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By HARRY BELBIN,

AND

RIVALS!

By CHARLES HAMILTON.



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Rivals!

A SCHOOL STORY.

By CHARLES HAMILTON.

CHAPTER I.

The Cricket Match—Rivals I

"CAUGHT! Oh, well caught!"

The shout went up from every part of the field, and Jack Stanley's handsome face flushed with pleasure. He tossed the ball skyward, and caught it again as it came down straight as a die.

And Rupert Cunningham's grasp tightened upon the cane. He looked as though he would dearly like to use it to fell to the earth the fieldsmen who had so neatly caught him at point. He gritted his teeth as the shout, which Stanley's exploit had called forth, rolled over the Clavering match-ground.

So much depended upon how much he shined in this match. It was being played between two sides, picked from the Upper Forms at Clavering College, and from the best players on both sides the college eleven was to be selected—the eleven which was to have the honour of meeting St. Roman's School in the annual match, always the hardest fight of the season to the Clavering boys.

And Bulkeley, the school captain, was on the ground, his eagle eye here, there, and everywhere, keenly noting the form of every player. And Cunningham had come on with the full intention of showing Bulkeley and all Clavering that what he didn't know about cricket wasn't worth knowing, and the very first ball of the over Jack Stanley had caught him at point, and he had to carry out his bat without breaking his duck. And as he went back to the pavilion the voices of some of the small boys were heard audibly inquiring the price of duck's eggs.

He realised very clearly that his chances of getting into the school eleven had gone down to zero. And, as if to fill the cup of his humiliation to overflowing, it had been Stanley, his especial rival, the boy he detested more than any other at Clavering, who had spoiled his chance by that unlucky catch.

And Rupert Cunningham stood watching

the white figures dotting the green, and especially the tall, well-set-up form of Jack Stanley, with black rage and malice in his heart.

Another roar went up.

Stanley had been put on to bowl. He was pitted against Mannering, the finest batsman in the Fifth. But Mannering's skill was not proof against the cunning of the bowler. A ball came down that looked like being a wide, and curled in just where Mannering least expected it, and before he knew



Tommy Hughes roared and wriggled. Jack's eyes blazed. In a moment his grasp was on the bully's wrist, and the strap was wrenched away and flung out into the corridor. (See page 2.)

where he was his off-stump was leaning back, with an intoxicated look, and the balls were down.

"Oh, well bowled!"

Rupert Cunningham gritted his teeth as the shout rang in his ears. Mannering carried out his bat with a rueful look. Bulkeley gave a joyous chuckle.

"How that kid shakes, Fane! If his batting's anything like up to his fielding and bowling, I sha'n't think twice about giving him his cap for the first eleven."

"You'll soon see, old chap. That's last man in. Tell Noel to open his innings with young Stanley."

"Right-ho!"

Rupert Cunningham heard every word, and his eyes burned as he listened. He had always disliked Jack Stanley, but at this moment he hated him with a mad hatred.

The innings was over. The wickets were all down for sixty, of which Cunningham, who was captaining his side, had not contributed a single run.

Bulkeley called to Noel, of the Lower Sixth, who was captaining the other side.

"I say, Noel, open your innings with young Stanley, will you?"

"Right you are, Bulkeley."

Cunningham moved away with a black scowl on his face.

But he had one chance left of lowering Stanley's colours. He was a good bowler, and he was determined that Jack should not cut so good a figure at the wicket if he could possibly prevent it. He forgot that in a mood of jealous bitterness he was not at all likely to do his best work.

The crowd of Clavering boys looked on with great interest when Noel opened the innings with Stanley of the Fifth. It was known that Jack had been working hard to fit himself for the college eleven, and had put in nearly every spare hour at the nets, but he was showing unexpected form. Everybody was anxious to see how he would shape at the wicket. And with the single exception of Rupert Cunningham, the good wishes of the crowd were with him. For Stanley's frank and manly character, and his whole-hearted devotion to the grand old game, made him very popular at Clavering.

Cunningham went on to bowl against Stanley. He took a little run and sent down a ball with lightning velocity. But Stanley was ready for it. The bat flashed, and there was a crack like a pistol-shot, and the leather went on a journey, past point and cover-point, and clear over the boundary.

A boundary for the first ball of the over! No wonder the onlookers shouted.

Rupert Cunningham gritted his teeth. Bulkeley was looking at him, and as he caught the expression upon the bowler's face, the captain's brow contracted a little. There was nothing the captain of Clavering detested so much as an unsportsmanlike spirit, and Cunningham's very visible temper was eminently unsportsmanlike.

Rupert sent down the next ball with more caution. It scudded in from the off with a cunning twist, which had baffled many a batsman ere now. But Stanley was all eyes. There was a clack, and the ball dropped dead on the crease.

The rest of the over brought Stanley five runs. Cunningham, striving to conceal his chagrin, but not succeeding very well, chuckled the leather to Mannering as they crossed over.

Soon, however, he was again bowling against his rival. He tried him with every kind of ball, but whatever he sent down, Stanley sent back with unfailing regularity, all the time piling up the runs. Rupert's inward fury was not conducive to good bowling, and he was not showing his best form, and the knowledge that he was contributing in this way to Stanley's triumph, made him angrier still.

And when Jack's wicket finally went down, for nearly forty runs, it was not due to Rupert, the batsman being stumped by Lester in a gallant attempt at five.

Jack was loudly cheered as he went off, and he deserved it. There were no two opinions now as to whether he would play against St. Ronan's. There could not be the slightest doubt that Bulkeley would be glad to have such a recruit.

And when the game was over, Noel's team winning by nearly double their adversaries' score, the school captain interviewed Jack upon that subject.

"Keep up your present form, Stanley, and you will have your cap for the college eleven," he said; "I promise you that much."

Jack flushed with pleasure.

"I'll do my best, Bulkeley," he said earnestly.

"He'll do, Fane," the captain of Clavering remarked, as he walked away with his chum. "I had thoughts of Cunningham, too, but— Ah, there he is. I want to speak a word or two to that young gentleman, Cunningham!"

Rupert turned round.

"Yes, Bulkeley."

"I've got a bone to pick with you, youngster. You lost your temper when Stanley caught you at point, and that spoiled your play through the game. That's silly and unsportsmanlike. It would be bad enough in a kid in the Lower

Fourth, but a Fifth Form fellow ought to know better. If there's any more rot like that you'll hear from me."

Rupert Cunningham got this down as best he could. The look he cast after the captain of Clavering was by no means amiable, and it is safe to say that Bulkeley's reprimand did not improve his feelings towards Jack Stanley.

CHAPTER 2.

Jack Interferes—Terrible News.

"DON'T, Cunningham, don't!"

"You little rat, I'll teach you to pry into my letters."

"I didn't mean—"

"Take that, and that—"

"Oh, don't, don't!"

Jack Stanley heard it all as he passed the door of Rupert Cunningham's study, and a dark look came over his face. For a moment he paused and hesitated, and then he opened the door and stepped into the study.

Rupert looked up with a glare of anger. He was holding Tommy Hughes, of the Lower Fourth, by the collar, and thrashing him savagely with a long strap, and at every blow Tommy roared like a bull.

"I say, Cunningham—" exclaimed Jack.

"What do you want here, Stanley? You've no business in my study."

Jack's eyes glinted.

"Yes I have, Cunningham, when you are acting like a brute."

"If you take it upon yourself to interfere between me and my bag—"

"You have no right to treat him like that. I don't know what he has done—"

"I caught the little hound reading a letter of mine!"

"Well, he ought to be licked for doing that. Still, you might draw it mild," said Jack.

"I think I'm the best judge of that," replied Cunningham tartly. "And you'll oblige me, Stanley, by clearing out of my study and minding your own business."

"You've licked him quite enough."

"That's not my opinion."

And up went the strap again. Tommy gave an anguished howl of anticipation.

Jack Stanley took a rapid step forward.

"Cunningham, I tell you I won't stand it! You have no right to treat the kid like that!"

Rupert sneered, and the strap came down. Tommy Hughes roared and wriggled. Jack's eyes blazed. In a moment his grasp was on Rupert's wrist, and the strap was wrenched away and flung out into the corridor. It required all Jack's self-control to keep from planting his fist full in the bully's face.

Cunningham was pale with rage.

"You—you hound! How dare you interfere? For two pins I'd—"

"You'd what? If you want to put up your fists to a fellow your own size, you've only got to say the word, and I'll meet you anywhere you like!" exclaimed Jack, with flashing eyes.

For a moment Cunningham seemed about to hurt himself at the rival he hated. But he thought better of it.

"I want no quarrel with you, Stanley. You know very well that a fight between two fellows in our Form would be bound to reach the doctor's ears and cause a row. You have no right to interfere between me and my bag."

"Well, for that matter, you know very well that the Fifth has no right to flog the youngsters at all, and Bulkeley has said more than once that he'll put it down," remarked Jack.

"And I tell you one thing, Cunningham, and that is, that if I find you ill-using Hughes again, I'll go straight to Bulkeley and give you away, so look out."

"Of course, you can act like a sneak if you choose," sneered Rupert.

"Well, you can't act like a bully, if you choose, for I'm going to put the stopper on," declared Jack. "I don't like interfering with anybody, but you shouldn't act like a brute. You'd better come with me, Tommy."

And Jack strode from the study, with the youngster gladly following him.

"I'll be even with you for this, Stanley," said Rupert Cunningham, between his teeth.

"Rats!" was Jack's cheerful reply.

"Thanks, Stanley, that's awfully good of you," stammered Tommy, in the corridor. "Oh, I say, the beast did lay it on."

"Serve you right," replied Jack severely. "What do you mean by looking into another fellow's letters? You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Well, I only took a little peep," said Tommy. "It wasn't worth making a fuss about—only a letter from his father asking Cunningham to meet him at the—"

"Don't tell me what was in it, you little rascal. And look



A figure came clambering up the steep bank of the stream, emerging from underneath the bridge. It was Tommy Hughes! (See page 5.)

here, Tommy, you had better try to cure yourself of your propensity to pry into other people's concerns, or it will get you into trouble one of these days. Now, cut along with you."

And Tommy cut along, not much impressed by Jack's lecture.

