I did, even when you left the road and came across Dismal Swamp. You laid no scent on the swamp, and we had to separate."

"Which of you came round by the old hulk?" Gilder asked. "Was it Le Roy?"

"Le Roy? Ugh! How did you know?"

"Never mind," laughed Gilder; "go and see if Tetley has come in."

At seven o'clock neither Noël nor Tetley had returned. Crawford, who was Tetley's particular companion, and who was afraid that some accident had happened to him, was the first to suggest that a search party should go out, and he nervously reminded Gilder of the enmity between Tetley and Monsieur Noël.

"Their enmity has nothing to do with their both being absent," Gilder assured him. "I expect Tetley has sprained his ankle or something of that sort. But we must search for him. He may need help."

Lanterns were lighted, and Arlingford and Sandwith went out to get further help from some of the senior boys at the school, who agreed to retrace the ground covered in the paper chase.

Gilder elected to make search in the immediate neighbourhood of Megson's. He privately believed that Monsieur Noël, at least, was not far away, certainly not farther away than the old hulk on the other side of the river. Borrowing his fag's bull's-eye lantern, he went out alone into the darkness. There was a nearer way to Haddisthorpe Bridge than the one round by the village and the school. It was a narrow footpath leading out of Primrose Lane into the plantation and across the ploughed fields. It was out of bounds, but that was a circumstance not likely to affect either Tetley or Monsieur Noël if either happened to be in a hurry to reach home after dusk.

Swinging his lantern from side to side, Gilder entered the plantation, walking slowly and making his way with difficulty through the network of branches and tangled undergrowth until he reached the footpath. The trees dripped with moisture and the ground was soft. The lantern shot a long, widening gleam of light into the white mist, and made weird moving shadows among the grey trunks of the beeches.

He emerged into an open glade, where the trees had been felled. Here he came to a sudden halt. He heard the snapping of twigs, the hurried rustling of feet among withered leaves. He stood very still, listening. Then, from the farther side of the clearing there came to him, breaking sharply on his ears, a cry for help. He ran forward, stumbled over a fallen tree, and dropped his lantern, but managed to save it while the wick still burned.

Rising quickly to his feet again, he went onward. He heard, or fancied that he heard, a low moan of pain. Swaying his lantern to and fro, he searched excitedly. In the luminance he saw a moving figure. The light shone upon a white and brown striped shirt, which told him at once that the figure was that of one of his school-fellows. Many of the hounds had worn their football shirts during the paper chase.

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"Tetley!" he shouted. "Tetley! Is that you?"

Tetley was kneeling in the grass. His right arm was uplifted as if about to strike at something on the ground, and in his right hand he gripped a long weapon with a blade that gleamed.

"*Tetley!*"

He turned round, startled at the imperative call of his name. Then he leapt to his feet and ran off, disappearing quickly among the black shadows of the trees.

What had he been doing?

Gilder strode forward to the place where he had been kneeling, sweeping the lantern rays before him as he went. Suddenly he shrank and stood gazing in horror upon the ground. In front of him lay the inert form of a man. He was on his back. His arms were flung outward from his sides. His vest had been wrenched open, and on the front of his exposed white shirt there was an ominous dark red stain, partly covered by the ends of a large black silk necktie.

Gilder directed the lantern light into the unconscious man's pale, upturned face. The heavy black moustache, the dark eyebrows, the finely shaped nose and smooth white forehead were unmistakable.

It was the face of Prosper Noël.

He bent over and caught up one of the hands. It was still warm, but the fingers gave no response to his touch.

"Monsieur Noël?" he murmured with bated breath.

He relinquished his hold, and the lax arm dropped with a dull thud upon the ground.

"Monsieur Noël?" he repeated excitedly. He gently drew his finger over one of the closed eyes.

"*Dead!*" he exclaimed in an awed whisper, and, realising the dreadful truth, he set off at a run in pursuit of Tetley.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### CRAWFORD'S ACCOUNT OF IT.

QUIVERING in every nerve with the mingled horror and excitement of his awful discovery, Harvey Gilder ran on into the path leading in the direction of Haddisthorpe bridge. It was by this way that Tetley had disappeared. The fog and the darkness combined had speedily hidden him, but as his shadowy figure passed into the gloom he had seemed to Gilder to run with a painful limp. If he had lamed himself, he would not go far before being overtaken. Yet he had gone swiftly, stealthily, evidently with the object of escaping recognition by the person who had called aloud his name.

For a moment only Gilder heard the throb of the fugitive's feet on the soft ground. Then there was the sound of a blow, followed by a suppressed cry of pain, as though in his precipitate flight Tetley had run against a tree or some other obstacle and hurt himself. After this there was silence, and then a hurried movement among the shrubs; but at which side of the path Gilder could not determine. It occurred to him that Tetley was probably trying to make his way out of the plantation into the fields beyond, or that perhaps he was endeavouring merely to baffle pursuit by leaving the beaten path.

Closing the shutter of his lantern, Gilder stood still, listening. All was silent; terribly, oppressively silent. He resolved to summon help, and at the same time cut off Tetley's escape, by gaining the road in advance of him. He ran on, keeping to the path through the plantation and across the two fields, thence by the corner of an orchard into the road near the bridge. There he halted and opened his lantern, flashing the light from side to side.

He heard hurried footsteps approaching him. Two figures loomed through the mist, then a third and a fourth.

"Hello, Gilder!"

It was Arlingford who greeted him.

"Stop, you fellows!" he commanded, turning the light into their faces. He saw that Arlingford's companions were Fearon, Sandwith, and Crawford.

"What's up?" Fearon cried. "Have you found Tetley?"

Gilder did not reply directly.

"Something awful has happened," he announced in a solemn voice. "Monsieur Noël is lying dead in the plantation. Sandwith," he ordered, peremptorily, "run to the village for Dr. Harris! Fetch him here to the bridge. I will wait for him."

Sandwith immediately turned on his heel and ran back.

"*Dead*, did you say?" questioned Arlingford, in amazement. And the three anxiously awaited Gilder's answer.

He nodded.

"Yes, quite dead, I believe. Tetley is somewhere about, too. We must catch him. He must not be allowed to escape. I expect he will come out by the path here. He's not likely to go back to Megson's. But he might get through across the fields. I wish some of the other fellows were here to help!"

"But why should Tetley escape?—and escape from what?" inquired Arlingford.

"Isn't he with Monsieur Noël?" asked Fearon.

"No, he is not with Monsieur Noël," Gilder quietly responded. "He has run away. He is hiding somewhere in the plantation. Monsieur Noël is alone."

"Alone?" repeated Crawford. "Ought you to have left him? If he is ill—if you are not certain that he is dead—ought not some of us to go to him at once and help him home?"

"I am afraid—indeed, I am sure—that he is beyond all help," Gilder declared. "And it is not ordinary illness. He has been attacked and killed—assassinated."

Crawford gave a cry of startled consternation, and stared with curious intentness into Gilder's face.

"Do you mean—by Tetley?" he gasped.

Gilder met his intent, searching gaze.

"I did not say so," he returned with hesitation. "But I am awfully afraid that it is so."

His three companions crowded close to him, anxiously curious.

"Listen," he went on. "Let me explain. It was in the wood at the back of Megson's. I was coming through, searching for both of them—Noël and Tetley. When I got into the clearing I saw Tetley. His back was towards me, but I knew it was he. There was a dagger in his right hand, and he was bending over Monsieur Noël, who lay flat on his back. I shouted to Tetley. He got up and ran off, taking his weapon along with him. He had stabbed his victim in the breast. It was an awful wound! Monsieur Noël did not answer when I spoke to him. His eyes were closed; he was not breathing. He was already unconscious. I chased Tetley for a bit along the path; but he took cover, and I lost track of him. So I came on here. That's all I know. Now you all understand why Tetley must be caught." He glanced along the road over Crawford's shoulder. "Who's this coming towards us?" he asked. "Stop him—quick!"

Arlingford ran up to the person who was approaching through the fog, and seized him. But it was not Tetley. It was a boy named Bamlett.

"Run back to the school, Bamlett," Gilder ordered. "Fetch Mr. Eyre-Loftus. Tell him something serious has happened. Say I sent you. Go on! Don't stop for an explanation!"

When Bamlett had gone, Gilder drew his companions on to the narrow bridge.

"We had better stay here," he said, leaning against the post of the lighted lamp. "Have any of the fellows gone along the road in search of Tetley?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," returned Fearon, "a crowd of them, led by Runciman. They're going the whole round of our run this afternoon."

They were all silent for some moments.

"I wish I'd stayed a bit longer, and made sure," sighed

Gilder. "I think I ought to go back without waiting for the Head and Dr. Harris."

Still he lingered.

Crawford was leaning on the parapet of the bridge with his head in his clasped hands. Almost unconsciously he saw a dim light moving down the river, and heard the panting machinery of a small electric launch. Gilder heard the panting, also, and glanced over, thinking it curious that a boat should be at work in the fog, and on a Saturday night.

"I believe that's the police launch," he remarked. But not until the boat had passed under the bridge and out of sight down the stream did he reflect that the police might have given valuable assistance.

Crawford stood back from the parapet.

"May I go with you, Gilder?" he asked abruptly. "Perhaps you don't care to go back alone."

"But what about Tetley?" Gilder demurred.

"Arlingford and I will keep a watch for him," Fearon suggested. "And there'll be a crowd of fellows here soon. We'll form a cordon round the plantation if he doesn't come out. I expect he's hiding."

"Come on, then, Crawford," nodded Gilder. And, looking back at Arlingford, he added, "Bring the Head and the Doctor after us when they come up. And perhaps, if he can be found, Constable Sharland ought to come as well."

Crawford accompanied him over the stile and on to the orchard path. They walked together in silence until they reached the open field.

"Gilder!"

"Yes."

"You're sure it was Tetley you saw, are you?" Crawford asked.

"Perfectly sure," Gilder responded. "He had on his football shirt. All the other fellows had changed. He was the only one out. Besides, I saw his face. Otherwise, I should not have dared to suggest that he could be guilty of such a horrible act."

Crawford breathed deeply. He almost groaned.



"Did you see the—the weapon?" he questioned.

"Yes. I told you I saw it." Gilder answered. "He held it up in his fist as if he were about to strike a second time. I believe he would have done so if I hadn't shouted to him. But the first blow was bad enough, goodness knows!"

"He must have gone clean out of his mind!" commented Crawford. "What was the dagger like? Was it long and very bright, tapering to a thin point? Had it an ivory and silver handle?"

Gilder looked round in surprise, turning the lantern light into his companion's face.

"Why do you ask that?" he inquired sharply. "Have you seen him with it?"

Crawford coughed uneasily.

"He was my chum, you know," he said slowly. "But for all that, I feel bound to tell you what I know. You remember that scrap he had with Le Roy in the pupil-room, of course? It was about the smoking of a cigarette in Le Roy's study. Monsieur Noël interfered, and flung Tetley on the floor. Tetley vowed that he would have vengeance. Then, again, there was the occasion when Tetley made an attack on Monsieur Noël in our dormitory and sat on him, and hammered him with the heel of a slipper. Tetley and Monsieur Noël have been at loggerheads all through the term. And now it has come to this! I am sure that Tetley must have been mad!"

"Yes," agreed Gilder. "It was sheer lunacy to rebel against a master as he has done. I am sure Monsieur Noël has never exceeded his duty." He paused. "Curiously enough," he presently added, "all their quarrels seem to have had some connection with Le Roy."

"Invariably," Crawford concurred. "Somehow, Monsieur has taken a sort of protective interest in Le Roy. And that brings me to the thing that I must tell you. I can't quite understand it, but I think you ought to know."

"What was it?" urged Gilder. "Don't make a mystery of it."

"Well," resumed Crawford. "Tetley and I were rather behind the other hounds in starting for the paper

chase this afternoon, and Monsieur Noël ran up to us. He said he wanted to see you."

"*Me?*" exclaimed Gilder.

"Yes. He wanted to see you badly. He said it was most important that he should speak with you. He was rather excited. When we told him that you were one of the hares, and that you'd gone on miles in front, he looked blank and fearfully disappointed. Then he said that Le Roy would do instead. But Le Roy was also on in front, and we told him so. At that he looked queer, and, detaining me, he pulled a long leather case out of his coat pocket, and asked me to give it to Le Roy. He said that Le Roy would understand."

Gilder put his hand on Crawford's arm and drew to a halt, listening.

"I thought I heard someone running," he said, renewing his quick walk. "Go on. He told you to give it to Le Roy, you say. Well?"

"We were in a hurry, you see," continued Crawford, "and he was detaining us. But I took the leather case from him and followed Tetley, who had gone on a bit in front of me. I don't know why I did it, but something—my natural curiosity, I suppose—prompted me to open the thing. Somehow I wanted to know what it was that I was expected to deliver to Le Roy in the midst of a paper chase. Anyhow, I opened it and saw that it contained a wicked-looking dagger with a blade and handle such as I have described."

Gilder stared at his companion in astonishment.

"But this is most extraordinary," he cried. "What on earth could Le Roy want with a weapon of that sort?"

"That was what puzzled me," Crawford went on. "It couldn't be for any good purpose, and I disliked the errand that Monsieur had forced upon me."

"So I should think," observed Gilder.

"I was so surprised," pursued Crawford, "that I spoke to Tetley about it. Tetley told me to chuck it in the ditch and take no notice of Monsieur Noël's request. But of course I could hardly do that. Then, while we trotted on after the other hounds, Tetley began to make wild

conjectures about the thing, and he got awfully excited. He made up his mind that Monsieur Noël was sending the dagger to Le Roy so that Le Roy might have a chance of using it."

"Using it in what way?" interrupted Gilder.

"Why, using it against Tetley himself," explained Crawford. "Le Roy and Monsieur Noël were both Tetley's enemies, remember, and, being foreigners, they were likely enough, so Tetley thought, to make up a plot to take his life."

"Nonsense, arrant nonsense!" cried Gilder. "Such an idea was perfectly ridiculous!"

"Well," resumed Crawford, "that was Tetley's theory, and he believed in it so much that he begged me not to give the thing to Le Roy on any account. I agreed that I wouldn't. I agreed that we should hide the dagger; and that's what we did. We hid it in a hole in the wall near the green gate of a field on Gurney's farm. And when we'd left it behind I, at least, felt a lot more comfortable, and so, I believe, did Tetley."

He paused. They were entering the plantation.

"Did Tetley go back for it, do you suppose?" Gilder interrogated.

"Nobody else knew where we'd hid it," returned Crawford. "And when I looked for it on the way back, it was gone. Tetley had already dropped out from the hounds. Yes, I believe he must have gone back for it."

Gilder went on in front of him, feeling exceedingly nervous as he drew nearer to the scene of the tragedy. He started at every trifling sound—the rustling of the leaves beneath his feet, even at the hollow bark of a dog on some distant farm. Crawford was equally nervous, expecting every moment that Gilder would stop and flash the ray of his lantern upon a dead man's marble white face.

Suddenly a voice sounded in front of them and Gilder drew back, trembling in apprehension. The light of a torch flickered fitfully among the trees.

"All right!" the voice spoke. "It's Deerfoot!"

"Brelson!" cried Gilder. "What are you doing here? It's out of bounds!"

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE BLACK SEAL.

GILDER had gone out from Megson's hardly more than a quarter of an hour when Brelson, disappointed at not being invited to form one of the search party, went upstairs to his dormitory to fetch a book from his sock locker. When he was about to open the locker, he remembered that the particular volume he wanted had been lent to Le Roy. He wandered into the passage, where some of the younger boys were noisily larking in the absence of their prefects. Apart from them he found Pierre Le Roy, standing at an open window, leaning out, apparently watching the gravel path in front of the porch.

"You'll catch an awful cold, hanging about that open window without your cap on," Brelson cautioned him. "This fog is the worst thing in the world for giving you a cold and influenza. And why didn't you change your boots? They must be soaking wet. Mine were."

Le Roy sighed deeply at he turned round.

"I wonder where Monsieur Noël has got to?" he breathed anxiously.

"Oh, I expect he's all right somewhere," conjectured Brelson, "taking a bit of a holiday, I daresay. Perhaps he has missed his train. It's Tetley that I'm wondering about."

Le Roy shook his head sadly.

"He has not gone anywhere by train," he responded, ignoring the remark about Tetley. "He has never been more than two or three miles from Haddisthorpe ever since he came to the school, except when we were camping out."

Brelson looked at him in surprise.

"Camping out?" he repeated. "Do you mean to say that it was Monsieur Noël who was with you that time when you were roughing it on Bartle Broad?"

Le Roy's face reddened slightly.

"He was my companion then—yes," he answered hesitatingly.

"H'm!" muttered Brelson. "You never told us that before! Fancy your spending a holiday with one of the masters! That accounts for him and you being so friendly."

"Probably," nodded Le Roy as he turned away.

Brelson followed him.

"You might let me have that book that I lent you, if you've done with it," he said.

"It is in my study," Le Roy told him. "Come up with me and you shall have it."

Entering his room on the half landing, he felt about for his candlestick and matches. He struck a light and held the match to the candle. As he did so, he caught sight of a slip of white paper that lay on the table. In the centre of the paper there was the impression of a seal in black wax, and beneath the seal two short words in French were scribbled. Brelson saw him clutch at it excitedly as, either intentionally or by accident, he so moved the match that the light was extinguished.

They were in darkness. Le Roy stepped back, even seemed to stagger, from the table, dropping the box of matches on the floor. Brelson went down on his knees, found the box, and struck a new match, lighting the candle.

"What's up?" he questioned, staring at Le Roy in consternation. "Are you ill?"

Le Roy had flung himself in his chair. His face was ghastly white, his large brown eyes looked out blankly in front of him, his hands were tightly clenched, and at his outstretched feet lay the slip of paper with its black seal crushed and broken. He appeared to be mazed, confused, as if he had received a physical blow. But he swiftly recovered himself, and stood up, pulling himself together with an effort.

"Now I remember," he said with forced lightness, "the book which you want is in the room of Monsieur Noël." And he strode out with a firm, resolute step, leaving Brelson in perplexity.

Brelson heard him bounding up the stairs, three steps at a time.

"Funny that he should be so upset by the sight of that bit of paper with the black stuff on it!" Brelson meditated. "I wonder what it meant?"

He stepped nearer to the crumpled and discarded little white slip and contemplated it inquisitively. It looked as though it had been torn from the back of an envelope. He stooped, picked it up, and straightened it out on the palm of his hand. The black seal was broken, and he could distinguish nothing of the design. Beneath what remained of the impressed shield or armorial bearing, however, he saw some writing in pencil, and he made out the two simple words, "*Gardez bien.*"

Crushing the paper into its original shape, he carefully replaced it where he had found it, on the floor.

"'Gardez bien'—be very careful?" he interpreted. "Careful of what, I wonder?"

He strolled out of the little room on to the half landing, and glanced up the stairs. There he waited for many minutes. Le Roy was a long time in finding the book. Brelson after all did not greatly want it, and he wished that Le Roy would not trouble. He began to be impatient. Then he decided to go up to Le Roy and tell him the book did not matter in the least.

He mounted the stairs with his usual silent step, and walked along the dark upper passage. He heard Le Roy moving things in Monsieur Noël's room. When he got to the open door he saw that Le Roy had lighted the table lamp, and was on his knees before an open, brass-bound travelling trunk near the bed.

Just as he looked in, Le Roy drew his hand from inside the trunk and placed something heavy—certainly not a book—on the floor by his right foot. Then he closed the lid, turned the key, and thrust the bunch of keys into his trousers pocket.

Brelson was too much astonished to make known his presence—astonished to see that Le Roy had a key of his own with which to open Monsieur Noël's private trunk, but astonished more than all to observe that the thing he had extracted from the trunk was a small revolver, which he now picked up and transferred to the inner pocket of his jacket.

Brelson drew away, ashamed of eavesdropping, and crept softly along the corridor. At the top of the stairs, however, he turned and walked back again with heavier tread to the door.

"I say, Still Water, it doesn't matter a bit about that book!" he cried, looking once again into the room.

Le Roy was now in the act of turning down the lamp wick preparatory to blowing across the top of the glass chimney to extinguish the light.

"I have got it," he responded calmly.

"You'll get into a most awful row coming like this into a master's room," Brelson warned him. "I wouldn't have done it for anything."

"You are different," returned Le Roy enigmatically, handing the volume to its owner. He walked quickly along the passage in advance of Brelson, and had disappeared into his study before the younger boy was half-way down the stairs.

A few moments later he came out, wearing his overcoat.

"Hullo!" cried Brelson, who encountered him by the door of Number Two dormitory. "Where are you off to? Going out? It's nearly lock-up time!"

"I cannot help that, I am going out," declared Le Roy. "I am going to make a search for Monsieur Noël. It is most important that I find him."

Brelson went closer to him.

"You are not going alone, are you, Still Water?" he whispered, thinking of the revolver, and even now noticing a certain bulkiness in the region of Le Roy's breast pocket. "Wait! I'll come with you. There are no prefects hanging round. Wait for me at the side door."

He was not long in joining his companion. They slipped into the playground, and he drew from his overcoat pocket a piece of tarred rope, which was already loosened into oakum at one end. Retiring to the shelter of a buttress, he struck a match and lighted the torch, which he coaxed into a flame.

"Deerfoot's got my lantern," he said, glancing at Le Roy. "But this will do quite as well; and it's more Indian."

Le Roy had pulled his cap far down over his eyes and turned up his overcoat collar. There was very little of his face visible. He seemed indeed purposely to have hidden his features.

They crossed the playground.

"We're fairly on the war-trail now," said Brelson. "You lead!" He dropped behind Le Roy in Indian fashion, walking very silently. "Which way?"

"By the path through the wood to Haddisthorpe bridge," suggested Le Roy. "That is the most lonely way. There is no use our going by Dead Tree Gulch or the prairie trail to the village or the school. Many of the fellows have already gone those ways, and they must have found trace of Monsieur Noël if he had been in such direction."

"I believe I'm right about his having gone somewhere by train," ventured Brelson. "I expect Deerfoot has gone to the station to make inquiries. You see, Noël knew we were all off at the paper chase, and that left him free to go wherever he liked. Perhaps he's gone to stay over Sunday with some friends in the land of the Pale-face."

Le Roy suppressed a moan.

"Monsieur Noël has got no friends in England," he said sadly; "none, absolutely, outside of Haddisthorpe."

"Well, then, he has lost his way in the fog, on Dismal Swamp," Brelson decided, "and in that case he will come back to Megson's as soon as the fog clears off. So will Tetley."

They went round by the old moat bridge and kitchen garden into the wood instead of by Primrose Lane.



"It's rather queer, don't you think, that Noël and Tetley should both be missing?" said Brelson. "Do you think they can be together somewhere?"

Le Roy caught at the suggestion.

"Ah! I wonder!" he said in a tone of relief. "I hope so. I hope Tetley is with him!"

"Why?" Brelson asked in quick surprise. "They're enemies!"

Le Roy made no response. They had entered the pathway leading to the open glade. He kept close to Brelson's side, holding his arm with nervous fingers.

"There is someone coming!" he whispered, and he thrust his free hand into his breast pocket. Brelson drew him onward, holding aloft his torch, peering into the darkness across the glade. He saw the ray of a bull's-eye lantern.

"It's all right!" he cried. "It's Deerfoot."

Gilder and Crawford advanced towards the two younger boys.

"Brelson! What are you doing here?" Gilder demanded to know. "It's out of bounds! Who is that with you?"

"It's Still Water," Brelson answered. "Have you found Tetley?"

Le Roy went nervously up to Gilder.

"Where is Monsieur Noël?" he implored. "You have not found him?"

Gilder looked at him strangely, wondering at his anxious concern, conscious of his own agitation.

"Yes. I have found him," he answered solemnly. "Come! I will show you where he is."

He signed to the three of them to follow him, and he led them aside into the glade, sweeping his lantern rays along the ground.

Le Roy watched him with fearful apprehension. Could Monsieur Noël be here? Why did he not call out to them?

Suddenly Gilder stopped and stared at his feet in dumb amazement.

Le Roy caught at his arm.

“What is it, Gilder?” he cried. “Speak! Speak!”  
Gilder held the lantern lower. On the grassy ground there was a gruesome dark red patch of moisture; but the dead body of Prosper Noël was nowhere to be seen.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE DISAPPEARANCE OF HENRY TETLEY.

GILDER stood back in amazement while his three companions gazed in bewildered consternation and dread at the crimson moisture on the grass.

Brelson was the first to break the spell of awful silence.

"It's blood!" he muttered, bending down and holding his flaming torch to the ground. "Blood!"

Crawford turned inquiringly to Gilder.

"Was it here that you saw him lying?" he asked.

Gilder pointed with trembling finger at the gruesome evidence of the tragedy he had witnessed.

"Yes, here; just here," he answered.

"*Him?*" questioned Brelson. "Who? Is this Tetley's blood?"

"Tetley's? No; Monsieur Noël's," Gilder explained, trying to keep calm. "He was lying here—dead—only half an hour ago. I saw him. I touched him."

A long-drawn, plaintive moan came from beside him. He turned and saw Le Roy tottering backward with his hands up to his face.

"You must have made a mistake about his being dead," Crawford interposed in a quiet, steady voice. "He has been badly wounded, of course. But he must have been able to crawl away."

"I tell you I touched him," Gilder retorted with decision. "I took hold of his hand—his right hand—and there was no life in the fingers. I put my finger on his eyelids, and there was no movement in them. I spoke his name. He couldn't have crept away."

"Let us search for him, anyhow," suggested Crawford. "He can't be far from here, having lost so much blood as that."

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Gilder was already busily searching the ground in a circle about the spot. His lantern cast but a feeble, flickering light, the oil being almost exhausted. Presently the tiny flame leapt and went out, leaving only a dull red glow. Brelson's torch, too, was burning short and stubbornly. He tried to kindle it into a fuller flame by loosening the hard strands of the rope.

"Take hold of this a minute, Still Water," he said. "I've got another torch in my pocket."

Le Roy shuddered as he put out his hand to take it. Gilder noticed that his face, dimly illumined by the yellow flame, was painfully drawn and haggard.

The trees rustled.

"There's a breeze springing up," announced Brelson. "It will clear away this fog, and then we can make a proper search." He looked up at Gilder, who was watching him separating the strands at the end of the new torch. "Did you hear the shot fired?" he asked.

"He was not shot," Gilder answered. "He was stabbed—stabbed with a dagger." And then he added grimly: "Tetley did it."

"Tetley?" Le Roy pronounced the name in horrified astonishment. He swayed backward unsteadily, brushing the lighted torch against Crawford's arm, extinguishing the flame and scattering many sparks. In stepping back he tripped slightly.

"I trod on something!" he said, and stooped to touch it. "It is a hat!" he cried—"a soft felt hat—like Prosper Noël's."

Crawford took hold of it, and ran his fingers over it, feeling the shape.

"Yes," he agreed. "I am sure it is his."

As he spoke, the sound of quickly treading feet came from along the pathway, and the dim light of a lantern was seen moving through the mist, blinking as it passed behind the intervening trees. Presently a second and a third light emerged from the further darkness.

"I expect these are some of the fellows bringing Dr. Harris," announced Gilder.

Brelson followed him towards the approaching runners, waving his newly kindled torch.

Arlingford was the first to reveal himself, carrying a huge, old-fashioned lamp. Then came Mr. Eyre-Loftus, wearing his inverness overcoat. At his heels ran the doctor and two or three of the senior boys, and finally the village constable with his bull's-eye lantern.