Tommy Hughes was the Paul Pry of Clavering College, and his inquisitiveness was constantly getting him into scrapes. Nothing ever happened at the school without Tommy knowing all about it. Curiosity was with him a ruling passion—or, rather, a disease. He found out everything, and told it to everybody.

From his study window Rupert Cunningham watched Jack Stabler cross the quadrangle, his face dark with hatred, and he shook his fist after the stalwart figure.

Unconscious of the evil look bent upon him, Jack left the school, and went down the green, shady lane towards the village. He had to call at a shop there about some cricket things, and, as he wanted to be back as early as possible for practice at the nets, he crossed the stile a little way down the lane to take a short cut through Clavering Wood.

A narrow footpath ran through the heart of the wood,

under the shade of ancient elms and beeches. Jack followed it with his quick, springy stride, and he had reached a point about half-way to Clavering village, when a sudden rustle in the thickets startled him.

He looked round, slackening his pace, and uttered an exclamation as he saw a white, haggard face peering at him from the bushes.

It disappeared the next moment, but in that fleeting glance Jack had recognised it.

"Arthur!"

He sprang into the thickets, and in a moment stood face to face with the one who was lurking there.

"Arthur, how came you here?"

It was a lad about three years older than himself who stood before him, trembling with mingled fear and excitement.

"Jack, is it really you? I hardly dared hope it was."

His voice was panting and hoarse.

"What's the matter, Arthur?" Jack seized the shaking hand of his cousin in his own strong palm. "In Heaven's name, what brings you here, Arthur, in such a state! Is anything wrong?"

"Come into the wood, and I'll tell you," said Arthur

Grand Tale by H. CLARKE HOOK NEXT SATURDAY.

Stanley, with a wild, nervous glance towards the path. "Someone may pass and see us."

"Well, why shouldn't they?"

"Oh, Jack, I'm in fearful trouble."

With a dull, leaden weight at his heart, Jack followed his cousin deeper into the wood.

Arthur's look and words were sufficient to show him that something was wrong—terribly wrong—but what it was he could not guess. But his mind was possessed by dark forebodings.

Arthur stopped at last, in the depths of the wood. He stood facing Jack, who looked at him with uneasy questioning in his glance.

"I'm innocent, Jack," Jack started.

"Innocent, Arthur?"

"Yes, yes. Say you believe me, Jack," cried the other, almost hysterically. "If you don't believe me I shall go mad."

Jack gripped his hand.

"Of course I believe you, Arthur, old fellow. What are you accused of? Who has dared to accuse you?"

"They say—oh, Jack—someone has robbed the bank, and they say that I—I—"

He broke off, and burst into passionate sobbing. "Oh, Jack, I'm as innocent as a baby."

"I know you are, Arthur," cried Jack loyally. "But—but what could have led them to make such a ghastly mistake?"

"I—I— It seems like a horrible dream, Jack. The bank was entered in the night, and the safe opened with a key, and Mr. Cunningham's key was found in the pocket of my overcoat. Heaven knows how it got there. I swear I never saw it till it was found there. And—and an old envelope was picked up near the safe—addressed to me, Jack. It was one you had sent me, and I had thrown it away. But yesterday morning I was called into the manager's room, and he said— Oh, Jack!"

And Arthur broke off again.

Jack was almost stunned. The worst of his anticipations had not been anything like this.

"This is terrible, Arthur."

"I am innocent, Jack."

"I know you are, old chap. But they believe—"

"They believe me guilty. I broke down when the manager spoke to me. It—it all seemed so horrible. He advised me to confess, and to tell him where the money was, and then he would deal with me as gently as he possibly could. Mr. Cunningham—that's our cashier—spoke to me in the same way. They both believed me guilty, and I could hardly stammer out that I was innocent, and then they both became very impatient. But Mr. Cunningham was very kind—he was really through him that I had an opportunity of slipping away before the police came—and—and so I escaped, Jack."

"That wasn't a wise thing to do, Arty. It will make the case look blacker against you, I am afraid."

"But to go to prison, Jack!" cried Arthur, with a shudder. "It would kill me. I thought of the court, and the crowd of faces, and I couldn't bear it. Besides, they would have found me guilty. Mr. Cunningham said that the proofs were complete, and—"

"But the police! They will be looking for you, then?"

cried Jack, unable to repress a shudder at the thought.

Arthur nodded.

"I came here, Jack. I hoped to be able to get into communication with you. I knew you would help me if you could."

"And I will, Arthur, old fellow. I'll do anything for you. You must keep out of the hands of the police until this horrible thing is cleared up. When did you get here?"

"Last night."

"You were in the wood all night?" exclaimed Jack.

"Better than in prison," muttered Arthur.

Jack put his hand to his forehead. He tried to think. What was to be done?

The police were hunting for his cousin. Whether Arthur had done wisely or not in running away, he must be saved from arrest now. And Jack must save him.

That he might be infringing the law by helping the hapless fugitive did not then occur to Jack. But if it had, it would not have made any difference to him.

"Mr. Cunningham said that I had no mercy to expect unless I restored the notes," Arthur went on brokenly. "How could I restore them, when I had never seen them? They wouldn't listen to me."

"How much was stolen, Arty?"

"Ten thousand pounds, all in notes."

"Of course, they have the numbers," exclaimed Jack, hopefully. "That will perhaps lead to the detection of the real thief, when he tries to pass them. I suppose he's sure to do so, sooner or later."

"Oh, Jack, you don't know how grateful I am," cried Arthur. "I was half afraid that—that— But if you had

believed me guilty, I think I should have gone out of my senses."

"No fear of that, old fellow," said Jack cheerily. "You may rely upon me to stand by you. But now, the question is, where can you lie low for a time, till the scent grows cold?"

"There's the old gipsy's hut, Jack. It's in the middle of the wood. Suppose I were to stay there."

"But it's so horribly lonely, Arthur."

"All the better, Jack."

"Yes, but at night."

"I shan't mind the loneliness. I'm not afraid of the dark. I'm not afraid of anything but the police," said Arthur, with a shudder. "You can bring me some tummy, Jack, and some things to make me a bed."

"I'll go to the village now and get the grub, Arty. Poor old chap, you must be famished. I won't lose a second. Go back to the old hut, and wait for me there."

And Jack wrung his cousin's hand, and hurried away.

In a few minutes he burst from the thickets into the footpath, and as he did so he came face to face with Rupert Cunningham. He started back with a cry, and then, in his alarm and excitement, sprang forward and grasped the other by the shoulder.

"What are you doing here?"

CHAPTER 3. A Mysterious Meeting.

"WHAT are you doing here, Rupert Cunningham?"

Jack's eyes blazed as he put the question.

What with the distress Arthur's story had caused him, and his fears for his cousin's safety, his nerves were in a highly strung state, and he did not reason with his usual clear judgment.

The sudden encounter with Rupert, so close to the spot where he had parted from Arthur, had startled him and thrown him off his guard, and the terrible thought had rushed into his mind that Cunningham had been spying upon him, and perhaps knew of Arthur's presence in the wood. And if that had been the case, Jack knew what little consideration he had to expect from one who hated him bitterly.

But Cunningham's look of absolute amazement as he tore himself away from Jack's grasp and started back, at once warned Jack that he had committed a blunder.

"What the dickens do you mean, Stanley, jumping on a fellow like that?" exclaimed Cunningham. "Have you taken leave of your senses?"

"I—I beg your pardon," stammered Jack. "I'm sorry. You startled me."

"Not so much as you startled me, confound you," growled Rupert. "What have you been up to in the wood?"

At this question Jack turned pale, and Cunningham, who was watching him malevolently, noted it, and wondered.

"Nothing!" said Jack, uneasily. "What should I be up to? You startled me—that's all. I must be going. Ta-ta!"

He felt that he had partially betrayed himself already. He had not wholly recovered his self-control, and he was anxious to get away from Cunningham's keen, searching eyes.

Rupert looked after him as he hurried down the footpath towards the village. The expression of wonder deepened in his face.

"What does it mean? He was frightened out of his wits when he saw me. What's his little game? There's a mystery here, and I mean to find out what it is. It may give me a chance to get square with him." He looked into the shadowy wood whence Jack had emerged, and then glanced at his watch. "No time to see about it now, or I shall be late for father. But I'll keep my eye on Stanley, by gum!"

And he followed, at a less hurried pace, the direction taken by Jack. He did not, however, go to the village. At a place where a second footpath crossed the one he was following, he turned off to the right, and, as he advanced, the sound of flowing water fell upon his ears.

Where a little stream flowed through a gully in the depths of Clavering Wood, a rustic bridge spanned the rippling water. It was a secluded and picturesque spot, shadowed by huge trees, through the foliage of which the slanting sun-rays fell.

A man was standing upon the bridge, smoking a cigar. He was a tall man, in a black frock-coat, with a trim beard, and a hard, cold face. There was sufficient resemblance between his hard features and those of the boy coming towards him to show that they were related.

"I've been waiting for you, Rupert."

"Couldn't help it, dad. You told me in your letter to be particular not to let anyone know where I was coming, or whom I was to meet, and I had to do some dodging."

"But you have succeeded in keeping the matter secret?"

"Oh, yes. But what's the trouble?" asked Rupert, curiously. "Why couldn't you come to the school, if you wanted to see me?"

"For excellent reasons, my son. It is of the first importance that this meeting of ours should be kept a secret."

"I can't see why," replied Mr. Cunningham icily. "But I will tell you something, in case you should be tempted to chatter too freely. Your whole prospects may depend upon your discretion in this matter."

"My whole prospects!" repeated Rupert wonderingly. "Yes, and mine."

"But why did you want to see me?"

"To give this packet into your charge."

And Mr. Cunningham drew a bulky package from within his coat and placed it in his son's hand.

Rupert received it with deepening wonder.

"What does it contain?"

"Valuable documents, relating to a law case in which the bank is concerned," replied his father. "It will be necessary for me to swear, at the proper time, that these documents are not in my possession. It is possible that a search may be made for them; and so it is not safe for me to have them where they might be found. But in your locker at Clavering College they will be safe—oh?"

"Oh, yes, I can shove them into a secret place easily enough. But what are they?"

"Don't ask me any questions, Rupert, and I'll tell you no lies," replied Cunningham senior blandly. "Keep the papers hidden, and keep the secret, and you'll do. But don't be careless. It will serve no purpose to tell you the particulars, and you will be better off, really, to know nothing."