"This way, sir," called Gilder, and, taking possession of Arlingford's lamp, he led Mr. Eyre-Loftus to the patch of blood-stained grass. "I found Monsieur Noël lying wounded—dead—here on this spot," he rapidly explained. "I left him to bring help——"

"Let me see the body!" interrupted Dr. Harris, elbowing his way through the group of boys who now stood closely round.

"It is gone," Gilder went on. "When I came back a few minutes ago it had been taken away. We must search for it."

"He cannot have been dead," objected Mr. Eyre-Loftus. "Taken away? Do you mean that someone has helped him home to Mr. Megson's?" He turned to the doctor. "Come, Dr. Harris," he said. "We had better follow him. It is evident that he has been badly hurt."

"You don't understand, sir," protested Gilder. "He could not have moved of his own accord. He was dead—quite dead. I am certain of that. And I don't believe he has been taken to Megson's. At least——"

The Head glanced about him.

"Boys!" he directed in a sharp tone of authority. "Quick! Make a systematic search between here and the house. Keep to the path, at first. Go in companies, each with a light!"

Brelson ran off in advance, followed by Le Roy and Durrant. He had approached the plantation by way of the kitchen garden and through the bushes; but now he kept to the more open path leading into the lane, knowing that if the wounded master was able to walk or crawl home, it would be by this way that he would surely go. As he ran, he held his flaming torch aloft, searching from

side to side with all his senses keenly alert. Once he paused and bent his gaze upon a bare patch of soft ground. He distinguished a footprint, pointing towards him.

"That's Gilder's," he decided. "Nobody else has been along here. There are no other footprints, and there's no trail of blood."

He paused once more when he came to the gate that shut off the path from the lane. Again he discovered the marks of Gilder's feet, but none other; it did not seem to him at all probable that a wounded man, hastening painfully homeward, would have waited to close and latch a gate behind him. Nevertheless he ran on, Durrant and Le Roy keeping up with him.

They entered the front garden by the side gateway. Brelson handed the torch to Durrant, and made a short cut across the lawn.

Mr. Megson stood at the open hall door with his sister and a crowd of boys. Their anxiously expectant faces showed that they had heard no word of what had happened, and that neither Monsieur Noël nor Tetley had returned.

Brelson rapidly told the housemaster all he knew, and was asking for candles and matches when Le Roy staggered past him to one of the hall chairs, upon which he sank, shuddering, burying his face in his trembling hands.

While Miss Megson hastened to her storeroom to procure a bundle of tallow candles, Brelson mustered a party of Fifth Form boys, most of them members of his tribe, and gave them instructions for the continuance of the search. Mr. Megson, in spite of his rheumatism, was preparing to accompany them; but Brelson objected.

"Don't you think you had better stay here, sir, in case Monsieur Noël comes in, or is brought in?" he suggested.

Without waiting for a response, he went into the back hall to meet Miss Megson and take possession of a tin lantern which she had found in the storeroom. He lighted its fragment of candle while Dewsbury distributed candles and matches among the boys who stood ready.

"Are you coming, Still Water?" Brelson asked, touching Le Roy on the shoulder.

With a sigh that was very like a moan of pain, Le Roy

rose wearily from the chair, still holding Monsieur Noël's hat crushed under his elbow.

"No," he answered. "I prefer to remain here."

Brelson did not wait to inquire into the reason of this apparently timid decision. Calling to Dewsbury and the others to follow him, he led the way out.

A light breeze had somewhat cleared the mist and a drizzling rain was falling. At the plantation gate they all lighted their candles before proceeding in Indian file along the path. In among the trees they could hear the movements of the searchers; here and there lights flitted about.

"Halt!" commanded Brelson. He went forward to meet Mr. Eyre-Loftus and Gilder, who were hurriedly approaching him.

"Is he at the house?" cried Gilder.

"No," answered Brelson. "There's no sign of either of them."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr. Eyre-Loftus. "This is all most mysterious. I cannot understand it. What can have become of Tetley, I wonder? His disappearance is almost as inexplicable as the disappearance of Monsieur Noël. You are sure he has not slipped into the house unnoticed, are you, Brelson?"

"Yes, sir," Brelson declared. "Mr. Megson has stationed someone at each of the doors, and he has himself been in the hall ever since Gilder went out. Tetley couldn't have slipped in without being seen."

The head master stood still, very much puzzled.

"I could almost believe that your eyes had deceived you, Gilder," he said, "if it were not for the evidence of the blood on the grass. That is the only proof of the tragedy that we have discovered—that and the finding of Monsieur's hat."

"Do you mean that you still doubt that the wound is a fatal one, sir?" Gilder asked.

"I cannot help having a strong doubt," returned the head master.

"Still," argued Gilder, "even if he were not dead, as I believe him to be, but only seriously wounded, he has

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surely lost too much blood to be able to walk away unhelped. If someone has helped him, why has he not been taken to Megson's? That is the nearest house, and the one to which he would naturally wish to be taken, even if he had to be carried."

"A person wounded like that would leave a trail behind him, wouldn't he?" questioned Brelson. "Whether he walked or was carried or dragged, there'd be a track showing the way he had gone."

"Tetley could neither carry nor drag a heavy man like Monsieur Noël," affirmed Gilder. "And Tetley was the only person with him in the plantation before I came along. He could not carry him."

"Quite true," nodded Mr. Eyre-Loftus, "that in itself should prove that the wound was only slight. But in any case, Monsieur Noël cannot be far away from here. Continue the search, Gilder. Continue it for another hour, at all events. I will go back to the bridge and see if there is any news of Tetley."

"Runciman and the others ought to be back there by now," Gilder told him. "Mr. Davy went after them on his bicycle, and would soon overtake them. If you find them there, sir, they ought to be made to form a cordon round the fields and the plantation, closing in and searching the whole ground. I believe Tetley is hiding among the bushes, somewhere."

He was walking with the Head as he spoke, Brelson and his party were following behind. At the clearing, Arlingford joined Mr. Eyre-Loftus and accompanied him with a lantern.

A fire of faggots had been lighted in the middle of the open space to serve as a landmark for the searchers, and Crawford had erected a tripod of branches over the spot where the tragedy had been committed, suspending from it a lighted lantern.

"There's no good in your pretending to be an Indian, Brelson, if you can't find a trail," Gilder said as he approached the hanging lantern. "The fellows had been tramping out all footprints, I'm afraid; but let us see what we can do!"



Brelson told his companions to form a ring about the clearing and to march round in gradually diminishing circles, searching every inch of the ground. He and Dewsbury began their search from the centre.

Dewsbury was the first to make a discovery. He stopped, concentrating his attention on a particular dark mark in the grass. He went down on his knees, wrapped a corner of his handkerchief over his finger and pressed it on the ground.

"Look here, Gilder!" he said quietly; and when Gilder strode towards him he held forth his handkerchief, showing a vivid red stain on the white linen.

The place was some three yards away from the hanging lantern.

"That is where Le Roy picked up the hat," said Brelson.

Durrant presently found another similar mark. Brelson saw that its position indicated a direct line from the first one, and he pointed through the trees away from the path and away from the direction of Megson's.

"Ugh! That's the line of the trail," he decided. "Come on, you fellows!" And he led his searchers out of the clearing.

Gilder remained within the light of the fire. The searchers had received instructions to communicate with him there immediately upon making any important discovery. When he had waited some ten minutes, Dewsbury came back to him and reported that Brelson had found what he believed to be the marks of both Tetley's and Monsieur Noël's feet impressed in the mud at the side of a ditch.

This piece of evidence was the last that was discovered, however. The search was continued late into the night. The plantation, the fields, and roads for a radius of a mile were diligently and carefully traversed; the whole neighbourhood was scoured, but without success. No trace of Monsieur Noël could be found. Both he and Tetley had disappeared as completely as if they had been spirited away.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### LE ROY THE INSCRUTABLE.

"LE ROY, are you awake?"

"Yes," Le Roy answered drowsily. "Is that you, Gilder? Come in!"

Gilder entered the little room and put his candlestick on the table. Le Roy was sitting on the edge of his cot, wearing a suit of red and white striped pyjamas. His face was pale and haggard and his large brown eyes were heavy and weary.

"Haven't you been asleep?" Gilder asked, seeing that the bedclothes had hardly been disturbed.

"N-no," Le Roy faltered. "I have been thinking. There is a lot to think about. Has Tetley come in?"

Gilder shook his head.

"I believe he has run away," he replied. "And no wonder. He couldn't very well come back after what he has done."

"You believe him to be guilty, then, do you? You do not think you could have made a mistake?"

"I am certain he is guilty," Gilder averred most positively. "I saw him in the very act. There is no room for doubt." He drew a chair nearer to the bed and sat on it, facing Le Roy. "I can't swear that Monsieur Noël was really dead when I went to him and touched him and spoke his name. But I am sure he was unconscious. He did not move, and I don't think he was breathing. And besides, I saw the wound in his chest, or at least the cut in his white shirt-front, just over his heart. His vest had been wrenched open. I have found one of the buttons. I am not sure that there were not two wounds. Anyhow, whether he was dead or not, he was too badly

hurt, and had lost too much blood, to be able to move away."

Le Roy's two hands at his sides were tightly gripping the counterpane of his cot. He was breathing deeply.

"And you say you saw Tetley doing it?" he inquired hollowly.

"Yes." Gilder flung his leg over the arm of the chair, resting his elbow on his knee and his chin on his open palm. "I saw him as plainly as I see you now. He held the dagger poised to strike, and when I called to him, he started guiltily and looked round at me and ran away, quickly, notwithstanding that he limped a bit. But I think his limp may have been assumed."

"But why—why should he do such a terrible thing?" Le Roy pursued. "He was not amicable towards Prosper Noël, I know. But he did not hate him so much as that. He had no reason, no motive, for committing such a terrible act. He must have been imbecile."

Gilder was silent for some moments. His eyes were fixed in scrutiny upon Le Roy's face.

"Why do you look at me that way?" Le Roy asked, evidently embarrassed.

Gilder sighed.

"You said just now," he resumed, "that Tetley had no motive for vengeance against Prosper Noël. I daresay you are right to some extent. No English schoolboy would bear such malice against a master as to prompt him to plan a crime like this. But let us assume that Tetley was in possession of a dangerous weapon, that he met Monsieur Noël by accident in the plantation, and that they had a quarrel about their old scores; then, in the heat of passion, Tetley might use the weapon with fatal effect."

Le Roy contracted his brows in perplexity.

"That is your theory?" he meditated. "It is not convincing. You seem to forget that Prosper Noël was an exceedingly strong man, very active, very quick in his movements. You have yourself seen him fencing. Was he not active then? You have seen him fling Tetley to the floor with a single movement of his strong arm."

Why, he could hold a full-grown man above his head with one hand. And yet, knowing him to be so powerful, you imagine that a youth like Tetley could overcome him? I cannot think it possible. No, it is not to be believed—unless—” he paused, “unless Monsieur Noël was already lying on his back, asleep; and he would hardly be in such a position on a cold, foggy night.”

“We cannot know exactly how it came about,” resumed Gilder, “and I can only say that I saw Tetley at his awful work.”

Le Roy shuddered as if he were cold. He put his hand to his forehead and covered his eyes for an instant. Then, again looking at Gilder, he asked:

“Did you not hear Monsieur Noël call for help or make a cry of pain?”

“I heard a cry—a sort of moan,” Gilder answered. “But remembering it, I seem to think it was Tetley’s voice rather than Noël’s.”

Le Roy threw himself on his side with his arm across the pillow and his legs outstretched.

“If your theory be the true one,” he said, “then it can only be that Tetley went out this afternoon to join in the paper chase armed with a dagger, which he contemplated using against Prosper Noël. How could he have known that he would meet him, do you imagine?”

“Listen!” said Gilder after a moment’s silence. “I have got something to tell you. I thought when I came in here that you might already know about it, and be able to explain; but you don’t seem to know anything—unless you are wilfully hiding your knowledge.”

Le Roy sat up abruptly.

“I am hiding nothing, Gilder,” he protested. “I am sure there is no one in the school—no one in the world—who wishes more earnestly than I do to get at the truth of this mystery. My brain is going round and round. I can explain nothing—nothing. What is it you would tell me?”

Gilder stood up and strode to the table, and back again to the chair.

“First of all,” he said, “tell me, when did you see

Monsieur Noël last? When did you last speak with him?"

"Let me think." Le Roy rubbed his forehead meditatively. "Yes, I remember. I last spoke with him in the early morning, before prayers. I last saw him after twelve."

Gilder looked at him sharply.

"You are sure?" he cried, "sure that you did not see him and speak with him in the evening, on your return from the paper chase?"

Le Roy met his scrutinising gaze with a look that was perfectly blank.

"I mean when you came across the marsh and went round by the old hulk," Gilder persisted.

"The old hulk?" repeated Le Roy in amazement. "But Prosper Noël would have no occasion to go anywhere near such a place as that. It is true that I came back by the hulk, following you and Fearon. But I saw no one anywhere near."

He spoke with such apparent candour that it was hard to doubt him. Yet there was a suspicion in Gilder's mind that he was hiding the truth.

"Instead of following us," Gilder declared, "you overtook us on the marsh, and were at the hulk in advance of us. When Fearon and I passed near, we heard two persons talking together. They were you and Monsieur Noël."

"No! No!" Le Roy shook his head. "You are wrong. It was not I. It could not have been Prosper. You make a mistake—absolutely!"

Gilder looked at him sternly.

"I make no mistake," he protested emphatically. "I heard your voices. You were talking in a strange foreign language that I did not understand."

The exclamation with which Le Roy received this statement, and the look of astonishment that leapt into his eyes surprised Gilder not a little. If he had been accused of having with his own hand committed the crime he could not have betrayed greater concern. His face went even paler than before, and he trembled from head to foot.

"A foreign language?" he gasped in a tone of mystery so subdued that his companion could barely hear the words. "What language? What language was it?"

"I do not know," Gilder answered. "I have told you that I did not understand it. But it was one which, I believe, is not so strange to you as it is to me. I have heard you speaking it—you and Noël together."

Le Roy slipped down from his bed and went softly to the door and turned the key. Gilder watched him. They faced each other, the candlelight shining in their faces.

"Tell me all that you saw and heard over there at the hulk," demanded Le Roy in a firm, tense voice. "You have some secret reason for saying what you have already said. Perhaps you suspect me—*me*, of having something to do with the death of poor Prosper Noël, eh?"

Gilder stood with his hands in his trousers pockets.

"It was foggy, you remember," he resumed. "I saw nothing except the black hulk. But I heard two persons talking—Monsieur Noël and yourself. That is all."

"Monsieur Noël it may have been," Le Roy admitted, after a few moments' reflection. "But the second speaker was not I."

"I don't see that it would matter much if it had been you," observed Gilder, wondering why he took the matter so seriously. "But I happen to know that Monsieur Noël wanted to see you very particularly earlier in the day—just after you had started with the hounds. He could not find you, but he gave Crawford a message for you—Crawford and Tetley. It was not a verbal message. What he gave to Crawford was a leather case, containing a dagger."

Le Roy started in amazement, gripping the table for support.

"For me—a dagger?" he cried.

Gilder nodded. "Yes," he said, moving about the room with his eyes bent on the floor. "The same dagger with which Monsieur was assassinated. It was to have been given to you; but Crawford and Tetley thought it best not to deliver it. What do you know about all this,

Le Roy? You had better tell. There is no use in being secretive on an occasion like this. You have had too many secrets, and there has been a lot of mystery always between you and Monsieur Noël—— Hullo! what's up?"

He had glanced aside and seen Le Roy swaying unsteadily. He put out his arms and caught him as he reeled and fell.

## CHAPTER XXV.

“GARDEZ BIEN.”

WHEN Pierre Le Roy recovered consciousness he was lying in his bed with the clothes tucked well round him. The room was dark and the house was very silent. The silence seemed to be intensified by the ticking of a clock out on the near landing. His head was aching fiercely and the hair about his throbbing temples was wet, as if someone had been bathing his brow with cold water. What had happened? He had a vague brooding sense of impending calamity.

Dimly he remembered that Gilder had been speaking to him as from a far way off, accusing him of secretiveness. He had felt his brain reeling, and then he had fallen forward. He had fainted; he who had believed himself to be too strong to be affected by the exercise of a ten-mile run. He tried to recollect the incidents of the paper chase, wondering why he felt so tired, so utterly weary. Then there came to him the remembrance of what he had seen and heard in the plantation—the patch of blood-stained grass and Gilder’s declaration that only half an hour earlier he had seen Prosper Noël lying there dead.

Prosper Noël—dead? Yes, that was the awful fact which now oppressed him with its heavy weight of tragic significance!

“He is dead—dead!” he repeated to himself many times.

He sat up in his bed, thinking, trying with aching brain to search the hidden depths of the mystery. Then he threw back the clothes and quietly slipped to the floor. He felt his way across the little room to his



wardrobe and took out his dressing-gown, wrapping it about his trembling body. Silently he lighted his candle, opened his table drawer and took from it a crumpled piece of paper which he straightened out. There was a broken and splintered seal upon it in black wax. The impression of the signet was now undistinguishable, but beneath it were the two words "*Gardez bien*" written in pencil by Prosper Noël. They were probably the last words that Prosper Noël had written, and they conveyed a warning; a warning that he, Pierre Le Roy, was to be on his guard.

On his guard against what? Against what secret, sinister treachery?

While the faintness was coming over him, he had not clearly comprehended the explanation which Gilder had been making concerning Crawford's failure to deliver his message. How had Tetley come to be in possession of the fatal weapon? And what mad impulse had prompted him to use it against an innocent, upright gentleman who was the very soul of honour and truth and justice?

It was hardly possible to believe that Tetley could be guilty. Surely there were other circumstances of which Gilder was ignorant, circumstances which Prosper Noël alone could have explained. Why, for example, had Monsieur Noël been so anxious to see him, Le Roy, at the time of the starting of the paper chase? And what was the hidden meaning of his sending the dagger in its leather case by Crawford's hand?

"He is dead! He is dead!" Le Roy repeated. "Oh, my friend—my more than friend!"

He stood by his little table, wrapped in his dressing-gown, watching the flickering flame of the candle. He felt unaccountably weak. His limbs trembled, his temples ached, and his brain was curiously clouded. He feared that he was sickening for an illness.

Suddenly a new energy came upon him. He drank a glass of water and was refreshed. Then, taking his keys, he unlocked his desk and transferred its miscellaneous contents to a small square trunk, which he had also unlocked. In outward appearance the trunk was a very

ordinary one, but as he pushed back the lid it was more like a banker's treasure chest than a schoolboy's sock box, lined with thin steel plates, as in protection against thieves or fire. It was half filled with bundles of legal-looking documents, bound with red tape. On the top of these were neatly packed many tiny parcels, each fastened with a large red seal. He thrust his hand among them and drew forth a small parcel of white tissue paper, which he quickly unfolded, taking from it the miniature portrait of a beautiful woman. The circular gold frame glistened with brilliants in the light of the candle. He gazed at the painted face and then pressed it to his lips. Then, quickly, he covered it again and replaced it in the trunk, proceeding with his work.

When he had emptied his desk he went about the room, busily examining everything as though with the eye of a stranger. He took two books from the shelf. From one he tore the fly-leaf which he reduced to fragments; the other he dropped into the trunk. From the fly-leaf of a third volume he tore a written name. He approached the chest of drawers, opened each drawer in turn, and carefully examined each piece of wearing apparel. From the lowest drawer, far back, he drew a small revolver, which he also hid in the trunk before turning the key.

Finally, he blew out the candle. But he did not yet return to his bed. Instead, he went to the door and cautiously opened it, waited listening for a few moments, and then returned to the table for his candle and box of matches. Again he listened at the door. Tired with their paper chase and with the excitement of the tragic circumstances which had cast a gloom upon the house, his schoolfellows were all sound asleep, and nothing could be heard but the monotonous ticking of the clock on the landing.

He crept out and with silent tread approached the stairs. Cautiously he ascended, trembling when one creaked. He went softly in his bare feet along the upper corridor and halted outside of Gilder's door, listening. No sound came to him, and he turned to the door opposite, gliding within. He closed it behind him and strode to

the window, where he silently and slowly let down the blind, and as silently drew the heavy curtains before lighting the candle which he had brought with him.

Satisfied that the candlelight would not betray his presence either by the window or under the door, he went about Monsieur Noël's study precisely as he had gone about his own, examining everything with careful scrutiny, packing books and private papers into the professor's trunk, opening drawers and cupboards, turning over all articles of clothing, even searching pockets ; but leaving most things as he found them.

Behind a row of books he found a writing case, which he took to the table and opened with one of his own keys. He touched a spring which one who did not know its secret would not readily have discovered. It disclosed a hidden receptacle from which he snatched a letter. Then he locked the desk and packed it in the trunk, while he held the letter between his teeth. Closing the lid of the trunk, he turned the key, blew out the candle, and crept to the door.

There again he stood listening. The clock downstairs struck three. He shuddered. Thrusting the letter into the pocket of his dressing-gown, he returned into the room and caught the heavy trunk in his arms. Usually he would have thought nothing of lifting such a weight, but now he was strangely weak. All his strength seemed to have oozed out of him. He breathed deeply, exerting all the strength that remained to him, and succeeded in raising the burden to the table, where he held it for some minutes on its end. He put his shoulders against it and drew it over, carrying it out along the passage and down the creaking stairs to his room, where he placed it side by side with his own box at the foot of the bed.

All this he accomplished with such cautious silence that no sound disturbed his sleeping companions in the dormitories below.

He had now to return for his candle and to remove all possible traces of his strange night visit to the upper passage. He stood at his door, listening. The house was still perfectly quiet, and he made his second journey.

As he crept softly back towards the stairs, he heard Gilder cough. Had he been disturbed? Would he get out of bed and come to inquire into the cause of the disturbance?

Le Roy waited at the head of the stairs to give the monitor time to fall asleep again. He shivered in the cold draught that swept along the passage. Regaining his room, he sat down for a while on the edge of his cot, pressing his two hands against his aching temples.

He had now been out of bed for fully an hour. He had not finished his task, however, for he had yet to read the letter which he had taken out of Prosper Noël's desk. Once again he lighted the candle. Then he seated himself at the table and drew the letter from his pocket, spreading it out before him.

“It is just as I feared!” he cried agitatedly, as his eyes rested on the first page. “He must have received this when he went to the village—when we were already starting for the paper chase! I see it all! We have been tracked even to here!” He read on to the end excitedly, and then from the beginning again to the end, reading as it were between the written lines.

“But why has Tetley run away?” he murmured, crispering the letter in his hand. “Why has he not come back?”

He started, hearing a distant door open and squeak on its hinges. He held the letter in the flame of the candle and watched it burn as he carried both candlestick and flaming paper to the fireplace. When the letter was consumed, he crushed the charred remains into the grate, blew out the candle, flung off his dressing-gown, and crawled into bed.

His heart was beating quickly as he listened to the creaking of the stairs. His door was pressed open and someone entered. A hand touched his heated forehead.

“Is that you, Gilder?” he asked with a shiver.

“Yes. Are you better? You're feverish. Your forehead is quite hot. I hope you are not going to be ill.” Gilder sniffed, conscious of the odour of

a newly extinguished candle. "Have you been out of bed?"

"Yes," Le Roy answered falteringly. "I got out and—and had a drink of water."

"I thought I smelt the candle," said Gilder. "You ought not to have got out. I will put a glass of water on the chair near your bed. Try to go to sleep."

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### CONFLICTING CONJECTURES.

At eight o'clock in the morning Gilder was awakened by his fag.

"It's awfully late," Brelson said. "You'd better get up. Everyone in the house seems to have overslept himself this morning."

Gilder sat up and rubbed his eyes.

"And I meant to get up early!" he complained with a yawn. "Tetley hasn't come back, I suppose, has he?"

"No," Brelson answered, emptying a pail of cold water into his fagmaster's tub. "And there's no news of Monsieur Noël, either. It's a marvel to me where they've both vanished to."

"Hasn't anybody been round from the school?" Gilder inquired. "Mr. Davy was going to continue the search at daylight, with Runciman and Fearon. Haven't they found anything?"

Brelson shook his head.

"I haven't heard. Arlingford came, I believe, about an hour ago to inquire; and from that I suppose that Mr. Davy has not come upon any new evidence. It seems to me that too many fellows have been searching. They've stamped out all the footprints and spoiled the trail. I believe Dewsbury and I would have done better alone. Do you think we might stay away from church, Gilder—Dewsbury and Le Roy and I, and perhaps Crawford and Sandwith?"

"If you consider you would be of help—yes," Gilder consented, "although I don't think Le Roy is fit. He was quite ill last night. Have you seen him yet?"

"Ill?" repeated Brelson. "I don't wonder at it."

He never changed his boots and stockings when he came in from the paper chase, and they were soaking wet."

"Go down to his room and ask him how he is," ordered Gilder. "Don't waken him, though, if he is asleep."

Brelson was not long absent. He came back to say that Le Roy was still in bed, sleeping like a top.

When Gilder was dressed, he himself went down to the little room on the half-landing. Le Roy was certainly asleep, but it required no great experience to discover that he had an alarmingly high temperature. His forehead was hot, his lips were parched, and his pulses were beating at a furious rate.

Gilder hastened to inform Miss Megson of the boy's condition, and Miss Megson, with the aid of a clinical thermometer, assured herself that the monitor's alarm was not groundless.

"He is ill," she decided. "I hope it is nothing infectious. In any case we must send for the doctor."

Before church-time Dr. Harris arrived. Le Roy was then awake, but deliriously talking in a strange jargon which to the doctor seemed to be an incomprehensible mixture of Latin tags and French phrases and sentences in a language which might be Chinese for all the medical mind could make of it.

"He must have been studying too hard," Dr. Harris observed aside to Miss Megson. "There is some congestion of the brain, and he has a severe chill. He must be kept very quiet. Light a fire, too; the air is damp. I will send some medicine to reduce the fever."

"Fever?" Miss Megson's alarm showed itself in her face. "Is it infectious?"

"No; not at all. But he will require careful nursing. Where do his parents live?"

This last question was asked as they were going down the stairs. Miss Megson came to a standstill.

"Really," she responded in a tone of indecision, "I do not know. In France, I believe. But I will ask my brother. Do you recommend our communicating with them?"

“No, it will not be necessary, I hope,” returned the doctor; “but I will come and see him a little later.”

Miss Megson accompanied him to the front hall, and he was giving final instructions as to the necessary treatment of the patient when Mr. Eyre-Loftus appeared in the doorway, accompanied by Fearon.

“Dear me, dear me!” exclaimed the Head on hearing of Le Roy’s illness. “This is most unfortunate. Everything seems to be going wrong in connection with this house—the strange absence of Tetley, the yet more mysterious disappearance of Monsieur Noël, and now Le Roy ill—it is all most disturbing! Where is Mr. Megson?”

Mr. Megson’s rheumatism was so much worse this morning, owing to his having stood in a draught on the previous evening at the hall door, that he had not been able to rise from his bed. Gilder, as monitor, was in charge of the house. Hearing Mr. Eyre-Loftus’s voice, he now came out into the hall.

“Good morning, Gilder,” the Head greeted him, “I have brought Fearon to help you. He will take the boys to church.” He signed to Gilder to follow him into Mr. Megson’s study. “I want to consult with you,” he began, walking restlessly about the room. “I am terribly perplexed and troubled over this awful affair of Noël and Tetley. It is quite impenetrable. The search for them has not been relaxed. A dozen men from the village have been out all night trying to discover some trace; and Mr. Davy, Woodhouse, and others were out at day-break this morning; but we are as much in the dark as ever. Nothing has been found—nothing but the stain of blood on the grass. The finding of Monsieur Noël’s hat near the spot is the one tangible fact that we have in support of your evidence. It is of course impossible that you can be making a mistake in declaring that you recognised both Tetley and his victim; and I am coming to think—to believe—that Tetley has escaped, knowing that you saw him in the act of committing the awful crime.”

He paused at the window and was silent for some moments.



"But you see, Gilder," he presently resumed, "if Tetley escaped in fear of being arrested—if he ran out of the plantation and altogether away from the neighbourhood—then by all logical argument you ought on your return to have found his victim still lying there, either dead, as you supposed him to be, or else seriously injured. The fact that you did not find Monsieur Noël lying there, but only his hat and a button and a stain of blood, inclines me to believe that he was not fatally wounded, but that he had sufficient strength left to go in pursuit of his assailant."

Gilder shook his head.

"I am afraid it is useless for you to argue that way, sir," he said solemnly. "You will never solve the mystery until you assure yourself that when I went up to Monsieur Noël, and touched him and spoke to him, he was absolutely dead. There is no other explanation possible than this, that during the half hour or so while I was at the bridge, his dead body was carried or dragged away and hidden somewhere. Depend upon it, sir, that is the truth. In that half-hour Tetley had time to go back and do as I believe he did."

Mr. Eyre-Loftus sighed in profound dismay.

"Is it your belief, then, that Tetley was physically strong enough to carry or even drag away so heavy a burden as a dead man?" he questioned pointedly. "Remember that Monsieur Noël was powerfully built. He was a man of quite twelve stone in weight, I should say."

"Yes, sir," Gilder agreed. "But Tetley was desperate, and he is also strong. Besides, he would not have to carry the body very far. There is the moat and the ditch on the one side and the river on the other. Either the moat or the ditch or the river would serve his purpose equally well, and each of them ought to be dragged. When he had successfully hidden the results of his crime he would still have time to make his escape, and there are many ways by which he could have gone—ways perfectly well known to him, that he could follow in the fog. He was helped by the fog."

"It is incredible that an English schoolboy could

possibly deserve such a character for downright villainy as you are giving to Tetley," sighed Mr. Eyre-Loftus. "I cannot bring myself to believe it of him. He is the son of respectable parents. His father can at least claim to be a gentleman. They have an estate near Chelmsford. I have telegraphed to Mr. Tetley, requesting him to come here. I expect him this afternoon."

Gilder, who stood near the window, watched the headmaster pacing the room with a hand meditatively clutching his bushy brown beard.

"Have you communicated with the friends of Monsieur Noël, sir?" the monitor presently requested to know.

Mr. Eyre-Loftus stopped abruptly.

"Not yet," he answered. "I must do so." He looked about him curiously, meditatively rubbing his fingers across his forehead. "Dear me!" he exclaimed. "His friends? Who are his friends, I wonder? It is rather curious, Gilder, but now that I come to think of it, I really know exceedingly little of Monsieur Noël. I do not believe, indeed, that I have the name or address of a single person to whom he is known."

Gilder gazed at the Head in surprise.

"But before he came to the school, sir, and when you engaged him as a teacher of modern languages, you naturally had letters from him, and recommendations from people who knew him?"

Mr. Eyre-Loftus shook his head. "No, I did not. He applied to me personally, without even an introduction. I liked the look of him. He was obviously a gentleman, and I quickly discovered that he was also a scholar. He informed me that he had taken his doctor's degree at Heidelberg University. I think it was there that he was a lecturer on French literature. He had been travelling tutor to a grand duke whose name I forget, and in many ways he proved to my complete satisfaction that he was exactly the man I wanted to fill the place of Herr Hilliger. My only doubt of him was that a man of his scholastic attainments should choose to waste his unquestionable abilities by acting as a mere tutor in a school like Haddisthorpe."

"It has always seemed to me that Monsieur Noël was fitted for something very much higher," interposed Gilder. "He might have been a great soldier, or have distinguished himself in the diplomatic service as an ambassador, or something of that nature."

Mr. Eyre-Loftus gave a curt nod of concurrence.

"Yes," he said.

"He was an uncommonly good teacher, sir," commented Gilder, "and all of us had a genuine regard for him—all of us excepting Tetley."

"I have always understood that he had no home ties," remarked the Head, "but it is impossible that he can have been without friends and correspondents. It occurs to me that we may find papers and letters in his room which will enlighten us." Mr. Eyre-Loftus looked at his watch. "Shall we go upstairs and investigate?" he proposed.

"Certainly, sir, if you wish," acquiesced Gilder.

They went together upstairs, past Le Roy's closed door, to the top passage, and into Prosper Noël's deserted room.

To all outward appearance it was exactly in the condition in which he had left it. The blind was drawn up and the curtains were thrown back. There were some scraps of waste paper on the floor; a volume of Plato's Dialogues lay open on the writing table, with a note book beside it, into which he had copied some of his favourite passages in his beautifully neat Greek writing.

Mr. Eyre-Loftus glanced at the rows of books on the shelves—books in many languages. Gilder opened the table drawer and looked within.

"Here are some letters, sir," he announced, examining them. "But I see they are all from the boys, written to him in the holidays, I suppose. Here's one from myself, two or three from Elkin, another from Arlingford, and a lot from the lower boys." He put them aside and took up a second bundle. "These are tradesmen's bills," he said, "all of them paid and receipted."

"He would probably keep his private papers locked up somewhere," the Head mused, stroking his bushy beard.

They both went about the room opening drawers and

cupboards. One drawer was locked. Gilder tried all his keys, and at length found one that fitted. The drawer contained nothing but a bundle of carefully marked examination papers, of which the Head took possession. A travelling trunk under the bed was also locked. Gilder had to borrow Miss Megson's keys before he could discover one that would open it, but his trouble was not rewarded, for the half-empty trunk contained only the dead tutor's summer clothing, about a dozen French novels, and a tattered copy of "Wilhelm Meister." Nowhere in all the room did they find a single scrap of paper or a single article of any kind which would lead them to a knowledge of Prosper Noël's identity.

"This is most mortifying. I feel that we are completely nonplussed," remarked Mr. Eyre-Loftus. "I should hardly have thought it possible that a man could leave behind him so little trace of intercourse with the outer world. It seems almost as if he had intentionally endeavoured to cut himself off from all his connections."

"That is exactly what I was thinking," acknowledged Gilder. "And I am not sure that there is not a good deal of truth in it. Monsieur Noël was always mysterious about himself, even as to his nationality. For my own part, I am not certain even now to what country he belonged."

"But he was French, of course," declared the Head with decision.

"I doubt it," returned Gilder. "Everyone in the school believed him to be French because of his name. But it does not follow that Prosper Noël was his real name, sir."

"You amaze me, Gilder!" exclaimed the Head. "If his name was assumed, that will add very materially to our difficulty in communicating with his people. All the same, I believe it was his true name, and that he was French."

Gilder looked at the head master curiously.

"I have thought all along that you knew everything about him, sir," he remarked, "and that you were keeping his secret for him. Did you never hear that Le Roy and

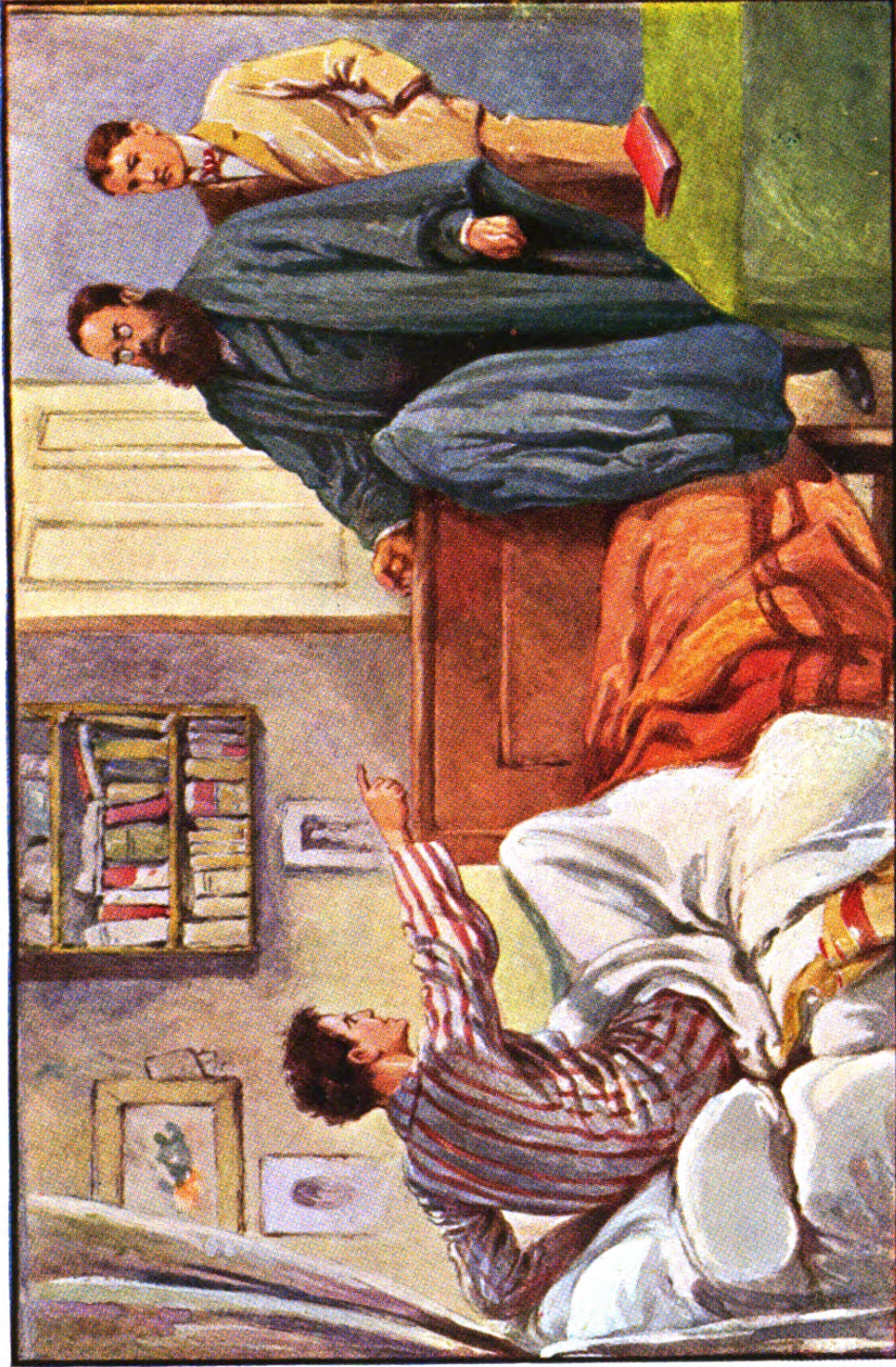
he used to talk to each other in a language that they alone knew? Did you never have reason to suspect that Le Roy and he knew each other before either of them came to Haddisthorpe?"

Mr. Eyre-Loftus shook his head. "No," he answered. "This is the first that I have ever heard of such an idea. Le Roy? Dear me! In that case Le Roy ought to be able to give us the information we require. I will go down and question him. You had better come with me."

"But he is ill, sir," Gilder objected. "He has got brain fever. The doctor said he was not on any account to be disturbed. Besides, I am afraid he wouldn't be willing to tell us anything."

"We will see about that," rejoined the Head, striding along the passage.

Gilder followed him down to the half-landing and into Le Roy's study. As they quietly entered, the patient sat up in his bed, staring at them with wild, feverish eyes. Then, pointing at them accusingly, he broke out into a delirious torrent of strange, unintelligible language.



"POINTING AT THEM ACCUSINGLY, HE BROKE OUT INTO A DELIRIOUS TORRENT OF STRANGE UNINTELLIGIBLE LANGUAGE" (p. 180).



## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE MYSTERY OF A FRIENDSHIP.

It was obvious that Le Roy did not recognise either the Headmaster or Gilder as they entered his study and went towards him. He shrank from them as though they were his deadliest enemies.

Mr. Eyre-Loftus drew back, astonished at the change in him, at the wild look in his eyes, and at his strange, unintelligible words.

"He is very ill," said he.

"Listen, sir! What is he saying?" interrogated Gilder. "Do you understand him? Do you know the language that he is speaking?"

"He is raving. He is in a high fever," murmured the Head. "It is no language that I ever before heard. Why has he been left alone?"

He approached the bed and tried to induce Le Roy to lie back and cover himself. For some moments Le Roy struggled against his touch, striking at him as in self defence.

"Come, Le Roy, you must really lie down," the Head implored, seizing his wrists.

Le Roy wriggled desperately to free himself, but fell back exhausted, and Gilder drew the bedclothes about him coaxingly.

"All right, Le Roy, old chap," Gilder said softly, tenderly. "Don't you know me? I am Gilder."

"Gilder?—Gilder?" Le Roy stared at him more calmly, yet still with a dazed look in his eyes. "No. I can't tell you. I'm not going to sneak. I never touched the Queen's letter. Why do you call me Le Roy? That's the name they used to call me at school." He spoke



excitedly, incoherently, going abruptly from thought to thought, mingling his English words with snatches of Greek and French, and again lapsing into the language which seemed to come most naturally to him ; the language of his private intercourse with Prosper Noël. Then he was silent for awhile, closing his eyes. When he spoke again it was in schoolboy English : " Tetley was a rank coward to run away like that. Why didn't he come back and make a clean breast of it ? "

Mr. Eyre-Loftus brought a glass of water to the bedside and held it towards the delirious boy invitingly.

Le Roy stared at it for an instant.

" Take it away," he said weakly. " Where is the letter ? Bring me the letter. I want to read it once more. I want Gilder to read it, too. And the piece of paper with the black seal on it. They're in the fire-grate."

The Head glanced to the fire, which had recently been kindled.

" What does he mean, Gilder ? Do you know ? " he whispered.

Gilder shook his head and turned to see Miss Megson entering with the patient's medicine.

Miss Megson started at sight of the two intruders.

" Dr. Harris gave orders that Le Roy was to be kept perfectly quiet," she informed them. " He must not be allowed to talk. His brain must have absolute rest."

" Quite right. That is most important," the Head accepted the implied rebuke. " You will give him every attention, Miss Megson, please, and see that the doctor's instructions are carried out in every detail. Come, Gilder ! "

Gilder followed him from the room.

" I'm afraid we cannot expect any immediate enlightenment from Le Roy," resumed Mr. Eyre-Loftus. " He is much worse than I thought. It is unfortunate, not only that a pupil should be ill, but that that pupil should happen to be one whose evidence at this particular time is of singular importance, especially taken in conjunction with what we have heard from Crawford concerning that weapon. I cannot imagine what possible reason or excuse Monsieur

Noël can have had for having such a weapon in his possession; and that he should want to get it into Le Roy's hand is beyond my comprehension. I had wished to question Le Roy concerning it."

"But I have already questioned him, sir," said Gilder, as they went side by side down the main staircase. "I spoke to him about it last night, just before he fainted, and he knew nothing. He was genuinely surprised when I mentioned the dagger."

They ceased speaking as they came amongst the boys whom Fearon was marshalling for church. The Head drew Gilder again into Mr. Megson's study.

"Tell me about that strange foreign language that Le Roy was speaking in his delirium," he urged. "I did not recognise it. At first it seemed to me to be a sort of corrupt Greek, although none of the words were familiar to me. Do you suppose it is Russian? I am not conscious that I have ever heard Russian spoken."

"No. I don't think it is Russian, sir," Gilder replied. "I can't even conjecture what it may be. I only know that Monsieur Noël and Le Roy spoke it equally well, and that they used it in secret conversations."

"That is significant—very. It would seem to suggest that these two were of the same nationality, and that that nationality was anything but French. It is remarkable that I have been kept in ignorance of this strange circumstance."

Gilder at this juncture put to Mr. Eyre-Loftus a question to which he had for a long time desired an authoritative answer.

"Who are Pierre Le Roy's parents, sir?"

Mr. Eyre-Loftus gave a perceptible little start of surprise.

"Dear me!" he cried. "They must be communicated with! I must write to them. I must get him to give me their address."

"Haven't you got it, sir?" Gilder interrogated.

"No. Curiously enough, I have never heard from them in any direct way. I understood when he came to the school that they were travelling on the Continent,

Le Roy was placed here by a London banker whom his parents had entrusted to find a good English school for the boy. It was all arranged by correspondence."

"Didn't the banker bring him down, then?" asked Gilder, remembering how Brelson had once told him that Le Roy had come to Haddisthorpe like a waif out of the void.

"No. It was Elkin who brought him from London."

"I remember now," nodded Gilder. "And Lewis and Monsieur Noël came by the same train. I daresay that that banker could give you all the information you want about Monsieur Noël, sir. For you may depend upon it that Monsieur had more charge of Le Roy than Elkin had, and that they had planned together to be in the same school."

Mr. Eyre-Loftus looked at Gilder sharply.

"Have you any definite ground for supposing that they were previously known to each other?" he demanded to know.

"I have a very definite impression that they were," admitted Gilder. "Of course I couldn't be certain. They have both of them been extremely secretive and mysterious. But I believe that if you had not engaged Monsieur Noël as our master of modern languages, we should never have set eyes upon Pierre Le Roy."

"That may very well have been," acknowledged the Head. "But I do not see why they should have made a mystery of their acquaintance; do you?"

Gilder shrugged his shoulders.

"It would have been better if they had been more open about it," he responded. "Tetley, for example, always believed that Monsieur Noël and Le Roy were combined in their enmity against him, and Crawford has told you what Tetley thought of the sending of the dagger. He thought that it was meant that Le Roy should use it against him while we were in the paper chase."

"Yes," assented Mr. Eyre-Loftus. "I know that that is alleged to be Tetley's motive of vengeance. But even though Tetley is known to be hot-tempered and impulsive, such a motive could not possibly have been

strong enough to impel anyone in his senses to go to such a tragic extreme. I am persuaded, Gilder, that we have not got anywhere near to the truth in this terrible affair, and that we shall not get at the truth until Tetley is arrested and his unfortunate victim is found."

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### ON THE TRAIL.

“ UGH ! There’s not a bit of use in trying to find a trail in all this maze of footprints,” complained Brelson, as he stood gazing in perplexity at a patch of soft ground in the plantation where bootmarks of all sizes were hopelessly confused. “ That’s Deerfoot’s,” he said, pointing to an impression that was clearly defined in the mud, “ and the one with the hob-nails is the constable’s. But who can decide which is the one that we want to follow ? If I had been in Gilder’s place last night, I shouldn’t have allowed anyone to come within a good hundred yards of the spot where he saw Tetley bending over. If we could tell which were Tetley’s footprints it wouldn’t be so difficult.”

He looked at Crawford as he spoke. Crawford was one of the Long Dormitory band of palefaces, but he rather prided himself on his skill in tracking, and he would long ago have joined the White Feather tribe but that Tetley had persuaded him to remain hostile to the Indians. His hostility was for the present held in abeyance.

“ I believe I know where we could find Tetley’s footprints,” he said now, in response to Brelson’s remarks. “ But it’s a long way from here ; quite a mile, I should say.”

“ Where ? ” Brelson sharply inquired.

“ Why,” said Crawford, “ near the wall where we hid the leather case that we were supposed to deliver to Le Roy. The ground was awfully muddy just there, I remember. But only he and I crossed it, and we shall easily know which marks he made, because his feet are miles bigger than mine.”

"Yes, you're quite right," agreed Sandwith. "Tetley has unusually big feet. They helped him a lot in football."

"Come on, then," proposed Brelson. "Let's go and see. It needn't take us more than half-an-hour." He signed to Dewsbury and Sandwith to accompany them, and they all four set off at a steady quick walk along the plantation path, across the two fields and through the orchard to the bridge, and thence by the way that the hounds had taken on the previous afternoon. They wore their week-day clothes and were glad to think they would not be observed by people going to church, the bells having already stopped ringing.

As they were crossing the bridge they encountered Sharland, the village constable, who had been out since early dawn.

"Morning, young gen'lemen," said he, coming to a halt in front of them. "You be on the search, same as myself, eh? I were just stepping along to the school, on the off-chance of seeing the master, if so be he ain't gone to church." He thrust his hand into his tail pocket. "Here's something I found in a ditch along the marsh there, an hour ago. I dunno if it have got any connection with the affair." He wrestled with his coat tail and presently produced a long leather case which Crawford immediately recognised.

It was crushed and bent out of its original shape, as if someone had stamped it under foot with the purpose of destroying it, and the leather was soiled with mud and smeared with green moss.

"Let me have a look at it!" cried Crawford. And when the policeman handed it to him and he examined it, "Yes," he said, decisively, "part of it is missing—the smaller part that formed the lid. It is the case that held the dagger. Look, Brelson, you can see where the long blade fitted in."

Brelson examined it in his turn. The black roan leather was lined with purple velvet, and there was a narrow band of silver round the edge where the lid would meet. He turned it in his hand, looking at it with interested scrutiny.

"It hasn't been made in England," he decided.

"How do you know?" questioned Crawford.

"Because," explained Brelson, "if it had been, that band of silver would have been hall-marked." He glanced at the constable. "Do you mind taking us and showing us exactly where you found it?" he asked.

The constable restored the article of evidence to his pocket.

"I don't see as how it would do any good for you to see the place," he answered.

"It will do lots of good if we can find the footprints of the fellow who planted it there," Brelson retorted.

"You didn't look for footprints, did you, Sharland?"

"No, I can't say as I did," admitted the representative of the law. "I'll show you the spot if you like. 'Tis not so far—only at the back of the old hulk yonder."

He led the four boys across the bridge and along by the river bank. Crawford walked by his side, Brelson, Sandwith and Dewsbury following in Indian file. Brelson kept his eyes bent searchingly on the ground.

"Ugh! The hares came along here last night," he remarked, observing the tiny fragments of paper scattered at the side of the path. "We've just passed the place where they emptied their bags of scent. That must have been before Still Water came by. I suppose it was too foggy for him to track them. If it hadn't been for the fog, we should have run them to earth just about here, Wax Wing! I was sure they had left the beaten trail and come across the Swamp." He stopped, letting the constable and Crawford go on in advance. "Look at the footmarks there, Wax Wing," he said, pointing to the impressions in a level patch of soft ground. "They're made by Deerfoot and Little Bittern. One was going in front of the other. Shall I tell you which one? It was Little Bittern."

"Hew!" exclaimed Wax Wing. "How do you know?"

"Ugh!" grunted the Little Chief Son of the Morning. "Any brave worth his salt at scouting could see that Deerfoot must have walked behind, because his moccasins have crushed out the marks made by the chap in front of him."

"Son of the Morning speaks the words of wisdom," commented Wax Wing.

"There's another set of footprints to the right of those," remarked Big Horn.

"Yes, I know," nodded Brelson. "They are Still Water's."

Constable Sharland abruptly left the path and branched off on the swampy marshland. Brelson, Sandwith and Dewsbury followed, noticing, however, that the footprints of the two hares and Le Roy continued in the direction of the hulk.

Sharland led the four boys obliquely across to a drain, where he drew to a halt.

"'Twas somewhere hereabout that I found the thing," he said, walking along the edge of the drain, searching as he went in the hedge on the farther side.

It was the same drain that Gilder and Fearon had crossed on the previous evening, and when he stopped a second time it was opposite the same gap in the hedge through which the two hares had made their way, leaving their trail in clearly defined footmarks which Brelson did not fail to observe.

"There—just there!" cried the constable. "That's where I found it, covered with mud."

The boys gazed upon the spot at which he pointed as though they expected to learn from it the reason why Tetley had sought to destroy the leather case while retaining the dagger. Brelson went down into the ditch and searched among the reeds.

"Haow!" exclaimed Dewsbury. "Are you looking for the dagger?"

"Ugh!" muttered Brelson. "What would be the good? He took it away with him. I'm trying to find the place where he crossed the drain. I'm on his trail, I believe."

Searching, he worked his way back to the gap in the hedge.

"It must have been here, after all," he decided. "There's a strange footprint here; but I fancy it's a bit too large, even for Tetley's. I wonder if the Professor



chanced to be prowling round here yesterday, and if Tetley followed on his trail all the way from this spot into the plantation. It looks like it!"

"Monsieur Noël was always particularly neat about the feet," Crawford reminded him. "And his boots were narrow and pointed at the toes."

"That's what makes me believe he has been here," ruminated Brelson. "And yet, what could he be doing on this side of the river? He was a botanist, and was in the habit of studying wild flowers; but it's too late in the year for that." He turned to the constable. "I suppose, Sharland, you didn't happen to see Professor Noël by any chance yesterday afternoon, did you?"

The constable stood at the side of the drain, with his thumbs in his belt.

"Yes, sir," he answered. "I seen him about two o'clock. I were in the post office, buying a screw of tobacco, and having a neighbourly chat with Miss Prew, when he comes in and asks her if there was a letter for him. 'Yes,' says Miss Prew, going to the rack. 'There's a letter, and likewise a parcel, Moundseer,' and she gave him them across the counter. The letter were fastened with a great black splash of sealing wax, I noticed."

"Hew!" exclaimed Brelson in quick interest. "That's where the black seal came from, then! Was it a foreign letter, do you suppose, Sharland?"

"Lor', sir! How should I know?" said Sharland.

"By the stamps, of course; and the postmark. Didn't you look?"

Brelson seemed to think that a policeman was good for very little if he did not notice such details.

Sharland shook his head.

"No. I never took no stock of the stamps," he answered.

"That's a pity," pursued Brelson. "What sort of a parcel was it?"

The constable considered a moment and then responded.

"A brown paper one, about half as long as your arm, but not quite as thick."

“Ugh!” grunted Brelson. “That would be just about the size of the leather case that you found here in the ditch, wouldn’t it?” He went aside to where Crawford was standing. “I say, Crawford,” he conjectured, “I believe the dagger came to him by post! Rather queer of him, wasn’t it, to try to get it immediately into the hands of Le Roy?”

“Yes, rather!” agreed Crawford. “He must have been expecting it, I should say. He and Le Roy must have been making up a plot of some sort between them. It makes me begin to wonder if his grudge against Tetley was based on something more serious than their quarrels in school and at Megson’s.”

“How do you mean?” interrogated Brelson.

Crawford bent down, pretending to be examining something in the ditch.

“Tetley never told me what it was,” he went on, “but I happen to know he had discovered some secret or other concerning Noël and Le Roy. He kept awfully quiet about it, but I’m certain it must have been something that Noël didn’t want made public. You remember, don’t you, how Tetley sat upon Noël that night in Number Three dormitory and thrashed him with the heel of a slipper, thinking it was Le Roy he was bashing? Well, Tetley never got punished. Noël simply dared not punish him.”

“But why?” questioned Brelson. “I’ve wondered why the punishment was delayed.”

“Well, I will tell you,” rejoined Crawford. “I was with Tetley the next morning, when Monsieur threatened to report him to the Head. Tetley went up to him and said with a boldness that surprised me: ‘Look here, Monsieur, I know I did wrong, and I apologise. If that’s not enough, you may report me to the Head. But if you do, mind you, and I get punished, there’s not a fellow in the school who shall not be told your secret!’ Afterwards I asked Tetley what he meant by his threat; but he wouldn’t tell me. Monsieur Noël went as white as a sheet, though; and I’ve since noticed that Tetley exercised a sort of power over him.”