Rupert nodded.

"All right, dad, but it looks to me like a risky business."

"No risk for you, my boy. I'll tell you this much; if the offer I'm engaged in turns out satisfactorily, I expect to be a good deal richer than I am now, and when the time comes for you to go up to Oxford, you shall cut a dash with the best of them. But if you should be fool enough to let out this secret, you'll never go to Oxford at all—you'll have to leave Clavering, and begin life at a desk at a pound a week. I suppose I needn't say more?"

"You may depend upon me," replied Rupert, wondering and uneasy. "But one good turn deserves another, dad. I've run through my pocket-money—"

Cunningham senior laughed, and, taking out a sovereign, he placed it in his son's hand.

"Take that my boy; and I will double your pocket-money so long as you have that packet under your charge. Now, you'd better go straight back to school and put it in a safe place, and remember to keep it always under lock and key. Tuck it somewhere out of sight to carry it."

"All right."

"And now you'd better be off. Good-bye!"

And, shaking hands with his son, Mr. Cunningham turned and walked rapidly away. Rupert, with the packet concealed under his jacket, went slowly back towards the school.

He was in a puzzled mood. He did not wholly believe his father's explanation as to what was in the packet. That some risky game was being played, he felt sure; and he knew that more than once Mr. Cunningham, the sedate and respectable cashier of the City and County Bank, had been engaged in City speculations of a doubtful character, and had sailed very near to the wind.

But he reflected that it was no business of his. The pater knew how to take care of himself, and that was all that mattered—from Rupert's extremely moral point of view. And if he could make a big coup, in the benefits of which his son was to share, Rupert had no objection in the world to doing a little to help him.

As for keeping the packet hidden, that would be easy enough. He had a study to himself at Clavering, like all the Fifth Form, and a locker with a lock and key. Nobody ever went to it but himself.

As Mr. Cunningham disappeared in one direction and Rupert in the other, the little bridge was left solitary in the shadow of the woods.

But not for long.

A figure came clambering up the steep bank of the stream, emerging from underneath the bridge.

It was the figure of Tommy Hughes.

In spite of the thrashing Cunningham had given him, and the lecture he had had from Jack Stanley, Tommy's insatiable curiosity was as strong upon him as ever.

In fact, it is probable that Rupert's excessive anger on the occasion of his reading the letter had made the inquisitive fag attach more importance to it than he would otherwise have done.

Although he had told Jack that he had had only a peep at the letter, he had, as a matter of fact, read almost the whole of it, and the rendezvous arranged by Cunningham senior had a mysterious look which had interested him greatly.

And the result of it was that he had determined to be beforehand at the rendezvous, and when Mr. Cunningham had reached the bridge in Clavering Wood that evening, Tommy

Hughes had been hidden underneath it, crouching on the steep bank just above the water.

Being so close to the talkers, he had naturally overheard every word they uttered, and his amazement was great. When at length he ventured out of his hiding-place and started off towards the college, his face was ablaze with excitement.

He had come there in the hope of satisfying his curiosity; but now it was more strongly excited than ever. What was in the mysterious packet which Mr. Cunningham had passed to his son? Tommy would have given worlds to know.

And he had already resolved that by hook or by crook he would find out. As Cunningham's fag, he had the run of his master's study, so sooner or later he was bound to find an opportunity.

But Tommy, who was generally as loquacious as he was inquisitive, realised that he must deny himself the pleasure of taking the whole Fourth Form into his confidence about what he had heard. It was not only that Cunningham would thrash him without mercy if he should learn how the inquisitive Fourth Former had spied upon him. That alone might not have deterred Tommy. But he reflected that strict secrecy would be necessary in order to obtain an opportunity of viewing the contents of the packet. And so Tommy, for once in his life, was as secret as the grave, and Cunningham had not the slightest suspicion that the terrible junior was on the track.

CHAPTER 4.

Rupert Cunningham Makes a Discovery.

"STANLEY!"

No reply.

"Stanley!"

Mr. Sydney's voice was a little louder. The boys looked at each other. Jack was never late for calling-over. What had become of him?

Still silence. Stanley was not there.

"Has anyone seen Stanley?" asked Mr. Sydney.

"I have, sir," replied Rupert Cunningham. "I saw him in Clavering Wood about two hours ago."

"Has anyone seen him since?"

No reply.

"This is strange," the master remarked. "I have never had to complain of Stanley before."

And, looking a little puzzled, he went on with the roll-call. He had just finished, when Jack, looking hot and tired, came in.

Mr. Sydney raised his eyebrows a little.

"You are late, Stanley."

"I'm very sorry, sir," said Jack, a little breathlessly. "It was plain that he had been running, and running hard. I couldn't help it, sir."

The master of the Fifth smiled slightly.

"I quite believe that, Stanley," he said. "Never mind, you are not usually unpunctual; we will let it pass."

"Thank you, sir," said Jack gratefully, deeply relieved that Mr. Sydney did not ask him for an explanation.

Rupert Cunningham was watching him keenly. Jack caught his look, and the colour flushed deeply over his handsome face. Cunningham gave a sneering smile. He guessed that Jack's being late for calling-over had some connection with the mystery of Clavering Wood, and he was more than ever determined to find out what the secret was.

Even without the clue he already possessed, Stanley's altered looks would have told him that something was amiss. He was by no means the only one that noted the change.

Jack, ordinarily cheerful and chatty, had suddenly become silent and almost morose. At supper he sat silent, speaking to nobody, and when he was spoken to, he attempted to answer in his usual tone, but the attempt was a dismal failure.

"Anything wrong, Jack?"

Tom Nugent asked the question as they went up to the dormitory. Nugent was Jack's chum, and he had observed his friend's clouded brow with something like anxiety.

Jack gave a start.

"Of course not, Tom. What a question!"

"You are looking so thundering queer."

A look of vexation crossed Jack's face. He realised that he would have to keep a better command of his features if he did not wish to give Arthur's secret away. But how was he to appear the cheery, light-hearted Jack Stanley of old, with such a secret weighing on his heart and his brain—with the remembrance haunting him of Arthur's white face looking out from the thickets, of the lad's lonely couch in the cabin in the gloomy wood, of the hue-and-cry that was doubtless already raised after him.

He gave a forced laugh.

"I didn't know I was looking queer, Tom. There's nothing the matter with me."

"Why did you cut cricket practice?"

Again Jack started. Cricketer as he was, heart and soul, he had until that moment forgotten completely that he had missed his usual practice. He was to have joined Nugent on the cricket-ground when he returned from the village, but, instead of that, he had hardly reached Clavering in time for calling-over.

"I—I forgot, Tom."

At this reply Tom Nugent stared, as well he might.

"You forgot?" he ejaculated. "You forgot? Are you off your dot, my son?"

Jack made no reply. He felt all the misery, especially keen to a boy of a frank, candid nature, of having a secret to keep.

Nugent looked at him queerly, but asked no more questions. He saw that there was something behind Jack's reticence, but he saw also that his chum did not wish to explain, so he was discreetly silent. But he could not help wondering.

The next day Jack, mindful of the warning he had received, strove to appear his ordinary self; but he could not quite hide the weight upon his mind, and he was not so attentive as usual during lessons. He saw Rupert Cunningham look at him more than once, too, with the same sneering smile, and he was terribly disquieted by the thought that Cunningham suspected something.

And when school was over, he found his position full of difficulties which he had not thought of the previous day. Tom Nugent joined him, expecting him to come into the fields as a matter of course. And Arthur was expecting him in Clavering Wood. He had done all he could the previous evening to make the old cabin habitable for his cousin, but much more remained to be done, and he had told Arthur he would come.

"Not going to practice!" exclaimed Nugent, when Jack began to make an excuse. "Look here, Jack, this won't do. Why, you'll have Bulkeley down on you like a hundred of bricks if you cut cricket two days running!"

"I can't help it, Tom. I've got to go to the village."

"Rats. You've got to come with me!"

And Nugent, without more ado, put his arm through Jack's, and walked him off towards the cricket-ground. But Jack jerked himself free.

"I can't come, Tom. You know I would if I could. But I must go into Clavering."

Nugent looked at him very seriously.

"Look here, Jack, what are you acting the giddy goat like this for! There's something on your mind, or on your chest. What is it?"

"I can't tell you, Tom. But I'm in a horrible bother!" Jack groaned out. "Don't ask me any questions, old fellow, for I can't answer them, and for goodness' sake keep dark what I've told you."

"You can rely upon me, Jack; but I wish you'd tell me what the trouble is," said Nugent earnestly. "Perhaps I could help you."

Jack shook his head.

"No, you couldn't. Yes, though—there's one thing you can do—lend me some money till next term. I'm stony."

"Why, you had a sovereign yesterday morning!" exclaimed Nugent, in amazement.

"Well, I've spent it."

An apprehensive look crossed Nugent's face.

"I say, Jack, you haven't been getting into trouble with that rascal of a bookmaker at Clavering, have you?"

Jack smiled faintly.

"No, Tom, you surely know me better than that. I'll tell you some day what the trouble is, but I can't now—I can't."

And Jack, with a willing loan from his chum in his pocket, went down the lane towards the village. Nugent looked after him doubtfully, and with a shake of the head walked into the cricket-field. As he did so, he noticed Rupert Cunningham walking down the lane in the direction taken by Jack.

Jack Stanley, after leaving Tom, hurried to the village, where he made his purchases, and with a pretty large bundle under his arm, took the footpath back through Clavering Wood. Near the spot where he had first met Arthur, he struck off into the wood, and pushed his way through trees and thickets and great ferns for a considerable distance. At length he stopped, in one of the thickest and gloomiest recesses of the wood.

There, half-hidden by the thick growths, stood a ruined cabin, the roof long since fallen in, the tottering walls partly upheld by the young trees which had sprung up round them.

Long ago, when Jack Stanley was in the Fourth Form at Clavering College and his cousin Arthur in the Upper Fifth, they had come upon the old cabin in rambling through the dusky depths of Clavering Wood. It was said that a gipsy poacher had once lived there, but the existence of the hut was known to few, and the location of it to still fewer.

As Jack paused, the figure of his cousin came through the tottering doorway. Arthur looked a good deal better than when Jack had met him the previous evening. Food, and the relief which Jack's loyal friendship had given him, had made a wonderful difference. His face was still pale and worn, but the haggard fear was gone from his looks.

"I'm so glad to see you, Jack. It's good of you to come." Jack entered the cabin. On the grass-grown floor was spread a bed of ferns and leaves. Jack set down the bundle he carried.

"I've brought you enough Tommy for a week, Arty, and some cheap clothes, and some books. It must be horribly lonely here for you all day by yourself. I wish I could come oftener."

"I wish you could, Jack. But I don't care much for the loneliness. I am only too glad the place is solitary. But the books will be a blessing. It was thoughtful of you. How long can you stay?"

"Not more than an hour, I'm afraid. I was late for calling-over last night, and that can't happen again without questions being asked."

"You are sure no one guesses that you've come here?" Arthur said nervously.

Jack was silent for a minute.

"I don't see how anyone could, Arty. But I mustn't come too often. I can't help feeling that Rupert Cunningham smells a rat. I ran across him on the footpath yesterday, after I left you, as I told you last night. To-day it has seemed to me as if he watched me with a peculiar interest. He hates me, and I know he would like to do me an ill turn, so I shall have to be careful of him."

Arthur started a little at the mention of the name.

"Rupert Cunningham? That's Mr. Cunningham's son. For Heaven's sake be careful of him, for if he suspected how matters stand, he might write to his father and betray me."

"I think I had better not come to-morrow, Arthur. I've had to miss cricket practice to-day and yesterday, and it's making the fellows talk. We play St. Roman's in a fortnight, and Bulkeley has promised me a place in the team if I am fit. I'd give it up for your sake, old fellow—"

"You mustn't do that, Jack. Besides, it would only excite comment, which would add to my risks. No. Come as often as you can, but don't give Bulkeley cause to complain."

A sudden thought struck Jack.

"Arthur, would you mind if I confided the secret to one other chap—Tom Nugent, my chum? He was in the Fourth with me when you were at Clavering."

Arthur hesitated.

"He's true as steel, Arty."

"Do as you think best, Jack."

"He will be as silent as the grave. And he could come here to bring you things, and to communicate between us, so that I should not be seen so often coming into the wood."

And when Jack left his cousin, it was agreed that Tom Nugent should be admitted to the secret.

The dusk was deepening in the wood when Jack strode through the trees towards the footpath to return to Clavering. As he emerged into it a voice broke upon his ears.

"Hallo, Stanley!"

He started violently.

Rupert Cunningham had just come out into the path a short distance away. He had come from the same direction as Jack. And as Jack looked at him, he saw upon his face the sneering smile he knew so well.

His very heart turned sick within him.

For Rupert's look told him everything, and he knew that his rival and enemy had followed him, had watched him, and knew that Arthur was hidden in the gipsy's hut in the wood.

Jack reeled back against a tree, his face white, his expression one of utter misery and despair.

Rupert Cunningham came towards him, his eyes gleaming with triumph, the malicious, sneering smile still upon his face.

CHAPTER 5. Under His Thumb.

"YOU—you err!"

The misery in Jack Stanley's face had not moved Rupert Cunningham in the least, but the bitter scorn of his voice brought a slight flush to the spy's cheek.

He bit his lip angrily.

"I suppose I have as much right in the wood as you have?" he sneered. "If I happen to make a discovery—"

"Don't tell lies! You didn't happen to do anything of the kind. You watched me."

"Confound you! You had better speak a little more civilly, Stanley—it would be wiser under the circumstances."

"Why should I? I know what I have to expect from you. You hate me, and you are cad enough to—"

"I might be inclined to keep your secret."

A momentary gleam of hope came into Jack's face, but it died out again.

"You are playing with me."

"I am not. It doesn't matter a rap to me whether your cousin is arrested or not. I am inclined to keep your secret."

Jack looked at him in helpless amazement.

"You'll keep the secret? Thanks, old fellow. I'm—I'm

very I spoke as I did. And Cunningham, Arthur is innocent. Some scoundrel robbed the bank and planned to lay the blame upon Arthur. It's as clear as noonday to me, and the truth will come out; it is sure to come out sooner or later, and then Arty will be cleared. The real criminal may be discovered any day. And if I can keep Arty safe till then— You don't know how grateful I am, Cunningham, for—"

"Stop a bit," said Rupert coolly. "You didn't let me finish. I am willing to keep your cousin's secret—on certain conditions."

The glow of gratitude and relief faded from Jack's face. A sort of chill ran through him.

"I don't quite understand, Cunningham."

"My idea is, that one good turn deserves another. Don't you think so?"

"Of course; and if there's anything I can do—"

"There is."

"If it's money," said Jack hastily, "I'm afraid I can't do anything this term, Cunningham. I've spent all my tin fixing things up for Arthur in the gipsy's hut. But next term—"

"Don't talk rot, Stanley! Do you think I want your money?"

"What is it, then?"

"You know how matters stand about the eleven. You can help me there."

Jack started.

"I don't see how."

"You know very well that I've set my heart on getting into the team that plays St. Roman's School?"

"Well, how can I help you? You don't suppose that Bulkeley will take my advice, do you?"

"On Monday the two Clavering sides play each other again. You will play with Noel's lot. I captained the other side last time, but on Monday Mannering takes my place, and Bulkeley has said that I am not to play in the team at all."

And Rupert's brows contracted as he spoke, and his eyes glittered with suppressed rage. He knew that it was to Jack Stanley he owed it that Bulkeley had dropped all idea of playing him against St. Roman's—though it would have been more correct to say that it was to his own envy and bad feeling that he owed it. For it was his display of bad temper which had made the captain decide not to give him another chance of showing what he could do, but to put Mannering in his place for the trial match on Monday.

"Well, I can't help that," replied Jack, in a conciliatory way. "It isn't by my wish that you are excluded."

"It is all your fault, any way," exclaimed Rupert savagely.

"My fault? I don't see how you make that out. You lost your temper the other day. I don't see that it was my fault. I was bound to play as well as I could."

"Well, any way, I'm going to play, by hook or by crook, on Monday, so as to have another chance at the cap for the first eleven."

"That depends upon Bulkeley."

"You must try to influence Bulkeley. You can do it. He has shown lately that he thinks a lot of you—an absurd lot, in my opinion. If any of my friends pressed my claims upon him, he wouldn't listen. But it's known that there's no love lost between us two. If you took it up, I believe he would give me another chance."

Jack looked deeply troubled.

"I can't honestly ask him that, Cunningham, when—"

"And I can't honestly help you to shield a criminal from justice!" sneered Rupert. "Yet you don't mind asking me to do it."

"How dare you call him a criminal?" flashed out Jack. "Arthur is as innocent as you or I."

"Possibly; but it doesn't matter to me whether he's innocent or guilty," said Cunningham coolly. "He's a fugitive from justice, and if I help you to keep him out of the clutches of the police, you ought to be willing to do something for me in return."

"But suppose I get Bulkeley to put you in Mannering's eleven on Monday, that won't help you. You know very well that your play isn't up to first eleven form."

A bitter look came upon Rupert's face.

"That's your opinion," he sneered, "and I don't think you are likely to form an unbiased opinion of my merits as a cricketer. At all events, I differ from you. I am really conceited enough to think that on Monday I may show form quite as good as yours. But I'm willing to take my chance of that."

"I'll speak to Bulkeley," said Jack shortly. "But mind, I don't answer for the result."

"Don't you? Let us be plain with each other, Stanley. I know how much goodwill you bear me. If I don't play on Monday I won't keep your secret."

"That isn't fair. I'll do my best, but if Bulkeley won't listen to me—"

"You must make him."

"I'll do my best," repeated Jack wearily.

And he returned to Clavering College with a heavy heart.

He was in time for calling-over to-night. As he went in he noticed Bulkeley gave him a peculiar look, but the captain did not speak. Jack knew what Bulkeley was thinking of. He had misused him from the cricket-ground again. Jack knew how strange his conduct must appear to the captain of Clavering, but he could give no explanation. He was in dread lest Bulkeley should speak to him about it.

"I say, Jack, Bulkeley was wild when he saw that you were not there," Tom Nugent remarked, "I don't want to alarm you, old fellow, but if you don't mind your P's and Q's your chance of getting your cap for the college eleven will be a goner."

"I'm going to wire in to-morrow, Tom. And—you said that if I'd tell you what was worrying me you'd help me?"

"So I will."

"I can trust you to keep a secret?"

"You ought to know that, Jack."

"Yes, yes, old fellow, I do know it, but this is so horribly serious," said Jack, in a low voice. "You must be careful not to let the least hint of it escape you to anyone."

Nugent looked amazed, but he gave the required promise.

Then Jack, in a low, agitated voice, told him the strange happenings, with which the reader is already acquainted. Nugent listened in wonder, and when Jack had finished, he said:

"Poor old chap, no wonder you looked worried. But cheer up. I believe your cousin is innocent just as firmly as you do, and the truth is certain to come out some day. I'll do my best to help you. I wish you had told me before, and then I could have saved you going to-night. But in future I can always go instead of you when you ought to be at cricket."



While Rupert Cunningham stood white and trembling, and the doctor pale with distress, Mr. Tomlinson made an examination of the numbers of the notes. (See page 17.)

"I don't know how to thank you, Tom. I couldn't speak to you without asking Arthur first, but I knew you'd stand by me, like a true chum."

"Of course I will. As for that mongrel Cunningham, I don't see what you can do. You'll have to knuckle under at present. Still, it's pretty certain that if he plays in the trial match on Monday, he'll make a guy of himself as usual, and so there won't be any harm done. But Scott!" added Nugent emphatically. "Shouldn't I like to wring his measly neck, the rotter, that's all!" He broke off abruptly. "Hallo, here comes old Bulkeley! Come to give you a lecture, old chap, I suppose."

The captain of the school was bearing down upon the two Fifth Formers, as they stood talking by themselves.

"I want to speak to you, Stanley," he said brusquely.

"Were?" exclaimed Jack, with a sinking heart. "You don't want me to stand out, Bulkeley, do you?"

The distress in his face touched the captain a little. "Well," he said, in a somewhat mollified tone, "why have you neglected the game for the past two days? Do you think you're up to first eleven form without any more practice, you young jackanape?"