Brelson had climbed up out of the ditch, and now he drew Crawford apart from the others.

"You ought to have told all this to Gilder," he said. "It seems to me to supply a sort of added reason for what happened in the plantation. If Tetley once threatened to reveal his secret, Monsieur would naturally want to get him out of the way."

"But," objected Crawford, "you're talking as though the victim were Tetley and not Noël!"

"I'm talking as though I believed that it was intended that Tetley should be the victim," retorted Brelson. "My theory is that Tetley used the dagger in self-defence."

"I see," nodded Crawford. "That makes him less guilty."

"Of course it does," agreed Brelson. "You don't imagine, do you, that any English schoolboy would plan and carry out a crime like this? All the same, we've got to find out as much as we possibly can, and that's why I'm anxious first of all to identify Tetley's footprints and follow on his trail."

"I've told you where you can do that," said Crawford. "The place where we hid the thing isn't far from here. Let's go now."

Leaving the constable, Sandwith and Dewsbury to continue their search for the missing portion of the leather case, Crawford and Brelson walked at a quick pace across the marsh to the road, and thence by a cart track to Gurney's farm. The ground was overtrodden by a confusion of footprints left by the hounds. Near a gate in an old stone wall Crawford went aside over the grass, but hesitated on seeing that a small herd of cows had taken up a position precisely at that part of the wall where he had expected to discover the evidence of which he was in search.

The cattle had left scarcely a bare inch of the ground untrodden. But Crawford, walking along by the wall, found some of his own footmarks, and presently he came upon others of a different stamp which both he and Brelson agreed to be the marks of Tetley's large feet.

"See! They go straight up to the place where I hid

the leather case!" Crawford pointed out. "It was in that crevice between the two big stones that I shoved it." He glanced at Brelson, who had taken a sheet of paper and a pencil from his pocket. "What are you up to?" he questioned.

"I am going to make a drawing and take the measure of Tetley's footprint," Brelson returned, "although we should easily know it again by the rounded toes."

Half an hour later they had joined their companions and the constable on the marsh, and were returning through the plantation when they met Gilder.

Gilder informed them that the Head had received a telegram from Mr. Tetley imploring to know if his son had yet been found. No satisfactory answer could be made, however. The missing boy's description had already been widely circulated among the county constabulary, and inquiries had been made in every town and village and hamlet between the Colne and the Crouch, but as yet not the faintest trace of Tetley had been discovered.

It ought to have been easy for anyone to remember him had they seen him, for his brown and white striped jersey, his bare knees and brown knitted stockings were unmistakable marks of identification. He was known to have no money in his pockets, and therefore he could not easily have escaped by train. It was almost certain that he would seek food in some farmstead or wayside cottage, but so far he had not revealed himself. He had disappeared as completely as if he had been spirited away.

In these circumstances it was nothing to be wondered at that his schoolfellows allowed their reluctant suspicions against him to become a confirmed and positive belief in his guilt.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### THE BROKEN BRIDGE.

GILDER'S announcement that the searchers beyond the neighbourhood of the school had found no trace of the fugitive, and that even the police, with the aid of the telegraph, had not discovered a single clue as to the direction in which Tetley escaped, added very greatly to the general perplexity.

"It looks to me," remarked Dewsbury, "as if he had met with an accident when he was running away in the fog. He could hardly have vanished like this if something queer hadn't happened. Perhaps he has hurt himself badly and is lying waiting for help. Or he may have fallen into a pond or the river and got drowned."

Dewsbury surveyed the faces of his four companions for approval of his conjecture. They had paused in the plantation clearing. The spot where the tragedy had occurred had for them a strange, irresistible fascination.

"More likely he's hiding in some cottage," ventured Crawford. "Lots of people would take a fellow in and give him shelter when he'd lost himself and was hungry."

"Tetley's not likely to have given himself away by going into any cottage or any dwelling," chimed in Sandwich. "He can't help having blood-stains about him, and they would betray him. I believe he has taken refuge in some shed or outhouse, or perhaps even in the old hulk at the other side of the river. I knew a chap once who hid himself for four days in a barn and fed on Swede turnips and raw eggs, with some milk that he managed to get from a cow, although I don't know how. Tetley has hardly been absent twenty hours yet, and it's next to impossible he can have been looked for in every

place he's likely to be hiding in. Why, for all we know, he may still be somewhere in this plantation."

"That's not in the least probable," interposed Brelson, with an air of authority. "There isn't an inch of ground or a bush or a tree that hasn't been carefully searched. He can't be in the plantation unless——"

He hesitated, as though a new idea had leapt into his mind.

"Unless what?" questioned Gilder. "He can't very well have taken cover in the earth."

"I was going to say unless he had fallen into the moat," continued Brelson. "Nobody has yet searched the moat; but he might easily have missed his way and slipped down the bank into the water. I saw some of his footprints near there this morning—at least, I believe they were Tetley's."

Brelson's comrades were ready to follow any suggestion, however wild, that promised to lead to their enlightenment.

"You had better come and show us the exact spot," Gilder proposed; "but I don't for my own part believe that Tetley was anywhere near the moat. You see, he ran off in quite another direction."

"Yes," admitted Brelson, "but you have said yourself that he had time to come back and dispose of the body and clear away again while you were absent at the bridge. Suppose he wanted to get quickly back to Megson's, then his nearest way would be by crossing the moat by the plank bridge."

"When you come to think of it," remarked Sandwich, "the moat is just as likely a place as any in which to hide anything."

"But," added Gilder, moving in the direction of Megson's, "considering that Tetley knew that I had seen him at his awful work, I cannot understand his intention in coming back and running the risk of being arrested."

"Neither can I," observed Brelson. "And if he used the dagger in self-defence, there was really no need for him either to run away or to hide the evidence of his deed."

"It wasn't in self-defence, though, Brelson," Gilder affirmed. "It was a savage, brutal attack, and it's my private opinion that Monsieur Noël was taken wholly by surprise, not knowing that Tetley had the weapon which he supposed was in Le Roy's possession."

"Le Roy could throw light on this affair and save us no end of worry if he hadn't happened to fall ill just at the most inconvenient time," said Crawford.

"I am afraid it will be days before he is allowed to speak," resumed Gilder. "At present his brain is in such a hopeless muddle that you can't believe anything he says. Brain fever has that effect, you know. When the Head and I were in his room this morning he wanted us to give him a letter and a piece of paper with a black seal on it that he said were in the fire-grate, although the fire was alight and there was no sign of any letter or any piece of paper near."

Brelson regarded his fagmaster curiously.

"Perhaps his brain wasn't wandering quite so much as you imagine," he remarked. "There was a slip of paper with a black seal on his table last night, and Monsieur Noël got a letter yesterday which he may have been anxious that Le Roy should read. The dagger came by post yesterday, too."

"Indeed!" cried Gilder. "How do you know?"

It was Crawford who replied to this question.

"Constable Sharland saw him receive both the sealed letter and the parcel from Miss Prew," he explained; and he proceeded to tell the monitor of the finding of the leather case and the discovery of Tetley's footprints on the marsh.

"That would seem to indicate that he came home by the marsh and round by the old hulk," conjectured Gilder. "I wonder if it was near the hulk that he first encountered Monsieur Noël? I firmly believe that the Professor was there when Fearon and I came past, for I heard two persons talking. I thought at first that they were Noël and Le Roy, because they, or at least one of them, spoke in a foreign tongue which I've never heard used by anyone else. But it wasn't Le Roy, and it could hardly have

been Tetley, unless Tetley is acquainted with more languages than he has learnt at Haddisthorpe."

Brelson nudged Crawford's arm.

"He was once in St. Petersburg," he remarked, "but I never supposed he could understand Russian. Tetley wasn't any good at languages; in fact, he was exceedingly rocky in that direction."

"He hasn't done badly in the last exam., though," Gilder assured them.

"I think we might pay a visit to that old hulk after dinner," suggested Brelson, as he left the path and forced his way in among the bushes in the direction of the moat.

Gilder and the others followed him. They were in an unfamiliar place, which was out of bounds. Brelson alone seemed to know his way unerringly.

"It's awfully swampy here," he said. "It's fortunate we haven't got our Sunday togs on. Bear to the right a bit, and look out for Tetley's track!"

They dispersed themselves, each searching on separate lines.

"Here you are!" cried Dewsbury after a while. "Somebody's been along here."

"Stop where you are, then, until I come to you," ordered Brelson.

He was quickly at Dewsbury's side, gazing fixedly at a track of deeply impressed footmarks.

"Tetley, without a doubt!" he decided. "And he's been carrying a heavy weight."

"How do you make that out?" inquired Gilder, looking over his fag's shoulder. "And how are you so cocksure that it is Tetley?"

Brelson moved aside and drew a sheet of paper from his jacket pocket.

"I know that the marks were made by Tetley, because they're the same as those I took this drawing of by the wall on Gurney's Farm," he explained, handing the paper to Gilder. "I know that he was carrying a heavy weight because the impressions are deeper than they would be if he hadn't been."

"Well, let us see where they lead to," proposed Gilder,



glancing at the rough drawing and assuring himself that his fag had made no mistake.

"They lead to the moat, of course," added Brelson, as he set off on the trail.

The margin of the moat was thickly overgrown with rushes and reeds and formidable clumps of nettles and bushes of brambles. But through the rank verdure an indistinct track could be discerned leading in a direct line and seeming to end in the wall of Megson's house.

"I've never been here before," remarked Gilder, looking about him with the interest of a stranger. "Megson's looks an awfully dismal place from this point of view. Which windows are those that we see?"

"The lower ones are the kitchens and Mr. Megson's study," Sandwith told him. "Those above them are Long Dormitory. The little top one in the gable is the window of Le Roy's room. Whenever I've been here it has been to look for lost cricket balls. They often drop over here when they get an unusually hard swipe from the nets. I should say there must be generations of cricket balls at the bottom of the moat. Tetley himself used to say that we could get a rich harvest if the water were only drained off. And once he even came here with a sort of trawling net that he'd invented; but all that he succeeded in fishing up was an old Latin dictionary that some fellow must have shied out through the dormitory window. It's on record that one of Megson's once caught an enormous pike from the bridge there."

He pointed to a structure formed of two rough-hewn tree trunks that spanned the moat.

"There used to be a handrail on it," Brelson added, "but it seems to have been broken off since I was last here."

"It wasn't broken off on Thursday when I was looking out of the dormitory window," remarked Dewsbury. "I know it wasn't, because I saw a wood pigeon perched on it and wished I had a gun."

They approached the little bridge. It was overgrown with green moss and poisonous-looking fungus.

"I shouldn't like to have to cross it in the dark or in

a fog," observed Gilder. He glanced down at the slimy, moss-grown earth where the tree trunks rested. "Tetley has been here!" he cried, bending to scrutinise a footprint.

"Yes, sure enough he has," concurred Brelson. "And—Gilder, I believe it was him that broke the hand-rail! Look! the wood is freshly broken; broken as if he had fallen against it, or as if the weight he carried——"

He did not finish the conjecture, but stepped cautiously upon the bridge and stared down into the dark, sluggish water whose depths were obscured by a dense growth of lazily swaying weeds. Watched by his companions, he went down on his hands and knees and peered searchingly beneath him. He waved his hand beckoningly. Gilder went to his side.

"Can you see something down there?" he whispered in a voice of awe—"something black, like a man's leg bent double?"

Gilder was silent for many moments.

"What's that white thing?" he asked presently, "a white thing, like a collar or a shirt cuff?"

Brelson leaned farther over the bank.

"It looks more like a bit of a football jersey, doesn't it?" he questioned, still in an awed voice. "I believe they're both there—Tetley as well as Monsieur Noël. He must have lost his balance when he was throwing the burden off his shoulder!"

"Come away!" urged Gilder. "Let us get back into Megson's. The moat must be dragged."

Brelson crept to the farther end of the bridge. Gilder followed him, and each in his turn, Crawford, Dewsbury, and Sandwith, crossed over.

"Tetley must have called aloud for help when he fell in," observed Crawford. "It is strange that nobody heard him!"

## CHAPTER XXX.

### WHAT TONY FOUND NEAR THE HAUNTED HULK.

ON that Sunday Harvey Gilder occupied the housemaster's place at the dinner table, and exhibited his skill in carving a boiled leg of mutton, under instructions from Miss Megson, who was economically anxious that he should not be too generous in his helpings, and that he should be careful to serve a due proportion of fat. Fearon, who was there as a guest, served the suet dumplings and the carrots and turnips, and did monitor's duty in preserving order and silence.

In the midst of the meal Miss Megson was summoned from the table to see the doctor, who had chosen this inconvenient time to call and see Le Roy. Her absence was the signal for an outburst of conversation.

"That was an awfully ripping motor-car that Tetley's father and mother came in," remarked one boy across the table. "It was a Mercedes, I believe."

"Was that Mr. and Mrs. Tetley?" returned the boy whom he had particularly addressed. "I didn't know. I saw the car stop opposite the church gates. Of course, they've come to make inquiries about Tetley?"

"Yes. They've gone along to the Head's house, to have dinner there, I suppose. They must be rather well off to afford a motor-car like that one."

"Nobody seems to have come to make inquiries about poor Monsieur Noël," interposed a third boy.

"Of course not," put in a fourth. "It isn't likely they could have come across from Paris already."

"Noël doesn't belong to Paris," corrected another. "He isn't French, either. He's a German, because I heard the Head say to my mater once that he'd taken his doctor's degree at Heidelberg."

"Well, that's the first time I ever heard he was a German," observed a boy named Strauss, "He isn't the least bit like a German, and, besides, Noël isn't a German name. It's French."

"Perhaps he's a Dutchman," someone else suggested.

"I should rather say he's Russian," another ventured. "Russians are always good at languages, and Monsieur Noël could talk a good half dozen."

The first boy who had spoken turned to Gilder.

"What countryman was Monsieur Noël, Gilder?" he asked.

"I don't exactly know," Gilder admitted, "and I hardly see that it signifies greatly. He was a scholar and a gentleman, however, and a gentleman may be of any nationality."

"Yes, I'm certain he was a gentleman," said a boy named Mayhew. "About a week ago I was walking with him along the high road, when we came upon an errand boy struggling under the weight of a basket of potatoes. 'That is far too heavy for a little chap like you,' said the professor; 'let me carry it for you.' And he did, too. I thought that was awfully kind of him."

"He was always doing things like that," observed another. "I once saw him going out of Megson's with a bundle under his arm, and I afterwards discovered that it was a suit of his old clothes that he was taking to give to one of the villagers who was out of work."

"He was fearfully strong," added a boy who wore spectacles with very large, round glasses. "Only last week there was a coal cart got stuck in a rut in Dead Tree Gulch. The horse and man together couldn't make it budge. Noël caught hold of one of the spokes of the embedded wheel. 'Now!' he shouted, and in next to no time the cart was free."

"I believe he must have been a cavalryman at some time," said Dewsbury. "Before last holidays there was a company of dragoons passing through Haddisthorpe. Noël stood on the kerb as they rode past, and first the major and then all the men saluted him. Both he and Le Roy, who was with him, returned the salute, and I

suppose I should have done so, too, only I wasn't quick enough."

"That major must have known him," interposed Tony Brelson; "and yet he can't ever have been in a British regiment."

"But there was something about Noël that always made you think he must have been a soldier," remarked Sandwith. "I saw him on horseback once, and he sat in his saddle and held the bridle exactly like a lifeguardsman, and he touched his charger's side with his heels quite in military style, although he didn't wear any spurs. The horse was only an old hunter that the squire had lent him, but somehow he made the animal move as if it had never had anyone but a soldier on its back."

"You seem to forget, Dewsbury, that on the Continent there is compulsory military service," remarked Fearon, "and that every man is more or less a soldier."

"That is true," nodded Dewsbury; "but Herr Hilliger, who had served five years in the German army, wasn't to be compared with Monsieur Noël for soldierly bearing."

"Noël was certainly more like a soldier than a schoolmaster," decided Gilder. "He was the best swordsman I have ever seen in my life, and I've seen a good many."

After dinner most of the boys were extremely busy writing letters home or doing their Sunday questions, while some went out to visit their friends at other houses or the school. Fearon went upstairs with Gilder to his room, where they quietly discussed the incidents and circumstances in connection with the crime alleged against Tetley, trying also to come to some possible explanation of the mysterious acquaintance between Prosper Noël and Pierre Le Roy. They went into Monsieur Noël's room and searched once again among his books and other belongings for evidence which might bring them to some knowledge of his history and his family connections; but in this quest they were unsuccessful.

They were thus engaged when they heard the restless panting of a motor-car outside.

"I expect this is Mr. and Mrs. Tetley," said Fearon; "we had better go down."

"I hope the Head is with them," said Gilder, "otherwise we shall not know how much to tell them and how much to leave unsaid. It's decidedly awkward to have to speak to them at all."

"I should say as little as possible," advised Fearon, "and not breathe a word about the moat. There is no use in alarming them; and, after all, we know nothing with absolute certainty. Tetley may be alive and well."

They were met at the foot of the stairs by Miss Megson, who introduced them to Mr. and Mrs. Tetley.

Mr. Tetley had the ruddy face and the wholesome appearance of a sporting country gentleman. When he heard Gilder's name he drew him aside and forthwith began to interrogate him minutely, and with such intimate knowledge of all that had occurred that it was obvious that Mr. Eyre-Loftus had hidden from him no single fact or circumstance relating to the tragedy in the plantation.

Very naturally Mr. Tetley endeavoured to persuade himself that his son was innocent and even above suspicion.

"Henry has always been a most gentle and peace-loving boy," he averred, with fatherly confidence, "and I cannot believe that he would desire to do bodily harm to any one. Yet, if I am to credit what I have been told, you have stated that you actually, with your own eyes, saw him committing a most brutal and outrageous crime! Now I do not wish to insinuate, young man, that you would wilfully perjure yourself, but I am convinced—my instinct tells me—that you have made a grave mistake. It could not have been Henry whom you saw."

Gilder looked at him sharply.

"Perhaps you do not understand, sir," he said, "but it was not possible for me to make a mistake of recognition. I am perfectly well acquainted with your son's face and figure, and I certainly saw him."

"Yes, but in the obscurity of a dense fog——" retorted Mr. Tetley with incredulity.

"But I had a powerful bull's-eye lantern," rejoined Gilder, "and I was near him. He wore his football jersey, and at that hour every other fellow in Megson's, and indeed in the school, had changed his clothes."

"Even that fact does not convince me," resumed the missing boy's father. "Many another person of his size and build might have worn a similar jersey. Then again, I am asked to believe that Henry, who is barely seventeen, attacked a powerful, full-grown man, and, unhelped, flung him bodily to the ground. That is not credible, young sir. In the fog you probably did not notice that there must have been other persons in the plantation."

"Do you mean accomplices, Mr. Tetley?"

Mr. Tetley gasped.

"Certainly not. Would you imply that my son was the accomplice, the tool, of a band of assassins?"

Gilder shrugged his shoulders.

"It was yourself who suggested that there might be others in the plantation," was his cool reminder. "But please understand, Mr. Tetley, that I do not question the possibility that your son acted in self-defence."

Mr. Tetley walked to and fro restlessly.

"Was he hurt?" he abruptly asked.

"I think not," returned Gilder. "He limped a little as he ran away; that is all. I went after him, but he soon disappeared in the mist."

"Ah, then you believe him to be merely hiding somewhere, and that he is safe?"

Gilder hesitated. It was evident that Mr. Tetley had heard nothing of the moat.

"We all of us sincerely hope that he is safe," he answered.

"He is capable of looking after himself," nodded Mr. Tetley, "and when he returns I firmly believe that he will prove himself wholly guiltless of the outrage alleged against him. You are the only person who saw anything, and, as you saw it through a thick mist, it is patent that your unsupported evidence is not to be taken as conclusive."

Gilder felt that his evidence would be conclusive enough if he were to add that Henry Tetley had given practical proof of his guilt by his act of attempting to hide the results of his crime. And what would the confident father think if he were told that in casting the dead body into the moat Henry had overbalanced himself and become

himself a victim? But of this Gilder said nothing. And, as it turned out, he was wise in his reticence.

Just before tea-time that afternoon his fag came very excitedly into his study.

"Look here what I've found!" exclaimed Brelson, and he placed a brown and white striped cap in front of Gilder.

Gilder drew it towards him across the letter that he was writing. On its front the cap bore a badge, indicating that the owner was in one of the football teams. He turned it so that he could see inside the crown, where he observed the initials, "H. T."

"It is Tetley's, of course," he decided. "Where did you pick it up?"

"On the far side of the river," Brelson informed him, "between the water and the old hulk. I went on board the hulk. There was some wet sand on the deck, and in the sand I saw Tetley's footprints. Down below, in what was once a cabin, I found a ham sandwich, with one bite taken out of the soft part with sharp, even teeth. Tetley's teeth were sharp and even. In a corner I found a loose bundle of hay that looked as if someone had made a bed of it. It's a pity none of us went across to search the hulk last night. We might have dropped on him while he slept."

He leaned with his two hands on the table.

"Was Tetley wearing his cap when you saw him in the plantation?" he asked eagerly.

"I'm not sure," Gilder scratched his head thoughtfully. "Why?"

"Because," returned Brelson, "there's something about the cap that you haven't noticed."

Gilder took it in his fingers and turned it over.

"H'm!" he muttered, fixing his eyes on a dull red stain in the middle of one of the white stripes. "That's blood! And it proves that Tetley was wearing it in the plantation."

"Yes," nodded Brelson, "and, since he lost it on the other side of the river, that proves that he hasn't fallen into the moat."



## CHAPTER XXXI.

### MEGSON'S MOAT.

DURING the next week the masters and pupils alike were busy with examinations. Mr. Megson bravely fought against his rheumatism and had himself wheeled to the school in a bath chair in order to be in his place as mathematical master. The absence of Monsieur Noël at this juncture was a serious drawback ; but the pupils in the higher forms had already completed their examination papers, and these had been carefully gone through and marked. In the result it was shown that Tetley had done unexpectedly well in both French and German. Modern languages had always been his stumbling block, and his success in this direction seemed to indicate that he might at last have hoped to be removed out of the Fifth Form, in which he had so long been anchored.

In addition to his own hard work in the competition for the Christopher Scholarship, Gilder undertook to help as a monitor in the examination of the lower boys in modern languages and history. Accordingly, he could afford very little time to devote to assisting the police in their investigations.

On the Monday morning a considerable number of strangers invaded the immediate neighbourhood of Megson's. Among them were two or three journalists, who sought interviews with masters and boys indiscriminately, and filled their notebooks with information which was often more sensational than accurate. Gilder, who was naturally accounted the witness in chief, was frequently applied to for his first-hand deposition by unauthorised persons, whose only guarantee of interest was a morbid desire to learn the details of a gruesome mystery. But he reserved

his knowledge for those who had come prepared to lend their professional skill in the unravelling of the hopelessly tangled meshes and to piece together the broken threads of evidence.

Two officers of the county constabulary and a detective had come to interrogate him, and on hearing what he had to tell them they engaged a party of labourers and set about the work of dragging the moat and its outlets.

The moat made a complete circle round the Megson house, and the grounds, therefore, formed an island, approached by a brick bridge in line with the avenue. The water was commonly supposed to be very deep, and it was six yards across at its widest part, although it looked narrower on account of the oziars and water-plants that fringed the sloping banks. It was reputed to swarm with carp and tench of fabulous size.

No more desolate-looking place could have been chosen for a school boarding house. The dwelling, with its moss-grown roof and twisted chimneys, and its walls densely covered with ivy, was weird enough in outward aspect, but the surrounding trees and the dreary moat combined gave it an air of melancholy calculated to depress the spirits of any schoolboy.

Brelson's discovery of the footprints at the broken bridge, and his theory that the dead body of Prosper Noël had been cast into the moat at that particular spot, prompted the police to concentrate their energies upon the work of searching the hidden depths of the sluggish stream. They procured grappling irons from one of the quays down the river, and long poles and props with formidable hooks at their ends, and with these they stirred the malarial mud and dragged out great balks of trees coated with nasty, evil-smelling slime and trailing weeds.

In the intervals of lessons the boys watched them from the open dormitory windows and breathed the noxious air of decay and rotteness, and great was the excitement when anything was brought to light which was seen to be more than a shapeless collection of dead leaves and mud. Sometimes from the mass of filth that was dumped down on the grassy bank a sodden cricket ball would be raked

out, and many were the conjectures as to how it chanced that such things as inkpots and primers should have found their way into so incongruous a place.

Even more difficult was it to be understood why no fewer than three door-keys and the remains of seven cricket-caps, four pocket-knives and a Waterbury watch should be dragged out. The number of jam-pots and pickle jars collected was quite astonishing, and it was an interesting fact that these were all found within measurable distance of the window of the room now occupied by Le Roy. Brelson, who saw the jam-pots all piled together, declared that they must have been shied into the moat by some fellow living in that particular room, but this, he surmised, must assuredly have been before the iron bars were fixed across the window.

Brelson watched the proceedings with lively interest, but he did not agree with the methods of the police. He was also disappointed in their delay in finding the thing for which they searched.

"They're going altogether the wrong way about it!" he objected. "There's not a bit of good in their poking and raking in the mud that way. They don't seem to have noticed that there's a lock at the place where the stream comes into the moat. They've only got to close the lock and let all the water drain out by the sluice, and they'd see everything before their eyes, the same as though it were dry land!"

Fearon stood behind him when he made this remark.

"The lock is jammed," he told Brelson, "and they can't move it."

Brelson looked round at him.

"I know that," he said, "but it wouldn't take more than a couple of hours for the blacksmith to mend it. They only need a new lever, and it wouldn't cost much."

By some means Brelson's suggestion got to the ears of the officer in charge, with the result that the dredging operations ceased, and attention was transferred to an effort to drain the moat dry by diverting the stream into another channel.

In the meantime the search for Tetley was continued

over a gradually widening area. His strange disappearance accentuated the belief that he was wilfully hiding himself to escape arrest for the crime. But it was thought that hunger would soon compel him to reveal himself, and, unless he had contrived to adopt some clever personal disguise, there could be no doubt that he would speedily be caught and brought to justice. His description was in every newspaper, and what came to be known as the Haddisthorpe Mystery was talked about throughout the length and breadth of the land.

As usually happens in such cases, suspected persons—youths of Tetley's age and height and having brown eyes and light brown hair—were arrested in various parts of the country, to be released on giving satisfactory accounts of themselves or on proving that they were not anywhere near the neighbourhood of Haddisthorpe on the evening of the terrible occurrence.

While general interest was manifested in this unaccountable disappearance of a schoolboy and his tutor, there were among the public many persons who cast serious doubt upon the explanation given by Harvey Gilder. They boldly declared that Gilder had merely invented the tale of his having witnessed the fatal act in the plantation. No one, it was argued, was reported to have seen the missing tutor or the boy Tetley enter the plantation, and there was no incontrovertible proof that they had entered it; even the discovery of the tutor's hat near the blood-stained grass was not positive evidence that a tragedy had been enacted; and it was preposterous to be asked to believe that a mere schoolboy could be bold enough to attack a grown man face to face and slay him.

On the top of these ignorant protestations it was vaguely hinted that Harvey Gilder was probably withholding some important facts of which he was cognisant, and that it was not impossible that he had himself helped his schoolfellow not only in the attack upon the tutor, but also in the grim work of disposing of the dead body.