"No, indeed I don't," replied Jack earnestly. "I mean to slog in as hard as I can go, Bulkeley. I—I haven't felt fit to-day." And this was true enough, for the trouble on Jack's mind had made him feel far from fit. "But give me a chance, and I'll show you how I can work. It wants four days to Monday, and, if you'll give me a chance, I'll promise that you shan't have anything to complain of."

"Very well," assented Bulkeley. "I'll give you another chance. But I want you to understand that a cap for the college eleven isn't to be picked up without any trouble. Let me see you put in some hard work between this and Monday, and you shall play in the trial match, and then we'll see about the cap for the eleven."

"Thanks!" said Jack, gratefully. "I'll do my best." And during the next few days he kept his word, and Bulkeley had to admit that he "slogged" with hearty good-will, and, good as his form already was, every day it showed a visible improvement. Bulkeley's brief annoyance had evaporated. He was delighted with the Fifth Former's performances, and he commended Jack warmly.

And every word of commendation was gall and wormwood to Rupert Cunningham. In these days Rupert also was assiduous at the cricket ground, but his form was only mediocre. He was not up to Stanley's form, but he did not acknowledge it, even to himself.

He did not speak again to Jack on the matter they had discussed in the wood until Saturday. Then he came up to Jack in the gymnasium, and plunged into the subject abruptly.

"Have you spoken to Bulkeley?"

"I haven't had a chance yet."

"I thought not. I only want to remind you that if I don't play on Monday with Manning's lot, Arthur Stanley will be arrested on Tuesday—that's all!"

And he walked off leaving Jack with a heavy heart. There was no way of getting out of it. He had to try the effect of his persuasion on the school captain. He was by no means certain of success, but the thought of failure was terrible. He knew that Rupert would keep his word, and in his distressed imagination he already saw Arthur in the grip of the police.

He had put off doing as Rupert demanded, waiting for a favourable opportunity. But it was clear that it would not do to put it off any longer. He trembled at the thought of what would happen if the captain did not allow Cunningham to play on Monday.

Bulkeley was in good humour with Jack, in whom he thought he had a rod in pickle for St. Ronan's when the great match came off, and Jack was relieved by the friendly way in which the captain of Clavering listened to his suggestion.

"That's very decent of you, Stanley," he said cordially. "I can't help knowing that you are not on good terms with Cunningham, and this shows that you are above petty jealousies, and consider the good of the college before your own personal feelings. I've noticed, the past few days, that Cunningham is doing his best, and I'm quite willing to give him another chance. Perhaps he's had lesson enough. Anyway, we shall see on Monday. You can tell him from me that he can play in Manning's team."

Jack went away, feeling like a hypocrite. The captain's praises of his disinterestedness made his ears tingle with shame. Yet what could he do? He longed to make a clean breast of it to Bulkeley, but the thought of Arthur's peril restrained him. He had gained his point, upon which so much depended, but his success made him feel very miserable.

He met Cunningham in the corridor, after leaving Bulkeley's study. Cunningham looked at him eagerly.

"You have seen Bulkeley?"

"Yes."

"What is the result?"

"You are to play with Manning's side."

Rupert's eyes gleamed with triumph.

"I thought you could fix it," he said. "And I thought you would, if I pinned you down."

"I hope you are satisfied now," said Jack bitterly. "You have made me act like a cad."

"I don't see it. You can't expect me to keep your secret for nothing, I suppose."

And Rupert walked away, quite satisfied with himself and with the point he had gained.

He had been going towards his study when he met Jack. He passed on, and, as he came to his study, he heard the sound of a movement within.

He opened the door suddenly. Tommy Hughes, with a duster in his hand, was arranging his books, with an air of conscious virtue and industry.

Cunningham looked at him suspiciously.

"What are you doing here, you little rat?" he asked, in his usual polite way.

"Can't you see?" replied Tommy, in an injured tone. "Don't you want me to keep your study tidy?"

This display of diligence on Tommy's part was so unprecedented that it was not surprising that Cunningham was suspicious.

"More likely prying, you rat!"

"Now, that's too bad, Cunningham, when I—"

"Clear out! And, look here, don't come into my study again when I'm absent. Do you hear?"

"Certainly; but I thought you'd be pleased—"

"Oh, get out!"

And Tommy got out. He grinned to himself as he went down the corridor.

"It was lucky I thought of the duster. That saved me a licking. What a suspicious beast he is," murmured the junior. "The packet is in the locker; there's no doubt about that. But how am I to get hold of the key?"

CHAPTER 6.

On the Cricket Ground.

A FINE summer's day: the sky bright and blue, dotted with fleecy clouds; the fields green, and fresh and fair.

The ground was pretty well crowded with boys of all forms to see the match between the two Clavering sides.

Both elevens were in deadly earnest, determined to do or die. From the players who made the best figure that day Bulkeley and the cricket committee were to make their final selection for the college eleven which was to meet St. Ronan's. And every boy of the twenty-two meant to do his level best.

It was to be a single innings match. It was a perfect afternoon for cricket. Jack Stanley's face was more cheerful than it had been for some time as he looked over the emerald level.

Rupert Cunningham was not looking so cheerful. In fact, he had a weight upon his mind.

He had watched Jack doing some bowling that morning before school, and envy itself could not ignore the fact that Stanley's bowling was pretty near as perfect as bowling could be.

Rupert had pictured himself at the wicket with Jack put on to bowl, and in his mind's eye he had seen his wicket a wreck, and himself, as before, going out without breaking his duck.

And he could not doubt that Jack would get Noel to put him on to bowl, if only for the sake of revenge. Rupert had forced him to use his influence, against his will, to get the captain of the school to give Rupert another chance, and if he could spoil that chance, he would do it, Rupert thought, judging Stanley by himself. All his skill and cunning would be exerted to make Cunningham's innings a failure. Indeed, Rupert suspected that it was for this very purpose that Stanley had of late devoted so much time and trouble to the improvement of his bowling.

He gritted his teeth at the thought of it, but for a long time he did not see how he was to baffle the supposed hostile intention of the boy he hated. But at last an idea occurred to him, and he found an opportunity of speaking to Jack before the game commenced.

"I want to speak a word to you, Stanley," he said abruptly.

Jack looked at him coldly.

"Well, what is it?"

"You intend to bowl against me, don't you?"

Jack stared.

"That depends upon Noel. He's captaining my side. If he puts me on to bowl against you, of course I shall bowl."

"That's all very well, but you know as well as I do that if you hint to Noel a wish to bowl, he'll let you."

"Likely enough, but what about it?"

"You haven't thought of doing it, I suppose," sneered

Rupert. "You haven't been practising bowling so hard lately for the purpose of getting even with me by bowling me in this match?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, if you haven't, all right," said Cunningham, with a smile of incredulity. "But, in case you should be tempted to revenge yourself that way, I warn you that you had better not bowl against me."

"I won't ask Noel to put me on, if that's what you mean."

"Look here, Stanley, I mean this, that if you bowl me out you had better look out for squalls, and your cousin, too!"

Jack turned pale.

"Do you know what you are asking me to do?" he said, in a low voice. "You are asking me to betray my side."

"Rats! It's only a practice match, anyway. You are not compelled to go on against me. There's no need for you to take the leather when I'm at the wicket, except your spite against me."

"Don't be an ass. I must bowl if Noel puts me on."

"I don't see why he should do that of his own accord."

"But he might."

"Well, if he does, you had better not bring my wicket down, that's all," said Rupert savagely. "I am going to get into the college eleven. I believe I can do it, unless you prevent me. And if you prevent me, I will make you suffer for it."

"If you have a big innings because I spare your wicket, you will be getting a reputation on false pretences, and I may be responsible for putting a bad player into the college eleven."

"Choose between that and seeing Arthur Stanley in the hands of the police," replied Cunningham brutally.

Jack bit his lip. His eyes were gleaming with scorn and rage. He longed to dash his fist into the sneering face before him, but for Arthur's sake he dared not.

"I can't do it, Cunningham. Ask me anything else—"

"I have nothing else to ask you."

"It would be wrong—mean."

"Rats!"

"I can't do it. I'll avoid going on against your wicket if I possibly can, but if I am put on, I must do my best."

"Very well," said Rupert, between his teeth. "That settles it. You know the consequences. I leave it to you. Do as you like, but if you spoil my chance for the college eleven, Arthur Stanley goes to prison."

And he walked away.

A heavy sigh passed Jack's lips. The sunshine and the cheeriness of the summer's day were gone for him. Again he had been made to feel the chain, in a way more galling than before. He felt that he could not do as Rupert demanded, but the thought of the consequences made him groan inwardly.

Noel's team went in first. Noel opened himself, with Taylor. Taylor was caught at mid-wicket by Lesley, and went out, and Jack Stanley donned pad and gloves, and took his place.

And then the gloom vanished from Jack's face. He was a born cricketer, and as he gripped the cane handle of the mallet, everything but cricket disappeared from his mind. With calm, cool face and alert eyes, he took his stand, prepared for anything the enemy might send him.

And they sent him some hard work, which he enjoyed. The enthusiasm of the spectators gradually rose as they watched him. Good as he had been in the last match, his steady practice had told, and he was now in wonderful form.

The best of Mannering's bowlers tackled him in vain. Rupert Cunningham did his very best, but the over he bowled ended by adding fifteen to Jack's score—a result which made the bowler snap his teeth.

And still the score crept up, till it looked as if the redoubtable Fifth Former would succeed in topping the century.

Popham sent down a ball which left Noel's wicket a wreck, and another batsman took his place, who in turn was caught in the slips, and gave place to another. But Stanley was still batting. He had knocked up ninety now off his own bat. The Fifth Form of Clavering shouted itself hoarse to see Sixth Formers come and go, and Stanley of the Fifth hold his ground without turning a hair.

But everything has an end in this world, and so had Jack's innings, at last. Popham was bowling again, and he sent in a ball just where Jack liked it, and the bat flashed round and sent it on a journey, and Jack and his partner ran. One—two—three—scudding like lightning—four; but the fourth was one too many. Jack's bat was scarce a foot from the crease when the ball came whizzing in, and the balls went to right and left. It was a narrow miss, but a miss was as bad as a mile, and the deed was done.

"Out!"

And Jack carried out his bat for ninety-three. He got a ringing cheer as he went off.

The innings went on with varying fortunes, till the wickets were all down for a hundred and thirty.

Mannering opened his innings with Lesley and Armitage. When the latter went out, Rupert Cunningham took his place.

It was soon seen that Cunningham's batting had improved. His innings opened auspiciously. He took nine for the over, and was still batting when Lesley went out and Mannering himself came on. And then Rupert and Mannering between them knocked out the runs, and showed no signs of shifting.

"Here, young Stanley, take the leather!" exclaimed Noel.

"You can bowl the next over against Cunningham."

Jack hesitated.

But the ball was pitched to him, and he had to catch it and go on, whether he liked it or not.

Rupert Cunningham's eyes glinted as he saw Stanley preparing to bowl. He felt that he was at Jack's mercy if the latter chose to bowl him out. He swore inwardly that Stanley should rue it if he did.

Jack was in a horrible predicament.

He had told Cunningham that he could not do as he demanded; but now that the hour had come, he did not know what to do.

If he did his best, he had little doubt that he could send Cunningham out, and then he knew that Rupert would keep his word, and he thought of Arthur betrayed—of the visit of the police to the gipsy's hut in the wood—of poor Arthur dragged away to prison, to suffer for a crime he had never committed.

But if he spared the wicket, and saved Arthur, it was quite within the bounds of possibility that Rupert might have a prosperous innings, and might possibly get into the college eleven on the strength of it. And none knew better than Jack that, however Rupert might shape in this game, he was far from being up to First Eleven form, and was not in the least fit to be played against an adversary like St. Ronan's. His presence in the team, in fact, might easily spell disaster for Clavering.

That was looking at the worst side of it. Jack thought about it till his head seemed to be turning round, and he had taken his place to bowl without having made any decision. He knew that he ought to do his best, but he knew that Arthur would suffer for it if he did, and it was not till the ball was leaving his hand that the conviction rushed upon him that he could not sacrifice Arthur.

Rupert played to one of the easiest balls he had ever stopped. He sent it whizzing to the boundary, and his eyes glinted with triumph. He knew that Stanley had surrendered.

It was the same with every ball of the over. Jack's face was white and set. He dared not risk taking Cunningham's wicket, and the result was that his bowling gave his rival twenty runs.

The over finished, Jack gladly abandoned the leather. He had saved Arthur, but in a way that made his heart sick.

Rupert lived through two more overs, and went out with a total of forty-two to his credit, which was at least twice as many as anybody had expected of him.

Bulkeley looked surprised.

"Cunningham's shaped better than I expected, Fano," he remarked. "It was Stanley advised me to give him another trial, and he was right."

"But you don't think Cunningham's up to playing St. Ronan's, do you, Bulkeley?"

"Oh, no!" said the captain of Clavering, with a shake of the head. "I would put him in at a pinch, but there's no need—we have better material."

The innings ended—all out for a hundred and ten. They had been beaten by twenty runs.

And there wasn't the least doubt to whom the victory was due. Jack Stanley had won for his side, and it was the general opinion that he would help very materially to win for Clavering against St. Ronan's. At all events, he had won his cap for the eleven.

CHAPTER 7.

The Man from Scotland Yard.

TAP!

"Come in!" called out Jack Stanley.

His study door opened.

He looked with some curiosity at the man who entered.

A man of medium size, plainly but respectably dressed, with a red face, and little black penetrating eyes.

"Allow me to introduce myself," he said, in reply to Jack's mute look of inquiry. "The doctor has been kind enough to give me permission to speak to you. You are Master Stanley?"

"I am Jack Stanley."

"Exactly. I am Frederick Tomlinson, of Scotland Yard."

Jack started up.

Every vestige of colour fled from his face at this announcement. At once he knew that it was the quest of Arthur that

had brought the man from Scotland Yard to Clavering College.

But he felt the little penetrating eyes upon him, and realised that he was betraying himself, and he sank down again into his chair, breathing hard.

A slight smile crossed the detective's face. He had made his announcement thus suddenly in order to see whether Jack Stanley had anything to conceal, and the way in which it had been received showed him pretty plainly that he was on the right track.

"You appear surprised, Mr. Stanley," he remarked suavely. "I am surprised," replied Jack. "I cannot imagine what your business can be with me. Will you please state it?"

But while he spoke thus boldly, his heart was sinking.

The thought of Rupert Cunningham had instantly rushed into his mind. During the three days that had elapsed since the match, it had become known for certain that Rupert would not play against St. Ronan's. The runs he had got by threatening Jack had not saved him. There were better players at Clavering, and the eleven, which included Jack, was made up without Rupert Cunningham.

Rupert had been unable to hide his chagrin and disappointment, and Jack had been in constant fear lest he should tell the secret of Arthur's retreat out of sheer malice.

But he did not. Whether he preferred to keep Jack in uneasiness, or whether he still hoped to turn his power to some account, he kept the secret. And Jack had begun to take comfort, when in the midst of his growing security, came the visit of Mr. Tomlinson from Scotland Yard.

And the thought that Rupert had betrayed him had naturally risen at once. Had his rival been base enough to write to his father or to Scotland Yard? But if so, he would have told of Arthur's hiding-place. Then Arthur was already found. Jack's brain swam at the thought. But he controlled his dismay with a great effort. It was possible that all was not yet lost.

He spoke with forced calmness. Mr. Tomlinson was looking at him with a keenness that was most disconcerting. The slight smile was still hovering about his mouth, and it made Jack vaguely uneasy.

"You cannot imagine what my business may be," the detective remarked slowly. "You have not heard of the bank robbery, then?"

Jack made an impatient gesture. "Please come to the point and tell me what it is you want with me, Mr. Tomlinson."

"I want to find your cousin, Arthur Stanley," said the detective abruptly.

Jack's heart gave a great throb of relief.

His most terrible fear had vanished. Cunningham had not betrayed him. The man from Scotland Yard did not know where Arthur was.

The detective, watching him, saw the relief that involuntarily flashed into the boy's face, and wondered.

"Really," said Jack, speaking with his usual composure, now that he was relieved of his most terrible dread, "if you had asked the doctor, Mr. Tomlinson, he would have told you that my cousin, Arthur Stanley, left Clavering a long time ago."

The detective smiled.

"I am aware of that," he said quietly.

"And he is now employed at a bank," added Jack, in a casual way.

"He was," said Mr. Tomlinson; "but he robbed that bank of ten thousand pounds' worth of banknotes, and fled. From information given by people who saw him that day, he appears to have taken a train for a point near Clavering. I am here to ask you if you have seen anything of him."

Jack did not reply.

He could not tell a deliberate lie, and he knew that after the emotion he had shown, it would be useless if he did.

But he had no intention of admitting anything, or of satisfying the detective on a single point.

Mr. Tomlinson watched him in silence for a few minutes, waiting for him to speak. He had a pretty shrewd idea that Jack could tell him where the fugitive was, if he liked.

"Have you seen him, Mr. Stanley?" he said at length, as Jack did not speak.

Jack looked him full in the eyes.

"Do you expect me to answer that question?" he asked.

"Do you really think I might help you to arrest my own cousin?"

"It is your duty to aid the law."

"Well, as far as that goes, it is the law's duty to punish the guilty, not to hunt down the innocent," retorted Jack. "And Arthur Stanley is as innocent of this crime as I am."

"That is not a question for you or me to settle," the detective said drily. "I am here to find him. I have every reason to believe that you have met him—that you know where he is to be found."

Jack made no reply to that.

"I ask you, therefore, to give me what information is in

your power," the detective said persuasively. "If Arthur Stanley is innocent, it will be best for him to stand his trial and have his name cleared. You must see that."

"I don't see it."

"You have admitted that you know where he is."

"On the contrary, I have admitted nothing."

The detective's face wore a baffled look. He had not expected to be repulsed like this by a mere schoolboy.

"Tell me plainly, have you met Arthur Stanley during the past week or not?" he exclaimed.

Jack was silent.

"Will you answer me?"

"No."

The detective rose. There was a gleam of anger in his eyes.

"Your refusal to answer can have only one meaning, Mr. Stanley. You have met him, and you have aided him to evade the law."

"Of course, you may think so if you like," said Jack composedly.

"And it is pretty clear to me that he is in hiding somewhere near Clavering," added the detective. "I shall certainly find him. Now, don't you think, Mr. Stanley, both for your cousin's sake and your own, that you had better make a clean breast of it?"

"I have nothing to tell you."

"Good-day."

At that moment the door of the study flew open with a crash, and the form of Tommy Hughes came flying headlong in, propelled by the boot of Tom Nugent.

"Look at that little mongrel, Jack! I found him with his ear glued to the keyhole!" exclaimed Nugent wrathfully. Then he saw the detective for the first time. "Sorry if I've interrupted you, Jack. But I simply had to let fly at that little spying beast."

"It's all right," said Jack. "Mr. Tomlinson was just going."

And the detective left the study.

Nugent seized the luckless Tommy by the throat, and backed him against the wall.

"Now, you rat, what do you mean by it?"

"I didn't hear anything," roared Tommy. "and I won't tell anybody that Stanley's cousin has robbed a bank—"

Jack gave a groan.

It was clear that the inquisitive Fourth Former had heard all the talk with the detective, and it was equally certain that in an hour it would be all over Clavering College.

Nugent shook the eavesdropper till his teeth rattled.

"You little beast! What shall we do to him, Jack?"

"Let him go, Tom. It's no good licking him."

"That's just it!" cried Tommy eagerly. "Licking only makes me worse—it does, really. Here, I say, hold on!"

"I'll risk it," said Nugent. "It can't make you much worse, anyway."

And he cuffed the unlucky junior right and left. Tommy yelled and roared.

"I say, Stanley, stop him. I won't say a word—I won't, really! Wild horses shan't drag it from me. Oh, oh, oh!"

"Let him alone, Tom."

And Nugent unwillingly desisted. He glowered fiercely at the junior.

"Now, you mongrel, you must promise to—"

Jack interrupted him.

"It's no good, Tom. He wouldn't keep a promise if he made it."

"Hum, no. I suppose he wouldn't," admitted Nugent. "It's a pity we can't throttle the little rotter."

"I won't say a word," blubbered Tommy.

"Get out!" said Jack.

The Fourth Former made for the door, gladly enough.

But there, struck by a sudden thought, he turned to ask a question.

"I say, Stanley, did you really meet your cousin? Did he give you any of the banknotes?"