But these uncomplimentary suppositions never reached Harvey Gilder's ears. His schoolfellows and masters

knew him too well to doubt the veracity of his statements. They believed that Prosper Noël was dead, and by Tetley's homicidal hand, and, in spite of the doubts of outsiders, they believed with equal certitude that Henry Tetley had escaped into hiding to avoid the stern justice which would surely be meted out to him when he should be discovered.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### BRELSON'S DISCOVERY.

WHILE the work of dredging and draining the moat was in process and the whole county being diligently searched for traces of Henry Tetley, the one person whose knowledge was most necessary to the full elucidation of the complex problem lay ill in bed, with his fevered brain so seriously unhinged that it seemed useless to question and cruel to disturb him.

At times Pierre Le Roy was totally unconscious, even when not physically asleep. At times he deliriously chattered with curious incoherence, his broken memory flitting from one incomplete thought to another. Occasionally he would talk as to one of his school companions about their games or their studies, but mostly about the examinations; and he would repeat snatches of Latin verse, or make a hopeless jumble of mental arithmetic, or wander vaguely among the details of the Peloponnesian war, or the travels of Odysseus, pronouncing the Greek names with faultless accuracy, and then breaking in with a cry of "Well stayed!" or "Pass! pass!"

The name of Gilder was often on his lips; sometimes it was Tetley with whom he seemed to be speaking; but more often than all it was to a person whom he addressed as Ludwig that he spoke; sometimes in French, but usually in the tongue which he had employed in his secret conversations with Prosper Noël, and which seemed to come most glibly to his lips.

His experiences when camping-out on the Broad entered frequently into his confused remembrance, and were curiously mingled with references to Brelson and the braves of the White Feather tribe. Once he repeated

with verbal precision many consecutive clauses from the Code, but abruptly went off into a maze of meaningless chatter.

Occasionally, and particularly after he had slept, he would exhibit a singular alertness of mind and become sanely sensible of his condition and of his surroundings and of the events which had happened in the hours immediately preceding his illness, and he would then ask to be told if Tetley had come home and if Monsieur Noël had been found.

A nurse had been engaged to attend to him. She was an elderly, morose woman, who was always industriously knitting a stocking which never appeared to grow any longer for all her industry. Le Roy playfully called her Penelope, and once when she asked him why, he replied:

"Oh, you understand, Penelope was the wife of Odysseus. She was always weaving a web, and at night she undid what she had done in the day, so the web, like your stocking, never got finished."

One evening Gilder peeped into his room and saw that he was awake and alone, amusing himself by tying knots in his handkerchief.

"Come in, Gilder," the patient invited. "Come and sit beside me. Penelope has gone down to make my chicken-broth. She is too silent. The doctor tells her she must not talk to me, and she obeys him too strictly."

"But if the nurse may not talk with you, neither should I," smiled Gilder, going nevertheless to the bedside.

"What are they doing outside?" Le Roy asked. "Are they building fortifications?"

"They are searching the moat," Gilder told him. "But they have not found anything yet."

Le Roy sighed.

"I made sure you would let me know at once if they had found him," he said quietly. "And when Tetley comes home, you will bring him in here to see me, will you, Gilder—before he speaks to anyone else? I have many things to ask him."

Gilder shook his head. "I can't promise you that," he said. "The police will take him."

"Not if he is innocent," Le Roy returned, "and he could not be guilty, however much the appearances are against him."

"I should be very glad to believe in his innocence as you seem to do," observed Gilder. "But I can't. I saw what he did."

"Certainly I do not question your reason for thinking him guilty," nodded Le Roy. "That is the thing which I cannot comprehend. Nevertheless——"

He broke off and leaned back on his pillow, closing his eyes.

Gilder regarded him anxiously, fearing that already he had talked too much. He drew back from the bedside very silently and then looked about the room searchingly. This was the first time that he had been in here without the Head, the doctor or the nurse, and he wanted to take advantage of his opportunity. Perhaps some books, some slip of paper, some little article, before unobserved, would give him the knowledge that he sought. But the room was scrupulously tidy. He could see nothing that might not have been seen in any other boy's study. He glanced at Le Roy, whose eyes were still closed. Then he moved a silent step farther into the middle of the room and bent forward inquiringly, fixing his gaze upon two trunks at the foot of the bed.

"Curious!" he said to himself. "Le Roy had only one trunk! Where did that second one come from?"

Something about it seemed to him to be not wholly unfamiliar. He went yet a step nearer, so that he could see it more fully, and as in a flash he remembered that he had noticed the same box in Prosper Noël's room; had seen Prosper Noël unlock it and take something out from it on the very morning of that last day in his life!

Again he glanced at the bed and started guiltily. For Le Roy's wide open eyes were fixed upon him in strange suspicion.

"Is it perhaps a mouse that you are watching there, Gilder?" Le Roy questioned hollowly. "There is one who is very friendly with me—a little brown chap. He becomes so bold sometimes that he will climb my chair



and eat the crumbs which I give him. Is he there, now ? ”

“ No,” Gilder answered confusedly. “ I was not looking at any mouse. I was wondering what Monsieur Noël's trunk is doing down here in your den. Who brought it ? Do you know ? ”

Le Roy moved uneasily, propping himself up on an elbow.

“ It was I who brought it,” he confessed, in a quiet voice that disguised his inward agitation.

“ When, and why ? ”

“ When ? On Saturday night, when all the house was asleep ? Why ? ” Le Roy paused, looking fixedly into Gilder's eyes. “ That is my private business, into which it is not necessary you should inquire.”

“ Indeed ? ” retorted Gilder. “ But do you know that the Head and I, and Fearon, have been searching Monsieur Noël's room for days, trying to find out who he was, and where his home is, in order that we may communicate with his friends ? ”

A curious expression of satisfaction passed over Le Roy's face. He had succeeded in removing all trace of Prosper Noël's identity from the room.

“ And you have found nothing ? ” he questioned, pointedly.

“ Absolutely nothing.”

“ Ah,” returned Le Roy. “ Then I am afraid you will learn nothing. Prosper Noël was singularly reticent about himself. As for the trunk, it may remain where it is, under my particular care. It is locked, you understand.”

Gilder looked at him sternly.

“ I believe you know that it contains the information we want,” he said.

“ That is probable,” Le Roy calmly agreed. “ But the information is not available.”

Gilder went to the bedside and seated himself in the nurse's chair.

“ You are an enigma,” he said. “ I cannot understand you. You know a great deal more about Prosper Noël

than you pretend to. I believe you know exactly who he was. Why do you keep your knowledge secret? What is the use of keeping it secret, now that he is dead? If he has committed some great crime—if he was a Russian anarchist, or if he has escaped from Siberia—no one can touch him now. Why are you silent?"

Pierre Le Roy slowly lay back upon his pillow.

"Gilder, I am not in a condition to be amused," he said, drawing the bedclothes up to his chin. "And your droll ideas about anarchy and Siberia fail even to make me smile. Prosper Noël was not a Russian, or an anarchist; he has never been in Siberia. As for his friends, he had none in England whom you do not yourself know. And his friends here will consult the best interests of his memory by not displaying too much curiosity."

"It is easy to see that you were his friend," rejoined Gilder with a level gaze at the boy in the bed. "I have thought so for a long time, and now what you say proves that there was a secret between you; a secret which had a good deal more in it than the mere fact that you and he could hold conversations in a language unknown to anyone else in Haddisthorpe."

Le Roy turned on his pillow.

"Well?" he interrogated. "What is the extent of your discoveries concerning him and me? Have you found something greatly to our discredit?"

Gilder shook his head.

"Hardly to your discredit," he answered, "unless it is discreditable that you should have known him to be living here under a false name, and that you should both have persistently hidden the fact that you were known to each other before either of you came to this school. Honest people—people who have nothing to fear—don't usually assume false names."

"Nothing to fear, you say?" Le Roy moaned painfully.

"Neither do they have any cause to go about in a peaceful country armed with daggers and loaded revolvers," pursued Gilder. He spoke austere, and there was a look of stern determination in his eyes.

Meeting that look, Le Roy slowly pushed back the bed-clothes and sat upright on his bed. His face was flushed and the muscles about his sensitive lips quivered. He laid a hand upon Gilder's wrist and closed the fingers in a firm grip.

"Listen, Gilder," he said hoarsely. "Listen, my friend. For you *are* my friend—my only true friend in this country now that he whom we have called Prosper Noël is dead. And it is right that I should give you my confidence; because I trust you and know that you will be true." He relaxed his fingers and moved his hand caressingly upward to Gilder's shoulder. "You will keep the secret faithfully, will you—his secret, and mine? And if I die, Gilder—if I should die——"

He stopped abruptly. The door was swung quietly open and the nurse entered with a tray which she placed on the table.

"What are you doing in here?" she cried indignantly, as Gilder rose from the chair and stood facing her. "What right have you to come in here, exciting my patient—making him talk? How dare you? Please to go out this moment!"

"I am awfully sorry, nurse," Gilder stammered. "Really, I——"

"Sorry?" she exclaimed. "But look at him! See how flushed he is! His temperature has risen enormously! It is most imprudent of you."

As he went out Gilder passed Dr. Harris, who had come to make his second visit that day.

Somewhat later in the evening the word went round Megson's that Pierre Le Roy was very much worse. The doctor had found him alarmingly ill. And when Gilder went up to his den he observed a notice on Le Roy's door, signed by the doctor, intimating that no one on any account was to enter the sick room without express permission.

Brelson was up and out very early on the following morning. The moat dam had been opened and the lock shut down, and since daybreak the water had been running out, leaving a wide deep ditch of unsightly black mud. He afterwards remarked that the absence of the water made

Megson's look positively indecent. At first, he surveyed the moat from the brick bridge in front of the house, then from the bank at the edge of the kitchen garden ; but he saw nothing to attract his special attention. Between the two foot bridges he found some men at work searching in the mud, watched by a police sergeant.

He went up to the sergeant.

"Have they found anything?" he inquired.

"No, boy," the officer answered. "We've had all our work for nothing. We've been all round and searched every foot of it. There's nothing here. Your friend who said that the body had been hidden in the moat ought to be jolly well whipped for giving us all this trouble to no purpose. If you ask me, I don't believe there was any dead body to hide."

Brelson made the circuit of the moat a second time, by the opposite bank, and was forced in the end to own to himself that he must have been following on a false trail.

It had been almost entirely on account of his own discoveries and suggestions that the searchers had concentrated their efforts upon the moat, and now it was conclusively proved that he had been wrong. He felt that he dared scarcely face the certain ridicule of his schoolfellows.

He looked at his watch. It was still very early, and he decided to walk through the plantation as far as Haddis-thorpe Bridge and return to Megson's by the road. As he went he began to wonder if, after all, Gilder had made a mistake altogether in believing that he had seen Monsieur Noël lying on the ground and Tetley bending over him. In the absence of any corroboratory evidence apart from the red stain in the grass, and the finding of the hat and the button, it seemed almost possible. And yet Harvey Gilder was not the sort of person to be deceived, or to be a victim of any optical delusion. Brelson had a profound faith in him.

The early morning was cold. Brelson walked quickly ; but when he came into the open glade he went once more to the place where the tragedy was alleged to have been

committed. He could only guess now at the exact spot, for no sign remained to mark it. He argued with himself that, admitting the truth of Gilder's evidence, admitting that the body of Prosper Noël had not been hidden in the waters of the moat, Tetley must have adopted other measures for the hiding of his crime. Could he have dragged his dead victim to the river and, having deposited it in the stream, swum across to the opposite bank, where his cap had been found? That seemed a reasonable theory, though hardly credible, for the river was fully a hundred yards away.

Pushing his way amongst the bushes, he went in the direction of the river, through the brambles. These brambles had been searched over and over again, and he avoided their denser growth, going round. To his surprise he came upon a narrow stream of running water of which he had not previously known the existence. He regarded it with wondering curiosity; but presently he realised that it was an overflow from a larger stream caused by the emptying of the moat. He followed its winding course, and it led him to what was previously a dry ditch, crossing the plantation. At its juncture with this dry ditch a wide pond had been formed in the midst of a hollow.

"Now if this pond had only been here on Saturday night," he reflected, "Tetley wouldn't have had far to come."

He remembered that it was in this direction that the first trail he had followed had led him. He had seen Constable Sharland searching among the bushes which were now submerged, standing with legs astride the narrower part of a pool of water. Presumably the constable had satisfied himself that his search was thorough. At all events his report had been accepted as final.

Brelson went round the pond until he came to a tree that leaned over it from a higher bank of ground. The branches were in the moving water. He put his two hands on the stout trunk and climbed upward and along one of the more slender boughs. From this point he looked down into the pond, cautiously balancing his weight lest he should fall. He searched from side to side

among the gently swaying bushes that showed their tops above the ruffled surface. Then he directed his gaze below him into the deep pool.

Something stirred beneath the ripples with the motion of the running water, and turned slowly over. He held his breath, peering downward in sudden affright.

He saw the swaying folds of a black coat, with the dull white linen of a shirt between the lapels. A white collar torn from its stud moved limply amid the tangle of a black necktie. Deeper in the water, and partly hidden under floating green weeds, he discovered a man's pinched white face, with very dark eyebrows and a long, black moustache.

He trembled in nervous horror at the gruesome sight.

"Gilder was right!" he muttered to himself as he clambered unsteadily to the ground.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### THE EXPERIENCE OF LAWRENCE MINOR.

GILDER had been at work very early that morning, going through two formidable piles of Fourth Form examination papers. It was easy for him to mark and classify them, and he had finished his task sooner than he had expected. Arranging the papers in neat parcels, he locked them away and strolled to his open window. From below he heard the voices of men. He leaned out and saw that the moat was already empty, and he decided to go down and ascertain what discoveries had been made.

He went out through the side door and across the kitchen garden to the broken bridge, where he was met by a police sergeant and a detective. They were explaining to him what had been done and deploring the fact that all their labour had been fruitless when Brelson strode up to them, looking unusually pale and agitated. He drew his fagmaster aside.

"Gilder," he said quietly. "I've found it. Come with me and I will show you where."

Gilder looked at him wonderingly.

"What is it that you have found, Tony?" he calmly inquired.

Brelson answered grimly:

"The body of Monsieur Noël! It's in the water. Come!" he urged.

Gilder signed to the detective to accompany him, and they followed through the bushes to the plantation path, where Brelson went on in advance.

He led them to the leaning tree, and when they were at his side he pointed down into the water at the dead face.

"There!" he said solemnly. "Do you see it?"

Gilder put a hand on the bole of the tree and bent over, staring fixedly into the water.

Yes, it was the face of Prosper Noël. There was no slightest possibility of doubting that awful fact. It was here, after all, that he had been concealed; here in the plantation, and in a place which must have been passed many times by the searchers. There had been a pool of stagnant water under the overhanging bank in which the tree had its roots, and where a tangled growth of branches and briars might well have defied even a careful search. The body had been cunningly hidden in this pool. Possibly it had sunk and been held by the netted roots; and it might have remained there undiscovered many days longer but that the overflow of water from the moat had swept through the dry ditch, ploughing the earth and carrying all loosened obstacles before it.

"Sure enough, you've found it, boy," commented the detective. "And that is the Frenchman, is it?"

"That is the body of Monsieur Prosper Noël," Gilder told him. "How shall you get it out? Can one of your men bring a grappling pole?"

"Yes. Here comes the sergeant. He will go back and fetch one," nodded the detective. "A pity nobody searched here before we went to the trouble of draining the moat!" He glanced at Brelson. "You've done a good morning's work, boy," he said. "What's your name?"

Brelson gave it him, and was informed that it would be necessary for him to attend the coroner's inquest.

"You had better not wait," Gilder said to his fag. "Sights like this are not for young eyes. Suppose you go along to the school and report this discovery to the Head."

"The Head won't be out of bed yet," Brelson demurred. "And I say, Gilder, it's hardly more than fifty yards from the clearing where you saw Noël lying. Tetley could easily have dragged him this far. And he must have made up his mind beforehand where he would hide the body. Don't you think so?"



"That would argue that the crime was premeditated in a brutally cold and calculating way," Gilder reflected. "And it would dispose altogether of my theory that Tetley acted in self-defence. No. I can't believe that he had made up his mind beforehand."

"This water is running off at a great rate," observed the detective. "The place will be dry, I should say, in another half-hour."

Brelson thought that he might be able to take the news to the school and still be back before the body was recovered, and he ran off, taking the nearest way round by Megson's.

As he crossed the broken footbridge he saw two of the labourers below him wading knee-deep in the mud of the empty moat. He called down to them, telling them to take a grappling-pole to the place where they would find the police-sergeant. He glanced up at the dormitory windows and saw two or three of his schoolfellows leaning out. At Le Roy's window he observed the nurse peering through the iron bars like a prisoner in her cell. He shouted to the boys and ran on to deliver his message at the school.

Very soon after he had gone by there was a general rush of the Megson boys for the plantation. It was out of bounds, but the prohibition had been temporarily removed. Most of them went round by Primrose Lane, but some, in greater haste, preferred to make a short cut across the kitchen garden and the footbridge, and among these was Lawrence Minor.

Lawrence Minor was a very young boy, in his second term at Haddisthorpe. He had been a favourite pupil of Monsieur Noël's, mainly for the reason that he was quick for his age in learning languages. One of the older boys, seeing him coming out of the house, had told him to go back; but Lawrence Minor was as anxious and as eager as any of his companions to join in the excitement of seeing what it was that Brelson had found, and he followed to the broken bridge. But when he saw there was no rail to the narrow planks, and looked down into the awful black gulf that yawned beneath, his heart

failed him and he hesitated. He dared not venture to cross alone and unaided as his older companions had done.

He drew back and was making up his mind to go round by the lane when on the farther side of the moat he saw the bushes stirred, and a tall man appeared in the opening and approached the bridge stealthily, as though he were conscious that he was trespassing.

There had been many strange men prowling around Megson's during the past few days—policemen in plain clothes, detectives and journalists and artists. This man did not look like a policeman or a detective. Lawrence Minor did not know the distinguishing marks of a journalist, but he had seen an artist drawing a picture of Megson's house, presumably to illustrate a newspaper account of the Haddisthorpe mystery, and he thought that this person might have a sketch-book hidden somewhere under his ample overcoat. Certainly he seemed to be looking at the ivy-covered building with the purpose of selecting the most picturesque view.

The stranger strode to the end of the bridge, and deliberately crossed it. Lawrence stood aside, and the man caught sight of him.

"Where have all those boys been running to?" he inquired. "Are you not going with them?"

"I intended to go with them, sir," Lawrence faltered, "but I don't quite like to venture across that narrow bridge. I might slip, and fall into that horrid black mud."

The stranger looked down at him.

"Shall I carry you across?" he smiled, showing his white teeth under his very black moustache.

Lawrence shook his head.

"No, thank you," he answered. "I have decided not to go. They have gone to look at a dead body, and I don't think I should like to see such a thing; especially as it's Monsieur Noël's."

"Did they find it in there?" the stranger indicated the empty moat.

"No," Lawrence answered. "In the plantation, some-

where ; not far from where Gilder saw him lying dead on Saturday night. Gilder is our monitor, you know."

"Yes? Tell me about it all, will you? I do not know the details."

Something in the stranger's voice made Lawrence Minor think of the voice of Prosper Noël. It was a sort of foreign intonation. This impression was borne out by the fact that the man's appearance was not typically English. He wore an unusually wide-brimmed soft felt hat, and a low collar with a huge black silk bow.

"Tell me about it all," he repeated. "Who was this Monsieur Noël of whom you speak—whose dead body has been found?"

"One of our masters. He was French," responded Lawrence.

"H'm, he said he was French, did he? That is droll, certainly it is droll."

Lawrence caught the tone of contemptuous incredulity in the remark.

"Monsieur Noël would never have said anything that was not true," he averred.

The man averted his face.

"Well, let us agree that he was not English," he said. "What is the story of his death?"

Lawrence narrated all that he knew concerning the enmity between Tetley and Prosper Noël and its terrible result, not forgetting the incident of the professor's receipt of the dagger and his sending it to be delivered to Pierre Le Roy.

It was in this incident that the stranger showed his most intense interest. He appeared to Lawrence to experience some difficulty in understanding the part which Le Roy had taken in the drama, and at one moment he seemed to be confused in his mind to the extent of believing that, in spite of his English name, Tetley was in actuality a foreigner.

"Ah, I comprehend," he exclaimed, when Lawrence told him that this was not so. "And how long has this young man—this Le Roy—been in your school? Many years, I suppose, eh?"

"No," Lawrence carelessly answered. "He came at the same time as Monsieur Noël, and they were friendly, because, you see, they were both French."

"Naturally," the stranger nodded. "And probably they were acquainted before they came to the school?"

"I never heard so," said the boy, "but it's not very likely. They were not always so friendly. They spent last holidays together, though, camping out and cooking their own food. It must have been no end enjoyable."

The stranger was silent as he meditatively pulled at his moustache, giving the ends an upward turn.

"And Le Roy, as you call him—" he remarked casually after a long pause. "Pierre Le Roy—I should very much like to see him once, if I could. Is it impossible that he is among those who ran past here over the bridge some minutes ago?"

"Le Roy is ill in bed," Lawrence Minor informed him.

"Ah, so? Ill in bed? *Tiens!*" There was a suggestion of mingled surprise and perplexity in these exclamations.

Lawrence nodded affirmatively.

"Yes, he's got brain fever. That's the window of the room he's in, up there in the gable."

"Which?" the stranger questioned eagerly.

Lawrence pointed to it and was sharp to notice what alert interest the man betrayed. He stared at the little window fixedly, and then ran his glance down the dense growth of ivy that covered the wall; then upward again at the window.

"That is the room in which he is ill?" he murmured inquiringly.

"Yes," Lawrence assured him.

"The window, I perceive, has bars across it," was the stranger's next remark. "I suppose, now, that they have been put there to prevent naughty boys from getting through and climbing down by the ivy, eh? Is that so?"

"He'd have to be a very daring fellow who would attempt a climb like that," said Lawrence Minor. "But the ivy is strong enough, I daresay."

"And the other windows below—what are they?"

"Oh, the one below it is the bath room," Lawrence explained. "The one beneath that again is a scullery, and the bottom one is the cellar where they keep the fire-wood and coals and empty packing cases."

The strange man moved towards the bridge as if he were going away, but turned abruptly.

"Shall I help you across?" he invited, again glancing up at the window.

His invitation was refused and he went across alone.

At the far side of the moat he stood looking at Megson's, while he took from his pocket what looked like a sketch-book and began to draw or write in it. Lawrence, seeing him thus occupied, decided that he was certainly a newspaper artist.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### THE STRANGE ADVENTURE OF PENELOPE.

WHEN Brelson got back into the plantation, accompanied by Mr. Davy and Dr. Harris, he found a crowd of his schoolfellows gathered in a wide circle about the body, which lay upon its back in the pathway, whither it had been carried. Harvey Gilder was bending over it, illustrating the way in which he had seen Tetley doing the same thing, while the detective was questioning him.

Mr. Davy peremptorily ordered all the boys who were not prefects to go back to their houses, and remarked to Gilder that he was surprised at a monitor allowing them to come there at all. Brelson also was dismissed, and none remained but Fearon and Arlingford.

They watched the doctor making a first examination of the body, and listened eagerly to his comments.

"There are two wounds in the chest, I see," Dr. Harris observed. "One of them is slight; the weapon has glanced off one of the ribs. The other seems to have traversed the heart." He looked up at Gilder. "When I came along just now," he said, "you were kneeling at the right side of the body. Was it at that side that Tetley knelt?"

"Yes," Gilder answered. "The head was to Tetley's left. He was bending well over."

"You are sure of that—sure that Tetley struck the blow from the right side?"

"I could hardly make a mistake in that, doctor," returned Gilder. "I approached from Megson's. Tetley's back was towards me. Monsieur lay beyond him, with his feet away from the path."

"H'm." The doctor looked dubious. "That is strange.

In which way did Tetley hold the weapon—downward, or as you would hold a sword ? ”

“ Downward, with his thumb away from the blade,” Gilder replied.

“ Thank you,” nodded Dr. Harris. “ If you are positive, a good deal will depend on your evidence. Just turn the body over, please, sergeant.”

When this was done, the doctor examined the back of Monsieur Noël's thin black overcoat, then felt with his fingers at the back of his head.

“ Ah,” he decided, “ there is a contusion here ! Either he has been struck a fierce blow from behind, or else he has fallen heavily on some hard substance. But I think it was a blow.” He rose to his feet. “ That will do, sergeant,” he said. “ Let it be taken to the cottage hospital, where I can make a more complete examination. You have not found the weapon, have you ? ”

“ No, sir.”

The doctor walked with Gilder and Fearon back to Megson's.

“ It's a most extraordinary thing, Gilder,” he said, “ but I cannot believe that a mere youth like Tetley could have done this. Monsieur Noël was a particularly powerful man, you see, and in excellent health. How do you suppose it possible that a boy of Tetley's build could overcome him ? Tetley was strong, I know, compared with most boys of his age ; but Noël was a giant beside him. It is true that Tetley may have felled him with a blow on the back of the head, and then struck him with the dagger ; yet even this possibility does not convince me. And if there was a struggle—if Tetley acted in self-defence, as you argue—how does it happen that he was not himself injured ? ”

“ I don't know. I cannot explain it,” returned Gilder.

“ Nor can I,” resumed the doctor emphatically, “ unless on the assumption that there were other persons in the plantation at the time. I shall be able to form a more definite opinion, however, when I make a more thorough examination. I am at present puzzled over one circumstance which seems to me to contradict your

evidence. You have explained that Tetley struck from Monsieur Noël's right side. Now, I have ascertained the direction of the wound. The weapon entered between the fifth and sixth ribs, to the left of the breast-bone, and the point came out, slightly cutting the coat, near the left arm. Do you follow me? Just think a moment. If you struck from his right side, the direction of the wound would naturally be inclined towards you, would it not?"

Gilder looked at him curiously.

"Yes," he answered, "undoubtedly."

"Consequently," the doctor argued, "I conclude that the fatal wound was dealt from the left side; and therefore your evidence concerning Tetley's position, or the position of the body, at that moment when you came upon the scene, is somehow at fault."

There was silence for some moments as the three walked along the path towards the lane.

"Perhaps in your excitement you made a mistake about the way Monsieur Noël was lying," suggested Fearon.

"Not at all," protested Gilder. "I have not for an instant doubted the evidence of my own eyes. I am absolutely certain that I saw the crime enacted precisely as I described the scene."

"Well," added Doctor Harris. "I will not be sure of anything until I have made a more careful examination. It is quite possible that the slight cut I noticed on the back of the overcoat is an ordinary rent made by something else than the point of the dagger. We shall get at the truth very soon now."

On his way up to his study Gilder met the nurse.

"How is Le Roy?" he asked.

"A little better this morning," Penelope answered. "He has had a good sleep. He has been asking me to let you see him; but the doctor forbids it."

"Have you told him that the body of Monsieur Noël has been found?" Gilder inquired.

"Yes. It seemed to have relieved his mind a little. But he is exciting himself by wanting to know more. And he is wondering all the time what has become of



Tetley. He says that the only thing to make him well again is to see Tetley."

In the night following the morning of the finding of Prosper Noël, Penelope had a remarkable experience, and the whole house was thrown into consternation by an occurrence of a yet more terrible nature.