Nugent made a rush at him. Tommy turned to flee, and Nugent's foot fairly lifted him behind, and sent him sprawling out into the corridor. In a twinkling, however, he picked himself up and fled.

Nugent turned back to his chum. Jack sank into his chair, leaning his elbows on his desk, his face buried in his hands.

"Cheer up, old boy," said Nugent. "After all, the fellows won't think any the worse of you."

After a minute or two, Jack raised his face. He was very pale, but his look was resolute.

"Even if Arthur were guilty, you have nothing to be ashamed of," continued Nugent. "But he is innocent, and the truth will be made known some day."

"Well, I must face it, anyway," said Jack quietly. "It's no use giving way."

Nugent looked at him curiously.

"But how did you come to be talking it over with this chap—Tomlinson, I think you called him?" he asked.

"He is a detective from Scotland Yard," said Jack.

"THE CAPTAIN'S RIDE."

A Thrilling Tale of the Captain, the Cook, and the Engineer.

NEXT SATURDAY.

The British

Nugent started.
"After Arthur?"
"Yes."
"And he wanted to get out of you whether you had seen him?"

"Yes. I refused to say anything."
"Quite right. Like his cheek to ask you."
"But he knows very well that I have met Arthur," continued Jack. "And he suspects that my cousin is hidden somewhere near Clavering."

Nugent whistled.
"Now, old fellow, you will be able to help me," Jack went on. "Tomlinson is pretty certain to hang about Clavering, and to watch my going out as much as he can, in the hope that I shall lead him to Arthur's hiding-place. Don't you think so?"

"It is pretty certain," agreed Nugent. "It won't be safe for you to go near Clavering Wood again."

"That's what I was thinking. I shall want you to go instead of me, when it is necessary for someone to go."

"I'll do it, like a bird," answered Nugent readily. "You had better give the wood a wide berth, and never go near it. I shall be able to do all that is required. And I think I had better run over and pay Arthur a visit, and warn him that a better detective is nosing around Clavering, as soon as possible. What do you think?"

"Yes, it's a good idea."
"I'll go as soon as we've finished prep, then. Hallo, Buttons, what do you want?"

This query was addressed to a fat, round-faced youth, who had put his head in at the door.

"Master Stanley is wanted in the doctor's study," Nugent gave a whistle.

"Is anybody with the doctor?"

"Yes. The gentleman who came a little while ago."

Jack changed colour. He knew what the summons meant. "Keep a stiff upper lip, old fellow," said Nugent. "After all, they can't force you to say anything."

Jack nodded, and left the study. His face was deeply troubled as he made his way towards the doctor's study, but his mind was fully made up. His resolution was taken, and nothing could shake it.

CHAPTER 8.

Mr. Tomlinson is Disappointed.

THE doctor's face was almost as troubled as Jack's as the boy entered. Mr. Tomlinson, of Scotland Yard, sat gnawing a pencil, and his little, black, penetrating eyes at once fixed upon Stanley.

The doctor coughed uncomfortably.

He looked over his gold pince-nez at Jack, who waited respectfully for him to speak. It was not difficult to read from the doctor's expression that he secretly wished the gentleman from Scotland Yard at the ends of the earth.

"Ahem, Stanley. You are aware that Mr. Tomlinson has come to Clavering to seek information respecting—hem—your cousin Arthur, who is—hem—accused of—"

"Of robbing the City and County Bank of banknotes to the value of ten thousand pounds," said Mr. Tomlinson, removing the end of his pencil from his mouth for a moment to make that remark.

The doctor coughed.

"Hem—exactly. Now, Stanley, Mr. Tomlinson had an idea that you might know something of your cousin's whereabouts, and, thinking that this notion was certainly erroneous, I gave him leave to question you. But he has astonished me by telling me that the result of this interview is that he is convinced that you know where Arthur Stanley is hidden."

Jack remained silent.

"Now, Stanley," continued the doctor gently, "if this is the case, your duty is to give Mr. Tomlinson any information in your power to give. You must not take upon yourself to obstruct the law."

"Mr. Tomlinson has no right to assume that I know anything," replied Jack. "I certainly have not told him so."

The doctor looked relieved.

"If he is mistaken, Stanley, tell him so, and that will end the matter," he said. "I rely absolutely upon your word."

Jack was silent.

"Come, Stanley. If you have not seen anything of this unfortunate youth, pray say so at once."

Still Jack did not speak.

Mr. Tomlinson smiled a little, as much as to say, "I told you so." But he said nothing.

The doctor's brows grew more troubled.

"I can only infer from your silence, Stanley, that Mr. Tomlinson's suspicion is well founded."

"May I speak to you alone, sir?" said Jack.

The doctor hesitated. The detective's face assumed a some-

what hostile expression. He evidently did not want to be left out of the matter.

"Why do you ask that, Stanley?" said the doctor at length.

"I want to explain to you, sir, but I do not want to speak before Mr. Tomlinson," replied Jack bluntly.

The doctor looked at the man from Scotland Yard. Mr. Tomlinson rose.

"I will retire if you wish it," he said.

And he walked out of the study.

The doctor waited until the door had closed.

"Now, Stanley, what have you to say?"

"I wish to tell you the whole truth, sir," said Jack. "I have met my cousin. I met him last week. He told me all that had happened at the bank, and I know that he is innocent."

"I sincerely hope so, Stanley, but you must be aware that that is a question for a judge and jury to decide."

"There is a conspiracy against him, sir," Jack went on hurriedly. "Things have been cunningly arranged, so as to throw upon him the guilt of others. I am certain of it. He never robbed the bank of a penny. He asked me for help, sir, and surely I could not refuse to help my own cousin in distress. I helped him, and promised to keep his secret. You would not advise me to break that promise?"

"Hem!" said the doctor.

"I could not do it, sir. Even if you were to expel me from Clavering, I could not betray Arthur," said Jack earnestly.

The doctor passed his hand over his brow. He was in a position of great difficulty. The boy's sturdy loyalty to his cousin touched him, and he could not very well advise or command him to break a promise. He did not know what to do.

"I hope you are not displeased with me, sir. But I couldn't betray Arthur. Even if he were not my cousin, it wouldn't be honourable. It wouldn't be cricket—would it, sir?"

The doctor smiled slightly.

"Perhaps you are right, Stanley. At all events, I shall not command you to do what you consider dishonourable. Open the door."

When Mr. Tomlinson, of Scotland Yard, returned to the study, he was not looking in the best of humours.

"I am sorry, Mr. Tomlinson, but Master Stanley can tell you nothing," said the doctor. "It will be useless to question him further."

Mr. Tomlinson's brow wrinkled a little.

"Very well, sir," he said. "You know best. I shall continue my investigations without help from this quarter, and I trust that nothing will come to light which will bring discredit upon Clavering College. I am afraid, however, that that may be the case."

And, with this parting shot, the detective bowed himself out.

The doctor, with a somewhat clouded brow, dismissed Jack, who went back to his study, where he found Tom Nugent awaiting him.

"Well, old son?"

"It's all right, Tom."

And Jack gave his chum an account of what had passed in the doctor's study.

"The doctor's a brick," said Nugent. "We shall have to keep our weather eye on Tomlinson, though. He means business. His disappointment at not finding anything out from you will make him wild. Arthur will have to lie awfully low while he stays in Clavering. As soon as you go to the cricket field, Jack, I'll be off to the gipsy's hut to put Arthur on his guard."

And a little later, when Jack was at cricket, he had the satisfaction of seeing Mr. Tomlinson, of Scotland Yard, looking on at the game, while Tom Nugent was speeding on his way to the fugitive's hiding-place in Clavering Wood.

Meanwhile, Tommy Hughes had not been idle. Jack Stanley was not mistaken in thinking that he would not be able to keep the secret he had discovered.

Tommy confided it—in strict confidence, of course—to every boy in the Lower Fourth, and it rapidly spread. Before long the story was all over the school.

That Arthur Stanley, who used to belong to Clavering, had robbed a bank of ten thousand pounds, and that a detective had come from Scotland Yard to look for him, was naturally a topic of exciting interest to the boys, and it was discussed breathlessly.

While most of the fellows agreed in condemning Tommy for the mean way he had surprised the secret, few of them were above asking him for particulars, and even some of the Upper Form boys listened to his tale.

In the general thirst for information, Rupert Cunningham found himself of great account, for it was known at Clavering that his father was cashier of the bank which Arthur had robbed—or was accused of having robbed. Cunningham's

opinion was listened to with great respect, and he did not conceal his belief that Arthur was guilty.

The discussion was in full swing when Jack Stanley came in. As soon as he appeared, there was an awkward pause, and a hush which told him as plainly as words could have done what the boys had been talking about.

Jack stopped dead, flushing scarlet, and then turning white. There was silence in the common-room for a moment, during which a pin might have been heard to drop.

It was broken by Bulkeley, who happened to be there, and who had heard the discussion with a frowning brow.

The captain of Clavering strode towards Jack, and shook hands with him.

"There seems to be bad news about your cousin, who used to be here, Stanley," he said. "I am very sorry to hear it, but I am quite certain that it will all come right in the end. I knew Arthur well when I was in the Fifth with him, and a more honourable fellow never breathed. I know that he was incapable of a base action. Depend upon it, my boy, the truth will soon come out."

The tears started to Jack's eyes. He was too much moved for words. He could only press Bulkeley's hand in silence, and turn away.

Some of the boys gave Bulkeley a cheer. The captain of the school, by his prompt action, had let it be seen that Arthur's misfortune would make no difference in his treatment of Jack, and most of the boys of Clavering were heartily inclined to follow his lead.

Some of them, with Rupert Cunningham at their head, had thought of making a set against Jack; but they dropped this idea now. Even Rupert had to content himself with covert sneers.

It was soon known that Mr. Tomlinson had taken up his quarters at the Black Bull, in Clavering, evidently with the intention of staying some time in the neighbourhood.

He was an object of considerable interest to the college boys, who not infrequently encountered him in his walks abroad, which very often brought him near the school, or into the playing-fields.

Jack Stanley knew very well what his object was. He believed that Arthur was hidden somewhere in the neighbourhood, and he was on the watch for any communication between the cousins. It was at this time that Jack found the full value of a chum's friendship. Every visit that it was necessary to make to the hidden hut in Clavering Wood was made by Tom Nugent, and Jack gave the wood a wide berth, taking care never to go near it.