It was after eleven o'clock, and the boys were presumably all asleep, unless, indeed, Harvey Gilder and Fearon, who now shared his room, were still engaged in working out their examination problems. The nurse sat in an easy chair, knitting her unending stocking, the while she glanced now and then at the open pages of a novel which she had propped against the lamp that stood on the little table at her side. Pierre Le Roy was breathing very calmly behind the curtain, which she had drawn half across the bed to shield his sleeping eyes from the glare of the lamp-light and also from a possible draught from the open window. Dr. Harris believed in fresh air at all costs, and although the air that came in from above the empty moat was not perhaps of the purest quality, yet it was to be preferred to the close atmosphere of a tiny room in which there was a fire.

Penelope was not reading with great avidity. Her interest in her book was broken by thoughts of her patient who, in a moment of confidence, had hinted at some exceedingly strange things concerning his life before he came to Haddisthorpe. She had believed that he was romancing, or that in his lingering fever he was dimly remembering some story that he had read; but he had spoken so earnestly, so sanely, and he had implored her so eagerly not to betray his unintentional confidence, that she was now wondering if after all there was not some truth in what he had said.

"Nurse—nurse!"

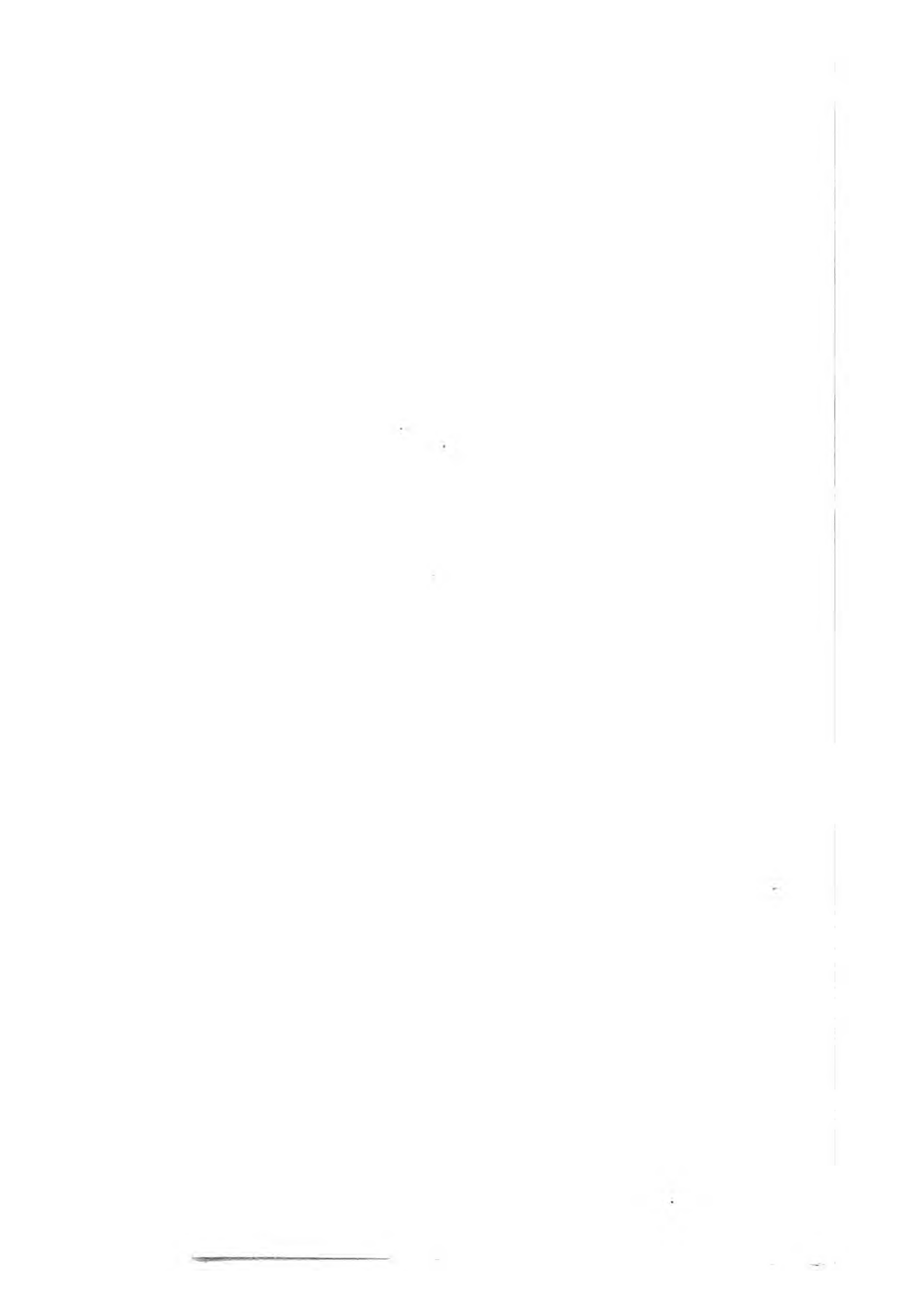
"Yes. What is it?"

"Listen!" Le Roy spoke in a startled whisper. "Is that the wind moving the ivy outside the casement? It can't be birds."

He had drawn back the curtain with his white hand, and was staring with wild eyes at the window.



"PENELOPE . . . FLUNG HERSELF BACK INSTINCTIVELY" (p. 231).



"Listen! There it is again! Didn't you hear it?"

Penelope put her knitting on the table and sat very silent.

"It is the wind, I think," she said softly. "Go to sleep."

Le Roy leaned back on his pillow, dropping the curtain. But in an instant he sat up again as before. The nurse started to her feet, gripping the back of her chair in sudden affright.

"Go to the window! See what it is!" Le Roy excitedly commanded, in a low imperative voice.

Penelope strode across the little room and put forth her hand to the casement. A quick cry of alarm escaped her. She had seen a man's hand clutching at one of the iron bars, and, beyond it, a man's face partly hidden by a mask through which a pair of eyes gleamed piercingly. She flung herself back instinctively and stood rigid, with her hand pressed over her furiously beating heart.

"What is it?" cried Le Roy, supporting himself on an outstretched arm.

Then he saw the nurse leap forward, shutting the casement with both hands. There was a crash of breaking glass, and a sound more ominous. In the same instant something whistled past Le Roy's right ear and a china jar fell from the shelf above his bed, shattered by the bullet from a revolver.

The nurse screamed, but quickly calmed herself and looked with startled eyes at her patient.

"Are you hurt?" she cried. "It was at you that he fired!"

Le Roy answered steadily:

"No, nurse, I am not hurt. But you are. Look at your hand. It is bleeding!"

She wrapped her apron round it as she stared at the broken window.

"He must have climbed up by the ivy," she said in an awed voice. "But who can he be? Why did he want to shoot you?"

Pierre Le Roy slipped out of bed. The nurse saw him turning down the light.

"Go back!" she commanded—"back into bed!"

He blew out the light and obeyed her, covering himself with the clothes and letting the curtain fall.

"Has he gone, nurse?"

"I don't know," she replied tremblingly. "I dare not look."

"Nurse," he said. "You must go out from here—to your own room. Go and get your hand dressed, and then——"

"No, no!" she demurred, "I cannot go and leave you alone. He may fire at you again."

"Quick!" he pleaded. "Go, nurse; go! He cannot see me in the dark. Go!"

"Only if you will promise me not to move," she entreated.

"Go! go!" he urged. "Go and look out of the passage window. Perhaps you can see him from there!"

She waited a few moments and listened. All was silent. Then she slipped out, closing the door behind her.

Hardly had she gone when Le Roy again left his bed, crept to the door, and turned the key. He was very feeble and his legs shook under him, but he held to the wall, then to the table, and next to the window, where he stood listening, holding in his breath. In the silence he heard a rustling, crackling sound as of someone climbing among the ivy. Quietly, unsteadily, he crossed to the end of the bed and took his bunch of keys from the pocket of his dressing gown. He knew which key he wanted, and soon found it. With it he opened his trunk, thrust in his hand and drew something out; locked the trunk again, and again crept to the window casement, which he gently and gradually drew open. The cool air fanned his perspiring face.

He knelt on the chair under the window-ledge and waited, with his revolver ready.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### A NIGHT ALARM.

TIGHTENING the apron about her injured hand, the nurse went down the stairs to the lower corridor and along to the end of it, where her own room was situated. She was trembling violently as a result of her strange adventure in Le Roy's study.

Who and what was the man who had climbed up by the ivy and fired the shot at her patient? It was at Le Roy that he had aimed. She knew that, perfectly well. She had seen his hand holding the revolver, pointing it at the boy on the bed, while he held with his left hand to one of the iron bars, and it had been when his finger was on the trigger that she had leapt forward, throwing her weight against the casement window. Her arm had gone through one of the small panes, and the splintered glass had cut deeply into the thick part of her thumb and lacerated her wrist. She was badly hurt; but she was thankful that her prompt action in shutting the casement had diverted the scoundrel's aim, and so in all probability saved Pierre Le Roy's young life.

Was the man still there, perilously clinging to the ivy, or had he lost his hold and fallen deep down to the ground below?

She hastened to her own room, wondering if she had done right in leaving her helpless patient unprotected against a possible repetition of the villainous attack of his mysterious enemy. A night light was burning in a saucer on her washstand. She approached the window and drew back the blind. Her room was at the back of the house in a projecting wing, and she could dimly make out Le Roy's broken window, reflecting the steel-blue

light of the sky, in the midst of the black darkness of the clinging ivy; but she could see nothing of the masked man who had dared to climb up.

She leaned against the dressing-table, searching the darkness. There was no movement; no slightest sound came to her. Presently she was aware of a gleam of flickering light down below. She could see the dull green of the ivy, the moving shadows of the trees, as though someone were passing with a lighted lantern.

Had some of the servants been alarmed by the firing of the shot, and rushed out to capture the man who had fired it ere yet he had reached the ground? She thought she heard voices, hurried footsteps; but there was a strange singing in her ears, her sight grew hazy, her brain whirled; a sickly feeling came over her. She moved back from the window and sank across the bed, fainting.

She did not know, she could not calculate, how long she lay there. Perhaps the loss of blood had seriously weakened her; perhaps her faintness had been followed by slumber, and slumber by heavy sleep. She could not tell. When at length she awoke it was at the sound of clamouring voices and wild cries of terror and alarm.

It was afterwards remarked upon as a curious circumstance that no one in all the house had been awakened by the firing of the revolver at Pierre Le Roy's window, or by the scream of the nurse. The boys in their various studies and dormitories, and the servants in their bedrooms, had not been disturbed. Even Gilder and Fearon, whose room was nearest to Le Roy's, had heard no sound; or, if they heard one, it was not sufficiently distinct to arouse their suspicions and cause them to inquire into its reason. Sudden sounds in the night were not infrequent at Megson's, and to a person asleep the report of a pistol shot might well be mistaken for the banging of a door, and the nurse's scream for the war-whoop of one of Brelson's Indians.

Fearon had been troubled with a bronchial cold since the day of the paper-chase—and at about one o'clock in the morning he began to cough. It was an irritating, tickling cough, unusually persistent. He turned over

with his face in the pillow to deaden the sound lest it should awaken Gilder in the neighbouring bed. But this position was worse than lying on his back. He sat up, remembering that there was a pot of apple jelly in the sock cupboard. He wondered if he could get to it without making a noise.

As he swung his legs out of bed, he saw that both the door and the window were open, and that he had been lying in a draught. The fog from outside filled the room. It was a pungent fog, enough to make anyone cough, even though he had not a bronchial cold. He sniffed. Surely it was not an ordinary fog.

"Gilder! Gilder!" he cried aloud, striding across to his companion's bed, and shaking him violently. "There's something burning!"

Gilder leapt out of bed. Fearon ran to the door, looked out and saw stretched across the end of the passage a glare of reflected flame and a rolling cloud of dense, brown smoke.

"Fire! Fire!" he shouted. "Quick, Harvey, quick!"

Harvey Gilder was at his side in a moment. Covering their faces with their hands, they dashed together along the passage, only to be met by a blinding, choking gust of smoke and sparks which drove them back.

"The staircase is on fire!" gasped Fearon. "We can't get past! Come back! Back to the front windows!"

Gilder hesitated.

"Le Roy!" he cried, gripping his companion's arm. "We must save him!"

Even as he spoke a boy's figure was seen emerging from amid the smoke.

"Here he is!" shouted Fearon. "Come on, Le Roy!" And he ran back and into the room he had just quitted. Gilder followed him, looking back over his shoulder to make sure that Le Roy was safe. At the door Fearon turned abruptly.

"The window is barred. We can't get out through the bars!" he declared in consternation.



Gilder flung open the door of Monsieur Noël's vacant room.

"This way!" he cried. "Don't be alarmed. We're all right. We can climb down by the creepers."

A roar of boys' voices met him as he threw up the window sash and leaned out. A crowd of younger boys had gathered on the lawn. They looked very small down there, running about, some in white night-gowns, some wearing pyjamas, some fully dressed. The fire was obviously at the back of the house, for there was no sign of flames or smoke here at the front.

"Plenty of time!" said Gilder. "Come, Le Roy. You're ill. Fearon and I can climb down with you."

He glanced behind him, and saw dimly a white figure escaping from the room.

"Quick, Le Roy—quick!" he shouted.

"It's Brelson—not Le Roy!" cried Fearon, running after the figure that had disappeared amid the smoke.

Brelson had run up the burning staircase to give the alarm to the two senior boys in the top room. They had mistaken him for Le Roy, and he had quickly realised their mistake. Now he was running back to Le Roy's room, if he could get down to the half landing through the blinding smoke.

He dashed down the stairs. Fearon and Gilder at his heels heard him cry aghast as he tried the door:

"It's locked!"

"Burst it open!" cried Gilder, and he flung himself against the door. It did not move. He stood back. "All together, now," he commanded, "with two hands!"

The three of them in unison plunged at the door. The lock snapped, the door flew open, and a thick gust of smoke swept out. The little room was illumined by a thin tongue of flame that came through the floor and was creeping up between the couch and the wardrobe.

Gilder rushed in and glanced for an instant at the bed. Pierre Le Roy lay across it in his dressing gown. His legs, in their red and white pyjama trousers, hung over the edge, as if he had been sitting there and had flung himself bodily backward. His head was pillowed on

his bent right arm, and in his right hand he gripped a revolver. He coughed in his deep sleep.

Without pausing an instant to question how he came to be in this singular position, Gilder strode to the bedside and put his strong arms about him and lifted him to his shoulder.

"Back! Go back to the front window!" he cried, pushing Brelson and Fearon before him. The flames played round them, curling fantastically as they scrambled up the stairs.

Le Roy, awakened suddenly, struggled; but Gilder held him tight, drawing the tail of his dressing gown over his own face as a protection against the choking smoke and nipping sparks. He trod on a fragment of burning carpet with his bare foot, and the pain made him stagger; but he went on, on along the passage and into Monsieur Noël's room. There he threw Le Roy on the bed.

He went to the open window and looked down into the deep darkness, which was now broken by a gleam of flickering firelight from the lower rooms. Men, boys, and women servants were flitting about. He saw Mr. Megson run across the lawn.

"Ugh! the moat's empty! There's no water," cried Brelson. "Megson's is doomed!"

"Climb down by the ivy!" shouted the boys from below.

"Go first, Brelson!" ordered Fearon.

Brelson stood back.

"Not before Le Roy is safely down there," he demurred.

"But to see if it can be done!" urged Fearon. "To find the way!"

Thus urged, Brelson climbed upon the window sill. He knew that four or five feet from the window there was attached to the wall a rain-pipe descending to the ground. It was thickly covered with ivy. A projecting ledge two inches wide ran from the window to the pipe. This was one way by which he could climb down. But at the other side of the window the ivy was more dense, with great twisted and gnarled boughs that would afford easy foothold, and it was by this side that he determined to descend.

He dug his hand among the leaves, swung himself outward, and went down inch by inch.

"It's as easy as a ladder," he told Fearon, who watched him, leaning over the window sill. "Fetch Le Roy; the three of us can help him."

Fearon turned back into the room. Le Roy was not there. Neither was Gilder. Gilder had run into his study to secure the examination papers, his stamp album, and his own and Fearon's watch. He quickly bundled them up in a sheet.

"Here, chuck this out of the window!" he cried, meeting Fearon.

"Where's Le Roy?" Fearon asked in agitation.

Gilder searched along the passage and saw Pierre Le Roy disappearing among the smoke and leaping flames. Dropping the bundle at Fearon's feet, he ran to the head of the burning staircase.

"Come back!" he implored imperatively. But Le Roy was already in his study. Gilder dashed through the flames and saw him dragging a trunk into the middle of the room. "Leave that," he shouted. "You've no time to save anything but your own life. Quick, come out of this; the stairs will fall in another minute. Come!"

"I must save this," protested Le Roy, tugging at the heavy box, which was evidently beyond his strength.

Gilder shoved him aside and caught at the trunk.

"Go on, I tell you. I will bring this."

"But there is the other one also," Le Roy objected resolutely. And he brushed past Gilder to the end of the bed where the flames were wreathing about the flimsy valance. "I must save them both. You do not know; you do not understand!"

Gilder almost swore at him in his obstinacy. But he thought he might have time to deposit the trunk in a place of safety and then run back to drag Le Roy out of danger by main force. He therefore clambered up the stairs. The banisters were in flames. He kept near the wall and staggered halfway along the passage, where he dropped his burden.

Returning, he met Le Roy on the half-landing, pulling

the second trunk by the strap handle. The whole staircase was moving, sinking. The lower stairs were being consumed by the fire beneath them.

“For heaven’s sake, leave it and come here!” shouted Gilder. He dared not go down farther for fear that his own extra weight should be too much and they should both be precipitated into the yawning gulf of fire that he saw raging in the lower passage. But he ventured two cautious steps.

Le Roy held out his right hand, clinging desperately still with his left to the trunk handle. Gilder caught him by the wrist, and, with a supreme effort, hauled him upward to the solid floor of the passage. At that moment there was a loud crash, followed by a fierce, deep roar, like the roar of a furnace. The stairs had fallen, and from Le Roy’s study a great sheet of flame shot outward into the empty space.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### THE RESCUE OF STILL WATER.

GILDER paused for one awful moment, with Le Roy's heavy weight bearing upon his arm. He gasped for breath in the fearful heat. Then through the rain of sparks and the stifling smoke Fearon came to him—Fearon and someone else, not Brelson.

"Lay hold of him and drag him to the room," said Gilder hoarsely. "Mind you don't fall over the box."

"I've taken it away," Fearon murmured as he caught at Le Roy. "Must this other box be saved?"

Gilder was hardly aware that Le Roy had not relinquished his hold of it. He hardly knew that he had dragged this extra weight.

"No. We've only time to save ourselves." He seized Le Roy's arm. "Leave go of that box!" he commanded angrily. "Do you want us all to be burnt alive—suffocated? Leave it, I say!"

"I cannot go without it," Le Roy pleaded, staggering to his feet.

Gilder dealt him a violent blow on the shoulder and was then himself struck in the back. He turned sharply, instinctively, and in the glaring light of the flames saw who it was that had struck him.

"*Tetley!* You here?" he gasped, blinking his smarting eyes.

"Go! go!" Tetley urged commandingly. "By the window in Noël's room. Quick! Leave Le Roy and his box to me!"

The excited crowd outside had been watching the window by which Brelson had descended. Brelson had told them that Fearon and Gilder were rescuing Pierre Le Roy.

But they were certainly a long time, and the flames were creeping, creeping through the house, unchecked. Once, for an instant, Fearon was seen at the window. He threw out a white bundle and waved his hand to let his schoolfellows know that all was well. Then he disappeared.

They were still anxiously watching when someone was seen moving rapidly among the bushes and forcing a way between them and the wall of the house to the spot at which Brelson had reached the ground. Presently he was seen to be climbing hand over hand upward by the rain-pipe and the tangled ivy.

"Who is that?" cried Mr. Megson.

No one knew. They could only see by the firelight from the front dormitory windows that he wore a football jersey and that he had a coil of rope over his shoulder. As he hesitated a moment, uncertain of his next upward step, he turned his face sideways.

"It's Tetley—*Tetley!*" shouted Crawford, and there was a spontaneous cheer.

"Bravo, Tetley!" they cried in encouragement.

They watched him mounting higher and higher, still with the coil of rope over his arm. Once he seemed as though he were about to lose his hold on the uncertain strands of ivy; but again he continued his difficult ascent until he got his hands on the stone ledge of the window of Prosper Noël's room. He dragged himself upward. They saw him get astride of the window-sill and swing the rope into the room. Then he disappeared.

They waited. Nothing occurred for a long and anxious interval. No one showed himself at the window, from which the smoke was now belching in black gusts. Where was Gilder? Where were Fearon and Le Roy? Why did they not climb out as Brelson had done?

At last Tetley reappeared as a dark figure moving busily across the reflected light of the flames that were now leaping and glowing in the top passage. They saw that he was securing an end of the rope to something within the room. He lifted something and rested it upon the window ledge. The watchers down below perceived that it was a large square box or trunk. He gently pushed it outward, and

it was seen swinging by the rope to which it was attached. He lowered it, letting the rope slip through his straining hands.

"What is he doing that for?" questioned Mr. Megson. "Where are Gilder and the others? There is no time to think of saving property when human lives are at stake!"

Arlingford ran forward to loosen the rope when its burden touched the ground.

"Leave it! Leave it!" Brelson cried. "He wants the weight to steady the rope!"

After a palpitating interval they saw Tetley, Fearon and Gilder at the window. There was a fiercer glow of light behind them. The fire was now raging in the passage. Gilder's room was in flames. Tetley got out with his hand on the taut rope. His feet were firmly resting on a tough strand of twisted ivy. His head was on a level with the window-sill.

Gilder threw something out which fell with a thud on the gravel path. It was Le Roy's dressing gown. Already a pile of bedding had been brought there. Gilder leaned over and spoke to Tetley, who raised himself a few inches. Then at last Le Roy was seen, in his red and white pyjamas. Fearon and Tetley helped him to get out, feet foremost, and as he cautiously lowered himself, holding on by the ledge, Tetley, stationed beneath him, got his head between his legs. Le Roy then gripped the rope, and Tetley, also holding it, began to climb down, supporting Le Roy on his shoulders.

Fearon descended by the rain-pipe, near enough to put his arm about Le Roy if such help should be needed. And the gaping crowd watched eagerly. Downward they came, foot by cautious foot, through the smoke and tongues of flame that gushed and writhed out of the windows of Number Three dormitory. Bedding and blankets were flung in a pile against the wall, lest the rope should be severed by the flames and its living burden be precipitated. But the rope held, and all three reached the ground in safety.

There was a tremendous cheer as they emerged from among the bushes and crossed the grass to the gravel path.

Tetley's hands were cut and Fearon's knees were bleeding ; but Le Roy was uninjured, excepting for a burn on his shin. The nurse, who stood ready with his dressing gown, had him taken to the brick bridge, where Miss Megson waited with blankets.

Flames were now coming through the roof, and still Gilder had not been rescued. And where was Tetley ?

Even as the boys looked for him, he was again climbing upward by the rope and creepers, to help Gilder as he had helped Le Roy. Gilder had already swung himself out from the window. Tetley flung an arm round him, and together they carefully descended. Gilder's flannel pyjamas were smouldering, and his hands and legs and back were severely burned. His companions pressed round him, crushing out the sparks that clung to his back and shoulders.

Having so courageously rescued his three schoolfellows, Tetley did not hesitate to climb up a third time to save the heavy trunk concerning which Pierre Le Roy had shown such stubborn and persistent solicitude. This he lowered down by means of the rope, and he had barely begun his final descent when the roof of the house fell in and the whole building was in a fierce blaze from end to end.

Very fortunately, in spite of barred windows and the absence of water and a fire brigade, no lives were lost. On the first alarm of fire Arlingford had taken command of the three dormitories, and had despatched messengers to make certain that the occupants of the various studies were aware of their danger. He had given his younger schoolfellows two minutes in which to dress, and those who were not ready in that time were ordered to carry their things under their arms. He mustered them all in the passage and marched them out of the burning house in precise order, the youngest leading. They finished their dressing on the front lawn while excitedly watching the conflagration and the thrilling rescue of Le Roy.

"You'll catch a most awful cold, Gilder, standing here on the wet grass in your bare feet and with nothing on but your pyjamas. I've brought you a blanket that I got amongst the salvage."



"Thank you, Brelson." Gilder took the blanket that his fag handed to him. "How about yourself?"

"Hew! I'm all right," returned Brelson. "I've got some fellow's overcoat, and I was wise enough to put my feet in slippers when I heard the alarm. Tetley was splendid, wasn't he?"

"Yes. I never saw anything like it. Where is he?"

Brelson glanced towards the burning house. "I saw him a few minutes ago getting Crawford and Fearon to carry away the two trunks that he saved. One of them was Le Roy's. The other was Monsieur Noël's. Why should Tetley have been so anxious to save them? Do you know?"

"It was Le Roy himself who was so fearfully anxious about them," Gilder responded. "He nearly lost his life in trying to rescue them just now."

"H'm!" muttered Brelson. "That's queer. It sets me thinking." He was silent a few seconds; then he asked abruptly, "Do you happen to have any idea how and where this fire originated?"

Gilder looked at his fag in surprise.

"Mr. Megson thinks it started in the cellar where the firewood was stored," he said.

"So do I," returned Brelson; "and what's more, I believe it was set on fire on purpose, by someone who wanted to destroy the contents of Monsieur Noël's trunk! Still Water wouldn't have been so anxious to save the trunk from the flames if it hadn't contained something of importance—some great secret that he has been protecting ever since he came to the school, and a secret that he was willing to protect even at the cost of his life. What can it be, Deerfoot?"

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### WHAT HAPPENED ON THE BRIDGE.

BRELSON'S remark to Gilder concerning his belief that Megson's had been set on fire by some person desiring to destroy the secret hidden in Pierre Le Roy's study had hardly left his lips when Gilder, glancing across the lawn, observed Tetley and Crawford carrying Monsieur Noël's trunk between them in the direction of the brick bridge. Behind them, Fearon and Sandwith were bearing a second burden.

Gilder and his fag strode up to them.

"Tetley, I want to speak with you as soon as you can spare a few moments," Gilder said.

"Right," returned Tetley. "I shall be glad. I have had a tremendous adventure. I want to tell you about it. Crawford has just been saying that the whole school has suspected me—*me*—of being responsible for Monsieur Noël's death! What a wild idea! Why, I tried to save him!" He signed to Brelson. "Here, Brelson," he said, "take hold of this side of the trunk and help Crawford to carry it down to the bridge there. I have done enough hard work for to-night, and I've scorched my hand."

He moved aside to Gilder.

"Do you mind lending me that blanket you're wearing, Gilder?" he requested. "I want to hide this jersey. I'm a marked man. I shall be spotted in a moment if I show myself. They're after me." He looked nervously into the shadows of the trees. "They are hanging round here somewhere, looking for me. They know I have escaped."

"They?" repeated Gilder, transferring the blanket to Tetley's shoulders. "Do you mean the police?"

"No, no," Tetley quickly answered. "The police won't touch me. I mean the conspirators—the low-down assassins who have crossed Europe to do what they have done. You don't understand, and it will take too long to explain; but there's a fellow sneaking round here trying to put a bullet into me; trying to get hold of these two boxes that we saved from the flames, trying to get hold of Le Roy. It's the cur who killed poor Noël, and he must be captured." He gripped Gilder's arm, "Look over there, under the trees," he muttered. "That's the man! Watch him, Gilder! Follow him! See what he does, while I go round the other way and get help."

Gilder observed the man and followed him in the direction in which he was furtively moving. It was towards the brick bridge that he went. Gilder crossed obliquely to where a group of homeless Megsonites stood about Miss Megson, the nurse, and Le Roy.

Le Roy was reclining on a mattress, covered with blankets. The nurse bent over him, with her hand still bound up in her white apron.

"How did you hurt your hand, nurse?" Gilder inquired, keeping his eye on the approaching stranger. "It is not a burn, is it?"

She drew him apart to the low wall of the bridge, against which she leaned.

"No," she answered, "I have told no one yet. I have not had time, and in this excitement my experience does not count for very much. But in the night—a considerable time before the fire broke out—while I sat with my patient, there was a peculiar sound outside my window. We were both startled. I looked at the window and saw a man's face, masked. He had climbed up by the ivy. Even as I looked at him in affright he raised his right hand and fired a shot at Le Roy. In shutting the window I cut my hand."

He listened in amazement. What was this mysterious conspiracy that was afoot?

Hurriedly she told him in fuller detail of her strange adventure in Le Roy's study.

"You are sure that it was at Le Roy that he fired?" he interrogated.

She nodded. "Certain."

"Then that accounts for our finding Pierre with a revolver in his hand!" he exclaimed. "He must have been waiting for the man's return."

Lawrence Minor, who stood by the wall and had overheard the nurse's story, put his hand on Gilder's arm.

"A strange man spoke to me early in the morning at the back of the house," he faltered. "He asked me a lot of questions about Le Roy's room, and I pointed it out to him. And I told him that wood and empty packing cases were stored in the cellar beneath. Gilder, I didn't mean to do any harm; I had no suspicion of him. I thought he was an artist. But I believe now, after what the nurse has just told you, that he wanted to do some harm to Le Roy. What I told him gave him the information he wanted—where Le Roy was and how the house could be set on fire!"

Gilder had heard, but he made no response to young Lawrence's explanation. He was nervously watching the stranger, who was slowly approaching the spot where the two trunks had just been deposited. He wore a very ample overcoat and a wide-brimmed felt hat. He looked at the two boxes with sharp-eyed curiosity, and strolled on to where Le Roy lay. The light from the burning building was still strong enough here to show that Le Roy had caught sight of him, and was feeling in the pocket of his dressing-gown. Gilder went nearer, standing at Le Roy's farther side, watching alertly. He saw little Lawrence staring fearfully at the stranger.

The man glanced around him as though to assure himself that he was not suspected. Then he took a step towards the mattress.

In an instant Le Roy had drawn out his right hand and covered the man with his revolver. What Pierre said, no one but the person he addressed understood, but the tone was commanding, menacing, proudly indignant.

Suddenly the man whipped out a long dagger and made a desperate lunge forward. But simultaneously with the first movement of his hand, Le Roy had pulled the trigger. There was a sharp report and the would-be assassin rolled over, with a bullet in his forehead. Gilder, who had leapt forward, just managed to fling him aside, and so prevent him from falling upon his intended victim.

It was Tetley who dragged the fallen man away—Tetley, helped by Crawford. They dragged him back to the grass, and there Tetley wrested from his hand the dagger that it gripped.

"Look, Crawford," he said, holding the weapon towards his chum. "Do you recognise it?"

"Yes," returned Crawford. "It is the same that Monsieur Noël told me to give to Le Roy. It was lucky that Le Roy had his revolver ready."

"Lucky that I shoved it back into his dressing-gown pocket when I found it on the gravel path," nodded Tetley. "But I believe Gilder would have saved Le Roy. He was ready."

"What does it all mean?" muttered Crawford.

Tetley looked down at the man lying lifeless on the grass.

"I'll tell you afterwards," he said solemnly. "It's too long a yarn to tell you here and now."

Mr. Eyre-Loftus and some of the assistant masters and senior boys had arrived on the scene of the fire before the roof fell in. Hearing that the boarders were all rescued from danger and that there was no possibility of saving even a part of the house, they busied themselves in distributing caps and overcoats picked out from the pile of salvage on the lawn, and in despatching the boys in small companies, in the charge of prefects, to the school and to the various boarding-houses where accommodation was provided for them.

The nurse had been waiting at the bridge for the school omnibus in which Le Roy and some of the very young boys were to be conveyed, but it had not yet arrived when the firing of the shot spread a new consternation among those who waited.

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The vehicle came at last, however, and with it Dr. Harris and the police, into whose hands Tetley resigned the body of the unknown man who had caused so much mischief. And soon Megson's was left to burn itself out and become a dismal heap of melancholy ruins.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### A VERY GREAT PERSONAGE.

AFTER the intensely exciting experience through which they had passed, few of the Megsonites were disposed to go to sleep without a previous discussion and a general comparison of their various escapes and perils. It was already three o'clock in the morning before those who were to be temporarily transferred to the school-house assembled in their complete number in the common-room. Beds had been made for them on the floor, and cups of warm milk were served round to them, with biscuits and cheese.

"Tetley is a long time in coming in, isn't he?" remarked Fearon. "Where is he? Does anybody know?"

"Yes," answered Crawford, who now assumed a sort of proprietary right in his returned schoolfellow. "He is having an interview with the Head and giving a full and particular account of his wanderings, of which we are only to have a second edition."

"Revised and corrected by Le Roy, I hope," interposed Gilder.

"No, we can't wait for the revision," observed Fearon.

"Le Roy's commentary must be regarded as an appendix. He has gone to bed and won't be visible for a day or two, I expect."

"Here comes Tetley!" cried Brelson. And when Tetley was about to take the seat offered him at the head of the table at which they sat, he added, "Do you mind letting me have a look at the soles of your boots, Tetley?"

"I will let you feel the toe of one of them if you are not less cheeky," laughed Tetley.

"No. Brelson's not impertinent," interposed Gilder.

"We are all very much interested in your boots. You've no idea how we've been following your footsteps during the past few days."

Tetley smiled, and, pushing back his chair, planted his two feet on the table where the light of the lamp fell on the soles.

"Will that do?" he asked.

Brelson leaned over Sandwith's shoulder to examine them.

"H'm!" he muttered ruefully. "They're not a bit like the footprints we've been tracking; although they are certainly large."

Tetley drew away his feet and took up the cup of milk that Crawford had passed to him.

"I think it is due to me to know what has been going on since I've been absent," he said. "From the few hints I've heard, it seems that my reputation has been pretty well pulled to pieces."

"Well," said Gilder, "you must own that appearances were against you. I believe now that we were all hopelessly wrong; but the links in the chain of evidence fitted each other so exactly that it was not to be wondered at that we thought you were guilty."

"Complimentary to my character, I must say," Tetley remarked drily.

"In the first place," resumed Gilder, "there was a certain amount of motive alleged against you. It was known to everyone that Monsieur Noël and you didn't get on very well together. It became known, too, that you held a sort of secret of his, which, if divulged, would mean disaster to him."

Tetley raised his eyebrows. "Go on!" he said. "I will explain these things afterwards. Let me have your school side of the story first."

"There was the incident of the dagger which Crawford and you were asked by Noël to give to Le Roy," Gilder went on. "Crawford has told us how it was hidden, and how when he went back for it on the return after the paper chase, he discovered that you had already taken it."



"*What!*" exclaimed Tetley in genuine astonishment. "Ah, this becomes interesting!"

"Crawford and Brelson saw footprints near the hole in the wall, which they took to be yours," explained Gilder. "Accordingly, you see, we felt justified in supposing that you carried the weapon with you into the plantation. The most convincing evidence against you, however, was that I saw you bending over Prosper Noël with the dagger poised to strike him."

Tetley stared at him in blank amazement.

"I have seen Dr. Harris to-night," Gilder pursued, "and he has convinced me by the evidence of his post-mortem examination that it couldn't have been you who dealt the fatal blow. Still, I saw you in that compromising position, and it was hard to believe that you were innocent. And your guilt seemed the more sure when you ran away and couldn't be found."

"Wait!" cried Tetley. "You have told me enough. I see clearly that you were justified in suspecting me. Let me explain the whole thing from the beginning." He emptied his cup of milk and leaned back in his chair with his legs stretched out in front of him. "Of course, you were quite right in what you said about my not getting on with Monsieur Noël. But it was my fault, not his. I was a mean cur to go against him. It is always currish to go against a master; but to go against Monsieur Noël was rank stupidity. He always got the better of me, and he ought to have jolly well thrashed me, only that he was too much a gentleman. As for the secret that you referred to, I will tell you what it was."

His hearers crowded close to him, listening eagerly.

"It was this," resumed Tetley, "that I found out quite by accident that he and Le Roy were in the habit of talking together in a strange foreign tongue, and that neither of them was French, as we all thought them to be. That put me on Monsieur Noël's track, and I discovered that his real name was not Prosper Noël at all."

"Ah!" exclaimed Gilder.

"Ugh!" grunted Brelson.

"What was his real name, then, and what was he?" inquired Crawford.

"His true name?" said Tetley, looking round at the eager faces of his companions. "Well, I discovered that he was the Count Frederick Ludwig von Bernhoff, and that he was marshal to the King of Leskovia."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Gilder. "No wonder he was good at fencing!"

"Bernhoff?—Leskovia?" repeated Fearon. "There has just been a revolution in Leskovia. The king was assassinated by the revolutionaries, and so were the Crown Prince and Princess!"

"Go on, Tetley," urged Crawford.

"You see, he was a very great personage," Tetley continued, "and naturally I thought that he couldn't be here in this outlandish hole unless he had committed some great crime. He was in hiding, anyhow, and when he threatened to report me for punishment, I rounded on him and told him I'd expose him if he didn't let me off. Then I found I'd made him a greater enemy than before, and when I saw the dagger that he wanted us to deliver to Le Roy, I naturally, although foolishly, believed that he wanted Le Roy to do for me on the quiet. But I was wrong there—wrong altogether. Le Roy will explain what was meant, but I know now that Count Ludwig had heard somehow that his enemies were on his track—a band of conspirators sent from Leskovia to assassinate him."

Sandwith passed a new cup of milk to Tetley, who took a deep drink and turned to Gilder.

"You saw the fellow whom Le Roy shot dead, just now," he went on. "He was the chief of the conspirators. His name was Captain Nikolas. I have since discovered that he saw Count Ludwig giving Crawford the case containing the dagger, and that he followed us on the paper chase. He watched us hiding the thing in the hole in the wall, and it was he who took it away from there. They were his footprints and not mine that you fellows have been tracking all the time."

Brelson and Crawford looked at each other in surprise.

"The first time I saw this man Nikolas," said Tetley, "was when I fell out of the paper chase, having sprained my ankle. I was at the rear of the hounds and was left behind. I sat down on the edge of a ditch and the fellow passed not far from me, going straight on the trail like a bloodhound. My ankle was so painful that I never thought of the dagger for a single moment. I limped all the way and got lost in the fog.

"At last I found myself on the marsh, near the old hulk on the other side of the river. Through the fog I could see an electric launch going across the stream, from the hulk. There were four men in it, whom I saw just as the thing started. I heard them talking, and it was in the same language that Monsieur Noël, or rather Count Ludwig von Bernhoff, had used when speaking with young Le Roy. For a bit, I wondered if Noël was himself in the launch, but I soon found out that he wasn't, because when I got to the bridge I met him.

"He asked if I could find the way home through the plantation. He didn't want to go by the public road, but he never said why; neither did he tell me how he happened to be out so late at night. He asked me if Crawford had given his message to Le Roy, and I said no, but I believed Crawford meant to give it him before the hounds got back to Haddisthorpe. He answered that that was all right. It was necessary that Le Roy should have it. Of course I didn't like to ask him why, because that would betray the fact that we had opened the leather case and seen what was in it."

"It is a pity he hadn't it himself as it happened," observed Gilder.

Tetley shook his head. "It wouldn't have helped him," he averred. "He had a loaded revolver in his pocket, but even that was no good."

He paused, then continued:

"I was nearly forgetting to say that when we turned into the plantation I heard a long, low whistle like the cry of a curlew. It sounded twice. I didn't think much of it then, but I've since come to the conclusion that it was a signal to the men in the launch, telling them that

Count Ludwig was not alone. I shall be sorry to the end of my days that I didn't tell Noël that I'd seen the launch crossing the river. But how could I have known that his enemies were lying in wait for him ?

"We didn't talk much as we went through the fog. He walked behind me most of the way. We missed the path once or twice, but at last we came to the clearing, where the thing happened." Tetley shuddered at the recollection. "I heard a rustling among the bushes, and then a bright light flashed in my eyes. Monsieur Noël was then at my side. He gave me a shove forward. 'Run, Tetley,' he cried, and I saw him draw his revolver. I ran a few steps and then turned. I heard a fearful thud and a cry of pain.

"Some fellow behind him had dealt a blow with a clubbed stick on the back of Noël's head. He fell and I saw Captain Nikolas run up to him, turn him over and stab at him twice with a long dagger. At that, seeing that they were too many for me, I took to my heels. Someone shouted after me, but I didn't understand what he said. He didn't speak in English. Then I heard some chap running after me. I doubled and made for the moat bridge, knowing that that was my nearest way into Megson's. Still he followed me. On the bridge he caught me and we wrestled for a bit ; but I broke away and he fell against the rail, smashing it."

"Ugh!" Brelson and Dewsbury exchanged glances of satisfaction.

"I thought he had fallen into the moat." Tetley resumed. "Then it occurred to me that I had been an awful coward to run away and leave poor Noël to his fate, so I went back as quickly as I could, although it was so dark and foggy that I could hardly find my way, and I was afraid that at any moment I might run into one of the foreigners.

"But I got to the path at last and went along it until I came to the clearing. In the darkness I searched about, but I couldn't find anything for a long time, until I heard a moan of pain. That told me where he was, and I went up to him. He was lying flat on his back with his arms

stretched out. I felt along his body. My fingers touched the haft of a dagger. I gave a cry, and caught hold of it and tried to pull it out. I knew then why Captain Nikolas had not taken it away with him. It was jammed tight between the ribs and wanted an awful pull to get it out.

"Just as I had done it, I saw my own shadow across his dull white shirt front. I turned round and saw a gleaming lantern. It was you, Gilder, but I did not know. I thought it was Captain Nikolas; and, knowing that poor Monsieur was dead, I got up and ran off."

"Yes," nodded Gilder, "that is just how it happened, and you can understand how I thought you were poisoning the dagger to strike a second time. But I called your name. Didn't you hear?"

"Yes. But hadn't the Count called me Tetley in Nikolas's hearing? I didn't recognise your voice. I thought it was his."

"Why did you run away? Why did you not come back to Megson's?" Gilder inquired.

"What, you don't know what happened?" cried Tetley. "Didn't you see?"

Gilder shook his head.

"No. I lost sight of you."

"Ah," said Tetley. "If you hadn't run on, it would all have been different."

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### CAPTAIN NIKOLAS.

TETLEY stood up and stretched himself.

"Don't you think we had better get some sleep?" he suggested, looking round the table at the expectant faces of his companions. "It's getting awfully late."

The younger boys turned to Gilder for a decision.

"No," he determined. "Let us hear the end of your story, Tetley. We want to know where you have been hiding all this time."

Tetley leaned over the back of his chair, swaying the seat to and fro on its front legs.

"There wasn't much hiding about it," he resumed. "I'd no chance to hide, even if I'd wanted to. I can't very well imagine how you could have supposed that I wouldn't come back if I had been free. When I got to my feet and ran off, with the dagger still in my hand, I went along the path for a few yards, but not far."

"I heard you give a cry as if you'd gone bang against a tree and hurt yourself," said Gilder.

Tetley smiled and resumed his seat.

"It was what you might call a human tree," he went on, addressing his words particularly to Gilder. "I went bang into a man's arms. The fellow put his hand over my mouth, lifted me, and carried me in among the bushes. I tried to cry out for help as I heard you run past and saw the flash of your lantern; but he gripped me by the throat and nearly choked me. I jabbed at him with the dagger, but he wrested it from me. Then he dragged me back to the clearing and, in spite of my struggles, gagged me with a handkerchief. He was doing this when one of his confederates turned on the light of his lantern.

It was an electric lantern, and the man that held it was Captain Nikolas. He began searching Monsieur Noël's pockets. He looked up at the man who held me and said something that I only understood when the fellow tightened his grip of me and flung me on my back, kneeling on me."

He looked round at the attentive faces of his audience.

"I thought he was going to kill me outright," he continued. "There were three of them altogether, and they were in a tremendous hurry to get away. Two of them picked up the Count's body and carried it off, while the third, an awfully strong fellow, flung me over his shoulder as if I had been a mere kid, and followed them through the bushes. After a bit they stopped, and I was put down on the ground and my legs were tied together, while I saw Nikolas and the other burying the Count's body in a pool of water and covering it carefully with bushes. Has it been found, Gilder?"

Gilder nodded.

"Yes," he said. "It was Brelson who discovered it. All the neighbourhood had been searched, and even the moat was drained."

"Ugh!" grunted Brelson, as though he resented this reference to the fruitless searching of the moat.

"You may be sure," Tetley resumed, "that I struggled for all I was worth to free myself. But it was no good; and when Count Ludwig was buried, there were three of them against me instead of one. They carried me down to the river. I expected they meant to drown me, but that wasn't their game. Their electric launch was waiting there, and they dropped me on board. Nikolas took charge of me. He seemed to be particularly anxious that I should not kick up a row or make my escape; for he held me down all the time with his hand on my throat."

"I can't quite understand their meaning in trying to kidnap you that way," observed Sandwith.

"Don't interrupt," interposed Gilder. "Let Tetley go on with his yarn."

"The launch was steered across the river," pursued Tetley, "and in the fog and darkness I saw the old hulk.

Another man—the one who had given the signal from the bridge—came on board. It was only then that I began to wonder what you fellows at Megson's would think if I never came back, and I managed by a sudden effort to snatch my cap from my head and throw it on to the bank, so that if anyone found it they'd know."

"Brelson found it on Sunday afternoon," said Dewsbury.

"The only thing it told us," commented Brelson, meeting Tetley's approving smile, "was that you had not fallen into the moat. Nobody ever thought of the possibility of your being carried off in an electric launch. It wasn't the sort of night for any launch to be out on a narrow river whose banks couldn't be seen for fog."

"Gilder and I saw the craft passing under the bridge," remarked Crawford.

"Yes, and we thought it was the police boat," added Gilder. "But we couldn't have saved you, Tetley, even if we had known you were on board."

"You might perhaps have telegraphed to Maldon," suggested Tetley. "The river police would have captured the launch if they had known the assassins were on board. They already had a watchful eye on the suspicious, foreign looking steamer that lay at anchor at the mouth of the river. Before we got down there I was blindfolded, and I only knew by the way they carried me that they were going on board a larger vessel."

"Cinders!" interjected Fearon. "Did they take you out to sea?"

Tetley inclined his head affirmatively.

"I was left lying on the deck for a long time," he explained. "I heard them hoisting the launch to the davits. I heard steam escaping from the steampipe, and after a while there came the rattling of a donkey engine as the anchor was raised. Then I was carried below and put to lie on a couch. Someone took the gag out of my mouth and untied my legs, and I can't tell you how thankful I was to be able to breathe properly. I must have been blue in the face, and my body was sore all over from the knocking about I had suffered. Lastly, the bandage was taken from



my eyes and I found myself in a small cabin that was lighted by a swinging lamp. Captain Nikolas sat at the table with the chap who had seized me in the plantation. There was food on the table, but they were smoking cigarettes. I was fearfully hungry and thirsty, not having eaten anything since dinner time. Nikolas pushed a plate of cold chicken towards me as I stood up, but I wasn't going to take food from the hand that had taken Prosper Noël's life. If I could have found anything better than a plate I should have thrown it into his villainous-looking face and chanced the consequences.

" 'No,' I said. 'Keep your food. I'd rather starve than touch it.'

"The two men looked at each other curiously and said something in a language that was strange to me. Nikolas then spoke to me in the same outlandish tongue, as though he didn't doubt that I understood him, which of course I didn't. He seemed to be asking me a question; but what it was I hadn't the ghost of an idea, and I said nothing. Again they looked at each other in a queer, puzzled way, jabbering all the time. I stood facing them, with my hands in my pockets. The only thing I understood of what they said was the name Rudolf, which they used frequently. They began to dispute rather fiercely, and presently Nikolas stood up and opened a locker, from which he took a bundle of papers. From among them he took a photograph, which he flung upon the table in front of his companion. I ought to have mentioned that he addressed this brutal-looking scoundrel as Giraldo."

Tetley glanced at the clock over the common-room fireplace.

"Never mind the time," urged Fearon. "We are all too excited to sleep."

"Well, then," resumed Tetley. "This Giraldo looked at the photograph and then at me, as if he were comparing me with the portrait. Nikolas watched him, puffing vigorously at his cigarette. With the photograph still between his fingers, Giraldo rose slowly from his chair and came up to me, shoved his dirty hands against my



"'NO,' I SAID. 'KEEP YOUR FOOD. I'D RATHER STARVE THAN TOUCH IT.'" (p. 260).



cheeks, and turned my head sideways, again comparing me with the portrait. Then he threw the photograph on the table and went back to his chair shaking his head. Nikolas turned on him and let out at him in language which seemed to include all the foreign swear words he could lay his tongue to.

"While they were quarrelling, I stretched out my hand and took up the photograph. It was a portrait of Pierre Le Roy! I recognised it at once, although it must have been taken years ago."

"Cinders!" exclaimed Fearon. "They must have mistaken you for Le Roy, then?"

"That is exactly what they had done," nodded Tetley. "Nikolas had seen me with Crawford when Count Ludwig von Bernhoff was giving us the dagger. He had followed me behind the hounds, all through the chase. He had afterwards seen me in the plantation with the Count. Seeing us together, he had naturally inferred that I was Le Roy. And they had carried me off in order that they might worm out of me the secret of where Count Ludwig kept his private papers. I didn't discover this for some time; not until Giraldo had gone out of the cabin, leaving me alone with Nikolas. Then it was that I found that Captain Nikolas could talk English as well almost as Noël and Le Roy. He asked me a hundred questions about both of them, if he asked one. He wanted to know if they had heard anything about the revolution in Leskovia and of the massacres in a place called Seligheim; if they knew that the king's palace had been blown up with dynamite, and that the Crown Prince and the Crown Princess had been assassinated. From the questions he asked, I gathered that they must have been having a high old time in Leskovia."

Fearon interrupted him to say to Gilder:

"Don't you remember, Harvey, that it was about the revolution in Leskovia that I was reading in the *Times* that evening when you were having the fencing bout in your study? Don't you remember the look on Noël's face when I said something about a man mentioned in the paper whose name—Count von Bernhoff—was the

same as the name of the man who had taught Le Roy how to fence?"

"To be sure I do," exclaimed Gilder. "And Monsieur Noël was Count von Bernhoff all the time! It was he himself who taught Le Roy to fence! And don't you remember how Noël folded up the newspaper and made a chest protector of it? He carried it away with him. And afterwards, when I looked into Le Roy's study, there was Noël reading out of the paper while Le Roy lay on his bed with tears in his eyes. I thought that Noël had been punishing Le Roy for his attack on Tetley. It was the evening when that affair of the cigarette occurred!"

Tetley sighed.

"It was I who smoked the cigarette," he confessed. "Le Roy was in the right, and I told a lie. But I hated him at that time."

"This is a digression," Crawford reminded them. "Go on with your story, Tetley."

"There's not much more to tell," Tetley smiled. "I gathered that Nikolas was awfully keen on getting hold of Count Ludwig's trunk. But I wouldn't give him any information. I answered none of his questions. I was stubbornly silent. But one thing I took comfort in, and that was that since they had made such asses of themselves as to think that I was Le Roy, and since they had come away without the documents that they wanted so badly either to possess or to destroy, they were pretty sure to turn back."

Once more Tetley stood up and leaned on the back of his chair.

"They did turn back," he continued. "But not at once. In the morning they saw a gunboat anchored at the mouth of the river. They were afraid of it, and they went out to sea again, cruising about in a random sort of way. Of course I was physically forced to take food, however distasteful it was to me to accept it from such scoundrels; and, as they allowed me a good deal of liberty, I didn't mind very much, although I was a bit sorry to be missing the exams. and the sports. At last, however,

we went to Harwich, and I began to look out for a chance of escaping.

“Nikolas and Giraldo and another fellow of their gang went ashore, leaving me in charge of the skipper, who was a Frenchman. I managed to get on the right side of him and to get him to let me launch a dinghy to go and see a yacht that was moored near. Instead of going to the yacht, I pulled up the river, landed, abandoned the boat, and tramped all the way to Haddisthorpe. Nikolas and Giraldo were here before me, as you know, and I hadn't time to prevent them from setting fire to Megson's. The house was in flames when I crossed the bridge, and I could only do what I could to help to rescue Pierre Le Roy and save his precious boxes from the rascals who wanted to destroy their contents.

“There!” he concluded. “You know the rest as well as I do. Suppose we try to get some sleep!”

## CHAPTER XL.

“ ONLY A POOR FOREIGNER.”

As may be guessed, Pierre Le Roy's exposure to the chill night air after his passage through the burning building did not tend towards the improvement of his fever. As a matter of fact, it made him very much worse, seriously weakening him. On the day after the fire, indeed, he was so ill that the doctor prescribed absolute quiet and forbade even his nurse to speak with him.

He had been accommodated with a room in the Head Master's house, removed from the sounds of the school and the playgrounds. He was unconscious rather than delirious, and when he spoke at all it was to ask if he might see Tetley or to inquire anxiously if he would be brought to trial and punished for having fired that fatal shot from his revolver. The nurse rigidly obeyed her instructions and refused to reply, but when he repeated his pleadings to the doctor, he was gently told that Tetley would be allowed to see him in a few days and that he need not trouble concerning the fear of punishment.

In these circumstances it was not possible for the coroner to take the depositions of Pierre Le Roy, valuable though his evidence would have been. With Tetley as a witness, however, it was not anticipated that the jury would have great difficulty in arriving at a decisive verdict.

The inquests on the bodies of Count Frederick Ludwig von Bernhoff and Captain Nikolas Anthoulis were held in a public hall in the village. The case of the inquiry into the death of Count von Bernhoff, otherwise Prosper Noël, was taken first, and when the doctor had given his evidence as to the wounds and Mr. Eyre-Loftus had given proof of identification, Harvey Gilder was called to say what he had seen in the plantation.

Notwithstanding his knowledge of the true circumstances, Gilder did not swerve from his original statement of the facts as they had appeared to him, and any stranger listening to him would have come to the conclusion that Tetley, and Tetley alone, was guilty. He was severely cross-examined as to Tetley's position in regard to the body over which he was bending, however, and his evidence on this point, taken in conjunction with what Dr. Harris had said concerning the position and direction of the fatal wound, clearly proved that Tetley could not have dealt the mortal blow.

Tony Brelson was next examined with a brevity that disappointed him. He had expected that he would be required to describe his various wanderings and investigations in pursuit of footprints, but he was merely asked to state how he had found the body in the plantation pool, and to give his opinion as to whether Tetley could have carried it there unaided. He thought it hard lines on him that the evidence which he ought to have given was sworn to by Constable Sharland; but, after all, it was Sharland who had found the leather case of the dagger, and he could give first hand information about Prosper Noël's receipt of the parcel and the letter with the black seal. He was further able to produce a piece of crumpled brown paper with the address of Monsieur Prosper Noël at Haddis-thorpe School and having on the label three Leskovian stamps bearing the portrait of the late King Otho. He had found this fragment of brown paper under the foot-bridge of the ditch into which Pierre Le Roy had once thrown Arbuthnot.

The sensation of the inquest was Henry Tetley's evidence. The reporters who were present took down every word of his long and detailed statement. Possibly the narrative which Tetley had delivered to his schoolfellows after the fire had been to him a valuable rehearsal for this more public occasion. He followed the incidents of his experience in perfectly arranged order, proving his evidence point by point, omitting no important fact, saying nothing that had not a direct bearing upon the case.



The coroner complimented him very highly upon the lucidity of his statement, but it was left to the foreman of the jury to give him praise for the manliness with which he had acted in conflict with a gang of ruffians, and more particularly upon his bravery in entering the burning building to rescue his imperilled schoolfellows.

The verdict of the jury was the expected one of wilful and premeditated murder against the man Nikolas Anthoulis. And now the inquiry was transferred to the case of Anthoulis himself.

Much of what Tetley had already said served in this second inquest, but the evidence of Lawrence Minor was added to it, and the evidence of the nurse was also taken to prove that Pierre Le Roy's life was perilously in danger. Anthoulis had attempted to shoot Le Roy through the window to which he had climbed. Failing in this, he had sought to accomplish his evil purpose by setting fire to the section of the house in which Le Roy was lying ill.

It was obvious that his third attempt on Le Roy's life would have succeeded had not Le Roy used his revolver. Gilder's statement regarding this incident at the bridge gave ample proof that Le Roy fired the shot in self-defence. With this the coroner fully concurred, and during his speech to the jury he read an extract from a law book bearing upon the right of persons in imminent danger of life so to defend themselves. His instructions to the jury were so precise that they could come to no verdict other than one of "justifiable homicide."

Thus Pierre Le Roy escaped all blame, for it was agreed that his act was no more culpable than if he had killed an enemy on the field of battle.

When Dr. Harris told this to Le Roy, Pierre breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"I shall get better now," he said; "but, doctor, I want to ask you something. I want you to promise me that the Count shall have a decent funeral. It ought to be military; for he was a very great soldier—a very great man. None of the fellows here will ever know what he has done for—for his King and country. To them he was only a poor foreigner, a poor tutor in a remote school on the

Essex marshes. To his own people in Leskovia he will always be known as their greatest patriot. Doctor, if he had lived, he was to have gone back to them to-day. The whole nation was calling for him to lead them, to govern them. They had come round to see that he alone could secure peace and tranquillity. It was only a few of the defeated leaders of the revolution like Nikolas Anthoulis who were against him; and Anthoulis has conquered.”

The doctor was interested.

“ If the Count was so great, so powerful, why did he desert his country in its hour of need ? ” he pertinently asked.

“ If he had stayed he would have been assassinated,” Le Roy replied. “ The revolutionaries were mad. They did not understand how wise he had been. But now they have come to see how good and just he was, and they were ready to welcome him back with open arms. Oh, he was great!—he was great! And now—now he is dead.” Le Roy paused. Then he added with emotion, “ You will remember about the funeral, doctor, won’t you ? Tell the Head from me to let all the fellows attend ; and please ask the organist to play Chopin’s Funeral March. I have got a flag to put on his coffin—a flag and his order of the Five Pointed Star. And—I must be allowed to pay for everything.”

“ You ? ” Dr. Harris smiled. “ But you must not trouble about these matters. You must only think of getting well enough to go home for the Christmas holidays. Mr. Eyre-Loftus tells me that you have come out at the top of your form and that you will be in the Sixth next half. That is good news.”

A look of satisfaction came into Le Roy’s dark, sad eyes.

“ Yes,” he said, and then he added regretfully, “ But I am afraid that this will be my last term at Haddis-thorpe.”

“ Indeed ? ” The doctor took hold of his patient’s hand. “ I am sorry.”

“ So am I, in a way.” Le Roy sighed. “ But I am

going to Leskovia to take back what is in the Count's box, and I may never return to England."

\* \* \* \* \*

Le Roy improved rapidly in health under the attentions that were bestowed upon him, and his schoolfellows were hopeful that he would be well enough to appear in their midst before the holidays.

During the intervening days it was remarked that Gilder and Tetley had struck up a close friendship. It began in their common interest in Pierre Le Roy, and perhaps Gilder was further drawn towards Tetley by reason of what he owed to his bravery at the time of the fire.

"It is rather queer, isn't it, Tetley, that although we seemed to have found out a lot about poor Monsieur Noël, yet we've learnt scarcely anything about Le Roy," said Gilder on the morning after the inquest.

"That is simply because there isn't anything to discover," Tetley responded. "My own impression is that Le Roy was a sort of servant of the Count's whom he was training for his secretary or something of that sort. At one time, I fancied that Le Roy was perhaps his son, but I've come to think that they were not related any way."

Gilder shook his head.

"No," he said. "Le Roy wasn't the Count's servant, any more than he was his son. I don't know what their relationship towards each other was. But I am certain that Le Roy is still hiding his secret from us. Perhaps we have no right to be inquisitive, but when he gets well enough, I'm going to ask him point-blank who and what he is; and I believe his answer will be surprising."

## CHAPTER XLI.

### THE LAST DAY OF THE TERM.

It was not before the last morning of the term that Harvey Gilder was permitted to go into Le Roy's room. He expected to find the invalid propped up with pillows on a couch before a rousing fire. Instead, he discovered him fully dressed in a new suit of black clothes, seated at a table upon which there were many bundles of letters and legal-looking documents.

During the past week Pierre Le Roy had been making up for the omissions of his early days at Haddisthorpe. He was noted then for the fact that he neither wrote nor received any letters whatever. But now a formidable handful came to him by every morning's post, all bearing the Leskovian stamp; and when evening came there was a yet more formidable collection, addressed in his own neat hand, to be sent to the letter-box. He was writing when Gilder entered, but he dropped his pen, stood up, and put forth both his hands.

"Good-morning, Gilder, I am so glad to see you!"

"Good-morning, Le Roy," Gilder stared at him. "Why, you seem to have grown inches taller! It must be that frock coat. You're looking awfully well; not in the least like an invalid."

"Certainly I do not feel like one," returned Le Roy, pushing a chair towards the fire. "Sit down. I want to have a nice long talk with you."

"Not more than I want to have one with you, old chap," smiled Gilder, seating himself with unaccustomed bashfulness.

Le Roy sat facing him. There was an awkward silence for some moments—a restraint which came of their long separation.

"Well?" said Le Roy.

Gilder looked at him curiously.

"How white your hands are!" he remarked.

"That is not what you intended to say before you came in," said Le Roy, hiding his hands in his trousers pockets and swinging a loose leg over the arm of his chair.

"I know," admitted Gilder, imitating his friend's easy attitude. "I was going to fire a whole volley of questions at you, but somehow they have all gone out of my head."

"I will now answer anything," Le Roy assured him with a new candour. "Formerly I was under a bond of secrecy, you understand. But now it is no longer necessary that I should be silent. You wish to question me? *Allons!* Suppose you make the commencement by asking why I voted against you for head of the school?"

Gilder laughed.

"Well?" he said. "Why did you? Was it because you had taken a dislike to me?"

"On the contrary," averred Le Roy. "I had taken a grand admiration for you, and I had the desire that you should be near me, in order that I might profit by your intimate acquaintance. Had I voted in your favour we should not have had you at Megson's, and I very much wanted that you should be there. Monsieur Noël had already asked the Head to make you monitor at Megson's. Mr. Eyre-Loftus informed him that that depended entirely upon the result of the election. Naturally, having it in my power to give the casting vote, I decided to disappoint you. It was selfish on my part, but what would you?"

He fixed his eyes upon Gilder, who looked embarrassed.

"Well?" smiled Le Roy, as though he were waiting for further interrogation.

Gilder folded his arms on his knees, leaning forward.

"Why were you in my study that night?" he asked.

"Ugh!" muttered Le Roy in imitation of Brelson. He shrugged his shoulders. "What would you? I had been in Monsieur Noël's room. When I heard you coming up the stairs I knew that I should be discovered. In order that you should not learn that I had been having

a private conversation with Ludwig, I preferred to be detected coming out of your study. But I had only concealed myself for an instant in your doorway. It was a subterfuge. Unfortunately the theft from your album caused you to suspect me, and I failed to invent a reasonable explanation. Nevertheless, you did not imagine that I had been in the room opposite, and I did not very much care what you thought of me so long as you had not discovered my secret."

Gilder leaned back in his chair, clasping his hands about his head.

"Since you appear to be in the humour to make explanations," he said, "perhaps you will tell me why you took it upon yourself to ransack Monsieur Noël's room after his death, and to remove all evidence of his identity?"

"Willingly," returned Le Roy. "I knew then that Tetley was absolutely innocent. I never for an instant suspected him. I knew that the conspirators from Leskovia were in the neighbourhood. The Count warned me by leaving on my table a slip of paper with a black seal bearing the insignia of the Chancellor of the Court of Leskovia. Under the seal he had written the words '*Gardez bien.*' I knew by that that he had received a letter from the Chancellor, and that we were both in danger. I afterwards found the letter itself in Count von Bernhoff's writing case. It told me everything: that Nikolas Anthoulis and other leaders of the revolutionary party were in England, with the intention of assassinating the Count and—myself. Had you in searching for his address discovered his true name—and mine—it would have been exceedingly embarrassing, not to say dangerous. In any case, it was convenient that I should gather his private papers and keep them under my personal care."

"Then what of the dagger?" Gilder inquired. "Why did Noël want you to get hold of it, even in the midst of a paper chase?"

"Partly as an unmistakable warning," Le Roy explained. "Had Tetley delivered it to me at once, I should have returned immediately to Monsieur Noël's

side, for the weapon would have told me that danger was near. The dagger itself was at once a message and a means of protection. The conspirators were already on my track. Fortunately for me, perhaps, Nikolas Anthoulis made the mistake of thinking that Tetley was Pierre Le Roy. And if Tetley had not chanced to sprain his ankle, and fall out of the paper chase, it is probable that he would have lost his life. For Anthoulis watched all the hounds crossing Floxley Bridge, but failing to single out his intended victim, he returned without doing the harm that he contemplated."

"Good glory!" exclaimed Gilder, trying to realise the full meaning of the strange conspiracy. "But why should the scoundrels want to assassinate a harmless, insignificant individual like you? I can understand them wanting to get rid of the Count, for he seems to have been a person of importance. But you——!"

Le Roy sighed.

In the silence which followed Gilder's eyes wandered to the mantelpiece, and he saw there the miniature portrait which Le Roy had worn about his neck on the night of his quarrel with Tetley.

"May I have a look at that portrait?" Gilder asked.

"Certainly." Le Roy stood up and handed it to him.

Gilder contemplated it with admiration. He had been mistaken when he thought on seeing it the first time that the hair was white. It was golden fair.

"She is very beautiful," he murmured. "And these diamonds are in the form of a crown! You used to wear it suspended by a ribbon round your neck. May I ask whose is the portrait?"

"It is the portrait of the late Crown Princess of Leskovia," Le Roy told him quietly.

"Indeed?" Gilder examined it with new interest. "She looks almost English."

"She was an Austrian." Le Roy sat down again and leaned towards his companion with his elbow on his knee.

"I suppose you knew her, did you?" Gilder questioned.

"Naturally," Le Roy sighed, adding, after a pause, "She was my mother."

"*Your mother?*" Gilder looked at him in amazement. "The Crown Princess was your mother?"

"I was her only child," Le Roy answered in a slow, quiet tone.

Gilder stared at him for many moments in silence.

"But I do not understand," he said presently, in a strange, doubting voice. "The King of Leskovia perished when his palace was destroyed by the revolutionists, who also assassinated the Crown Prince. The Crown Prince would have been King—was King."

"That is true." Le Roy inclined his head. "It only required that the coronation ceremonies should take place."

Very slowly Gilder rose to his feet and moved backward. "Then you—you, Pierre Le Roy—you *are the King!*" he murmured.

Le Roy stood up also and leaned with his back against the mantelpiece, his hands in his pockets.

"I am *Le Roy*," he modestly responded, giving a French pronunciation to the name which he had borne in his exile at Haddisthorpe.

Gilder remained as if his feet had taken root in the carpet, staring blankly at his schoolfellow, who had hidden his true name and rank for so long.

"Now I understand," he said at last. "I understand why Monsieur Noël took such tender care of you. I understand why it was that one night when I was in the dark in my study at Megson's, I saw you both in his room—saw him kneel at your feet and ceremoniously press your hand to his lips! He knew that you were his King!"

Le Roy started.

"You saw—you saw Ludwig doing that?" he cried. "Ah, it was indiscreet of him. I remember. It was on the memorable evening when he received the letter from Leskovia, with the terrible news that my father and mother had been assassinated. We burned the letter. It was written in French. We burned it lest anyone should get sight of it and so discover our secrets. If my grand-



father, my father, and my mother had fallen victims of the revolution, it was probable that the revolutionists would do all in their power to remove me also—me, the last of the Royal line—and it was important that no one should discover our hiding place.”

He paused for a moment, and then continued :

“ We took every precaution to preserve our incognito ; we held no communication with anyone but the Grand Duke Oskar, my great uncle, who wrote to Ludwig secretly. Here, in the school, so anxious were we that none should penetrate our disguise, we pretended to be strangers to each other, pretended even that we were personally at variance, and sometimes Monsieur Noël—Ludwig—would reprove me, and punish me publicly, as when he commanded me to apologise to you for having been in your study.”

He signed to Gilder to resume his seat.

“ Ah ! ” he sighed. “ How often we were on the very brink of betraying ourselves ! For example, on the occasion when you were bathing my face after Tetley had struck me. You saw my mother's portrait, with its frame of diamonds. If you had not been a true gentleman, Gilder, our secret would have been out. And then, on the same evening, when Ludwig and I were fencing in your study ! We then ran a perilous risk. You detected the similarity of our sword-play. That was clever of you, Harvey ! (You will let me call you Harvey ?) And I was indiscreet enough to explain that it was a certain Bernhoff who taught me. Ludwig was excessively nervous then. But he cleverly turned away suspicion by the explanation that my teacher had been his confrère. We could not have foreseen that at that moment Fearon should be reading in the newspaper an account of the revolution, and that at that instant his eyes should be upon the very name of Bernhoff in the printed columns ! Fortunately an interruption came in the war-whoop of Brelson's Indians downstairs and so saved the situation.”

“ Monsieur Noël—I mean the Count von Bernhoff—was clever in his method of purloining that newspaper,” remarked Gilder.

“ Yes,” smiled the young king. ‘ But it was necessary that he should see what Fearon had been reading. The newspaper gave us a full and particular account of the assassination of my father and mother. Ludwig read it aloud to me. He was reading it when you entered and found me in tears.’”

“ I am beginning to understand how very clever a protector you had in the Count,” said Gilder. “ But you were clever too, Still Water. We suspected that you were not French. For a time Brelson and I agreed that you were a French Canadian ; but we never doubted that Pierre Le Roy was your true name.”

“ My true name is Rudolf Alexander Sergius,” smiled Le Roy.

Gilder repeated the names :

“ Rudolf Alexander Sergius, King of Leskovia and Seligheim. Rather a mouthful.”

“ Yes,” acknowledged Le Roy. “ But I hope it will make no difference to you, Harvey. You must think of me always as Le Roy, your schoolfellow. Whatever my destiny may be, I shall always be proud—very proud—of having been an English schoolboy.” He held out his hand. “ And Gilder,” he added as his friend grasped it, “ I want to ask you a great favour. The holidays begin to-morrow : you will be free. To-morrow I go to Paris to meet my Prime Minister. I want you to join us there and accompany us to Seligheim—you and Tetley. Do you consent ? ”

Gilder hesitated.

## CHAPTER XLII.

### HIS MAJESTY.

“ I SAY, Gilder, old chap, I’ve come to the conclusion that I was a rank out-and-out ass at Haddis-thorpe.”

“ Oh ? ” Gilder looked aside at his companion in the *fiacre* as it rattled noisily across the Place Vendôme. “ How do you make that out ? ”

“ Why,” answered Tetley, “ look at the chances I missed ! I never cared a hang for lessons ; never saw the good of them. But I’m sorry now. There’s French, for example. You can patter it off like a native. But I— why, when that Custom-house chap in the station put his hand in my bag and began to jaw me, I didn’t understand a word he said. As for answering—— ! And if I’d only a grain of commonsense I should have seen what an opportunity I had in being taught by a master like Prosper Noël. Instead of which I was impudent to him and shirked my preparation, and went rotting about like the lunatic I was ! I say, is this cabby drunk ? He’s on the wrong side ! ”

“ They always go on the wrong side in Paris—when they go on any side at all,” Gilder informed him, with the knowledge acquired by a three weeks’ stay in the French metropolis when he was a boy of fifteen. He took off his silk hat to assure himself that it had not been ruffled when he got into the cab.

“ And this is Paris ! ” exclaimed Tetley, as they turned into the Rue de Rivoli.

“ Yes,” nodded Gilder, “ and here is Le Roy’s hotel.”

They alighted, helped by an attentive concierge. They

both looked exceedingly spruce in their silk hats and new overcoats, with their gloved hands and natty walking sticks. Gilder asked to be shown to the apartments of King Rudolf, and the man in uniform graciously conducted them, with his head bared.

"I believe this fellow takes us for princes," whispered Tetley, as they ascended a wide, thickly carpeted staircase.

"Shut up!" cautioned Gilder. "He's sure to know English. I shouldn't wonder if he even knew Leskovian as well."

They gave their names, and were announced as they were ushered into a great, quiet *salon*, whose windows overlooked the Tuileries gardens.

Le Roy leapt at them, and embraced them in turn in Continental fashion, ending by giving each a hand.

"I am rejoiced!" he exclaimed. "Take off your coats and gloves and come and have some tuck in the next room. I'm sure you're ready for it. I hope you had a good crossing. Were you sea-sick, Tetley?"

"Yes, your majesty," Tetley admitted, reluctantly but truthfully.

Le Roy looked a trifle annoyed.

"Look here, Tetley, old chap," he said, "I don't want any of that ceremonious rot! Call me Rudolf, if you like—Le Roy by preference; but if I hear you say anything about 'majesty' again, I shall give you a bigger imposition than ever you had at Haddisthorpe."

"Awfully nice diggings, these, Le Roy," remarked Gilder, with a promptitude that quickly restored the tone of schoolboy familiarity.

"Yours are in the next passage," said Le Roy. "Chuck your togs on the sofa, there; my fag will look after them. Frock coats? H'm! Why didn't you come in mufti?"

He was himself dressed in a jacket suit of dark serge. Tetley was profoundly gratified to observe that in spite of his being a king he was not putting on "side." The only sign of his high rank that betrayed itself was when presently he acknowledged with majestic dignity the

salutation of a very sedate elderly gentleman, who met him on his entrance into the adjoining room.

Le Roy introduced his two schoolfellows to this serious senior.

"My friends, Monsieur Gilder and Monsieur Tetley," he said in French, and to them he introduced, "The Duke of Seligheim and Festenberg, my very good friend and Prime Minister."

The duke did not speak English with confident fluency, and as a consequence it was with Gilder whom he conversed in French over lunch, while Le Roy spoke more frequently with Tetley, whom he quickly put at his ease by saying :

"I'm going to get you to give me lessons in boxing, Tetley, when we get to Festenberg. I was an awful duffer that time when we had our fight behind the plantation. I'm going to introduce football and cricket in Leskovia. When you've seen a bit of the country—enough to know whether you like it or not—I intend to ask you to stay there. I don't know what as. Anything you like, short of a seat in the Cabinet. The debates in our House of Representatives are carried on in the Leskovian language, which I believe is difficult to learn ; and the language of the Court is French, which is rather rocky in your case. But I must have some English fellows about me, you know. I should ask Gilder to be my private secretary if I thought he would accept the post. But I suspect that Sandhurst will interfere. He'd make a tip-top diplomatist, though ; and I'm not sure that if I exercised my influence with the British Government I couldn't get him the post of British Minister to the Court of Leskovia. What do you think, Tetley ? Is he awfully sweet on entering the Army ?"

"H'm !" returned Tetley. "I believe he'd jump at your offer. He's got too much brains for the Army, and he'd a jolly sight rather be a diplomatist."

After lunch Le Roy drew Gilder aside.

"Do you know, Gilder," he said, "I've taken a tremendous fancy to Tetley. He has improved wonderfully since that adventure of his. I wish I knew whether he is

bent on going in for the law. He'd make a good lawyer, I dare say, but he seems to me more fitted for active service."

"Tetley doesn't know what he wants to be," said Gilder. "He's fit for anything that he likes to set his mind to, though. He was telling me this morning in the train that he would like to go abroad and build railways and make roads—do something big. He only wants an opportunity."

"Do you suppose that if I offered him an opportunity he would take it?" Le Roy interrogated.

"He would jump at it," averred Gilder.

Four days afterwards King Rudolf and his small retinue arrived at the Castle of Festenberg. Throughout his journey across Leskovia the young King was greeted by the enthusiasm of his subjects, and his entry into Festenberg was a triumphant progress. His gaily uniformed soldiers lined the roads, and military music sounded amid the joyous cheers of the populace. In the castle itself Le Roy received his ministers and councillors, his generals and admirals, and at a regal banquet, at which he appeared in the quiet costume of an English gentleman, he made a great speech, in which he promised his subjects to maintain with justice the peace which had come to them.

He made a feeling tribute to the memory of Count Ludwig von Bernhoff, who had been his companion and protector during his exile. He spoke with emotion and reverence of his grandfather, the late King, and of his father and mother, the late Crown Prince and Princess, and ended by saying that his exile in England had not been in vain if it had taught him of the institutions, of the political methods, of the laws and the education of that great people among whom he had lived.

Gilder and Tetley came back to England for Christmas, and gave glowing accounts of their schoolfellow who had become a king. But they returned to Leskovia for the coronation and to take up their duties in King Rudolf's court.

They are in Leskovia now, doing great work, and their old schoolfellows often hear from them.

Brelson received a letter from Gilder only the other day, congratulating him upon being elected as head boy in Haddisthorpe School and sending messages of friendship to Captain Fearon of the Royal Artillery, to Crawford and Sandwith, and Dewsbury, and all the other fellows whom he had known in the days when he was monitor at Megson's.

THE END.

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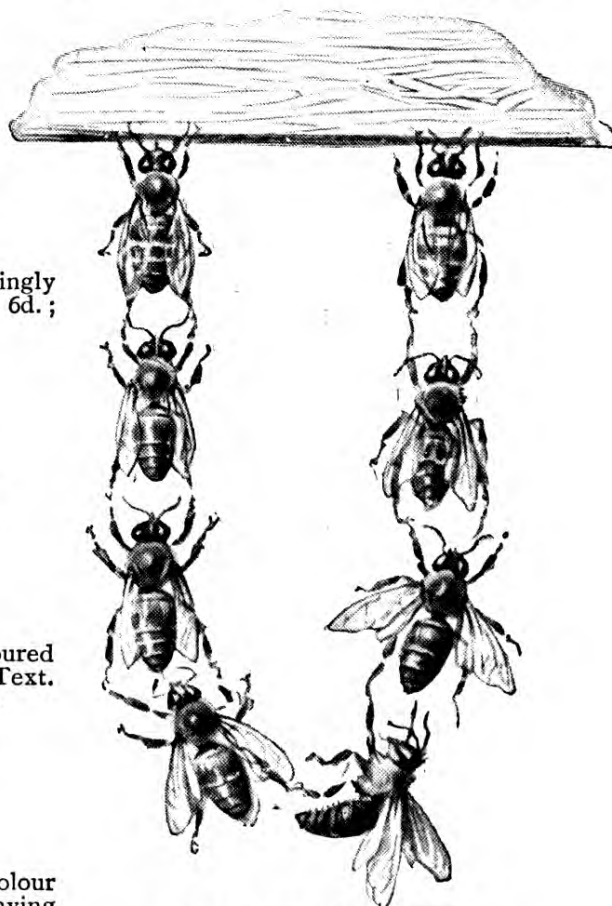
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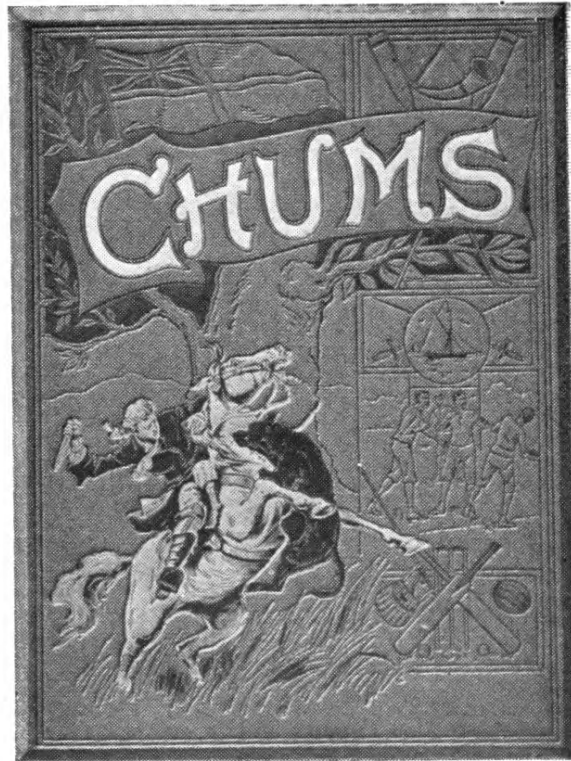
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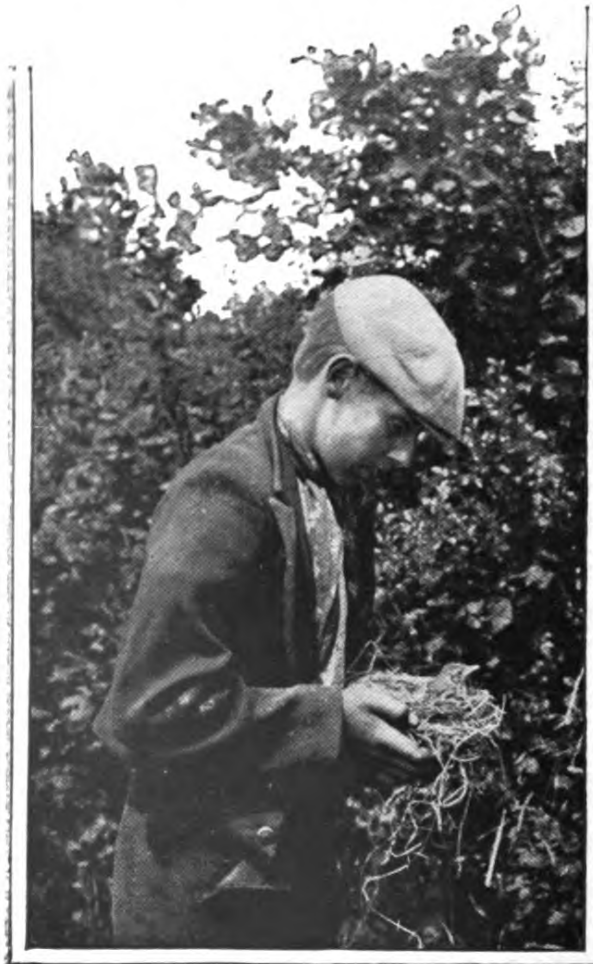
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