This prudent course baffled the detective; but he knew that he was on the track, and he could afford to be patient.

It was Rupert Cunningham who caused Jack more anxiety than Mr. Tomlinson of Scotland Yard. Cunningham had promised to keep the secret if Jack yielded to the demands he made. Jack yielded; but he knew that he could not depend upon Cunningham. Rupert's previous conduct showed how little he was bound by considerations of honour, and Jack felt that if it ever suited him to break his promise, he would do so.

He had not done so yet. It appeared to be his object to keep Jack in anxiety. On more than one occasion Jack saw him in conversation with the detective, and a pang of apprehension went to his heart. But each time his terror proved to be unfounded.

He gradually came to the conviction that Rupert had some card up his sleeve—that he intended to make some fresh use of his power; but what his plan was Jack could not guess. That Cunningham bitterly resented being excluded from the college eleven was no secret. He had not been able to hide his chagrin, and when the names were known, he had muttered something about favouritism, which brought Bulkeley's wrath down upon him. Rupert had to apologise, and that did not improve his temper.

"He's as spiteful as a cat, Jack," Tom Nugent remarked. "And I'm convinced that he means to revenge himself somehow. I could see it in his looks."

"But why doesn't he speak to the detective, then?" said Jack, looking puzzled. "If that is his intention, why doesn't he do it?"

"I don't know. I can't quite get on to his little game. But I am certain that he means mischief."

And that was Jack's opinion too, though he tried to hope for the best.

They were anxious days for Jack Stanley. But he had one all-powerful consolation. Every leisure hour was spent in the cricket-field. When he had the leather or the willow in his hand he forgot all his troubles, and remembered only the grand old game.

A couple of days after the interview in the doctor's study, Jack met Mr. Tomlinson in Clavering Lane, and the detective stopped to speak.

"A word with you, Mr. Stanley."

Jack stopped, not very willingly. He never felt quite comfortable under the detective's sharp gaze.

"You will not tell me whether you have met Arthur Stanley, but, of course, I have drawn my own conclusions upon that point. What I want to say to you is this. When Arthur Stanley absconded, he carried off a packet containing banknotes to the value of ten thousand pounds. Patience, please! Whether this packet remains in his possession, or whether, as is more likely, he has placed it in the care of someone else, of course I do not know. But one thing I do know, and that is, that he might consider a schoolboy's locker a safe hiding-place for—"

Jack's eyes blazed.

Mr. Tomlinson went on imperturbably.

"He might consider a schoolboy's locker a safe hiding-place for anything he wished to conceal, and he might take advantage of the friendship of an unsuspicious cousin. Now, Mr. Stanley, I want to ask you a simple question. I do not mean to hint that you would be guilty of concealing stolen property. That is not my meaning at all. But did your cousin entrust to your charge anything—anything at all?"

The penetrating eyes were fastened upon the boy's face. Jack had turned red with anger. But he answered calmly.

"My cousin did not entrust anything to my charge."

"Nothing at all?"

"Nothing."

The detective looked a little disappointed. He was a sufficiently keen reader of character to know that Jack was telling the truth.

"I believe you, Mr. Stanley. But let me tell you something which you may tell to someone else when you see him again. You understand me? The bank is more anxious to recover the notes than to punish the thief. If the plunder were given up, it is probable that a certain party who is now being searched for, and who will certainly be found before long, would find a free path left to him to escape. That is all."

"Wait a moment," said Jack. "Let me tell you something, too. You would be much better employed in looking for the real thief, than in tracking down an innocent lad who knows no more about the crime than I do. That is all."

And he walked away. The detective looked after him with a smile. Jack had given him a good deal of trouble, and yet he could not help liking the frank, fearless, true-hearted lad.

But the smile vanished from his face the next moment, and a sharp, alert look took its place. He swung round, made a sudden dive through a gap in the hedge, and the next moment there was a roar, and he re-appeared in the lane, dragging a wriggling form by the collar.

"Hold on! I mean let go! You're chook-chook-chooking me!"

The detective relaxed his grip, but still held the boy so that he could not run away.

"So you were deeply interested, were you?" he drawled. "What do you mean by listening behind the hedge, you little rascal? Who are you?"

"I'm Tommy Hughes."

"Do you belong to the school younger?"

"Fourth Form," said Tommy.

"And what were you listening for?"

"I wanted to hear what you said to Stanley," said Tommy ingenuously. "I saw you stop and speak to him, and so I cut behind the hedge."

"And don't you think you deserve a hiding?"

"No," said Tommy apprehensively. "I say," he went on eagerly, "do you think the stolen banknotes might really be hidden in a locker at Clavering?"

"Never mind what I think. Cut along, and consider yourself lucky that I don't wring your neck!" said Mr. Tomlinson.

And he walked away, leaving Tommy staring after him with wide-open eyes. A new idea had evidently flashed into the mind of the junior—an idea which filled him with amazement and excitement.

CHAPTER 3

A Dastardly Demand.

RUPERT CUNNINGHAM knocked at the door of Jack Stanley's study.

"Come in!" called out Jack's cheery voice.

Cunningham pushed open the door, and entered. Jack's face fell a little as he saw who his visitor was. Tom Nugent, who was with his chum, rose as Rupert walked in.

"I should like to speak to you, Stanley."

"Go ahead," said Jack shortly.

Rupert cast a meaning look at Nugent. Jack's chum understood.

"I'll see you again presently, Jack," he remarked, and walked out of the study.

"What is it, Cunningham?" said Jack quietly.

His heart was heavy. He felt that Cunningham had come on no friendly errand. The expression of Rupert's face showed him that his enemy meant mischief.

The blow he had long been vaguely expecting was to fall at

last. But even now he could not divine what form Rupert's attack would take.

Cunningham sat on the edge of the table, his hands in his pockets, the old sneering smile upon his face that Jack knew so well.

"The St. Ronan's match is coming off the day after to-morrow," he remarked.

Jack nodded.

"You have been looking forward to it as a day of triumph, of course," said Rupert, with an ugly sneer, "though you know as well as I do that you ought not to be in the team at all, and that Bulkeley has given you the place I ought to have had."

"I know nothing of the kind," said Jack warmly.

"Bulkeley chose the one he considered the best player."

"Of course you don't find fault with his favouritism, when you are the one to benefit by it."

"It's not much use discussing it, Cunningham. Whether I ought to be in the college team or not, Bulkeley has put me in, and there's an end of it."

"Yes, he has put you in, and I'll make him sorry for it," said Rupert, between his teeth.

Jack stared at him.

"I really don't see how you'll manage that, Cunningham," he remarked. "Bulkeley's not likely to attach much importance to your opinion."

"He'll attach some importance to losing the match, I suppose."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you are not going to triumph over me as you anticipate," said Rupert, with a malignant smile. "You are going to lose the St. Ronan's match."

"I am going to lose the St. Ronan's match?"

"Yes, you are, or you'll rue it."

Jack turned pale.

"Speak plainly, Cunningham. Do you mean to say that you want Clavering to be beaten by St. Ronan's?"

Cunningham nodded coolly.

"You are!"

"You are!"

"Better language, please," said Cunningham threateningly.

"You cur! You mongrel!" cried Jack, unheeding. "And you think I could be base enough to do as you wish—to lose the match for the school?"

"I know you could if you liked, and I think you will, too, if you don't want your cousin to go to penal servitude."

Jack made a step towards him with blazing eyes. Rupert Cunningham slid from the table, and threw up his hands to defend himself. For a moment it looked as if Jack would spring at him like a tiger. And if he had given rein to his temper, Cunningham's defence would not have availed him much. But the thought of the unhappy fugitive of Clavering Wood flashed across Jack Stanley's mind in time. His clenched hands fell to his sides.

"You hound!"

Rupert gave a yawn.

"Now you know what to expect, Stanley. You've been thinking during the past week that I meant to knuckle under, haven't you? You were mistaken, you see. When I saw the names of the eleven, I made up my mind to make you all smart for it, and you especially. It is all through you that I was left out," he said, with gleaming eyes. "Your triumph will be a frost after all. You can do as you like, of course. But I shall watch the match the day after to-morrow. And if Clavering wins, I shall go straight to Tomlinson and show him where to find your cousin. So you know what to expect."

And he moved to the door.

"Stop!" called out Jack.

Rupert turned round.

"Well?"

"Have you fully considered what you are doing?" said Jack hoarsely. "Do you understand what a villainy you are asking me to commit? Can you be really base enough to wish your own college to lose a match, for the sake of petty spite?"

"Is that all you want to say?"

Jack set his teeth.

"You have made up your mind, then?"

"Certainly I have."

"And you will betray Arthur unless I lose the match?"

"I have said so."

"Then you must do it," said Jack, with a deep breath.

"I can't do what you ask, even to save Arthur."

Rupert sneered.

"Very well. I wonder what Arthur Stanley would think of your scruples? But please yourself. You have another day to think over it."

And he went out of the study.

He left Jack a prey to a terrible disquietude. His whole soul revolted from the baseness his enemy required of him. But to see Arthur dragged away to prison!

What could he do? He threw himself into a chair and buried his face in his hands. What could he do? He groaned aloud as he thought how helpless he was.

The door opened.

"Why, Jack old chap?"

It was Nugent. Jack raised his face—his cheeks were wet with tears. Nugent looked at him in amazement and alarm.

"What's the matter, old chap?"

"I can't tell you," groaned Jack. "Oh, if I only knew what to do!"

"What has that hound asked of you this time?" demanded Nugent wrathfully.

Jack was silent.

"Tell me what it is, Jack?"

"Don't ask me, Tom!" Jack started up. "I must go and see Arthur. I'll see what he says, at any rate."

"You can't go and see him to-night, Jack."

"No, I forgot that."

Jack began to pace the room, his chum watching him in uneasy silence, but not questioning him further, as he saw that his questions only added to Jack's trouble.

Truly, Rupert Cunningham had planned his revenge well. The day which Jack had looked forward to with joyous anticipation was to be the blackest of any he had spent at Clavering. He must either lose the match for Clavering, or he must play with the knowledge that as soon as the game was over the police would visit Arthur's hiding-place and seize the unhappy lad, and drag him away to answer for another's crime. He must commit an act of base treachery, or send his cousin to a living death. The only thing that could save him would be a defeat for Clavering by fair play at the hands of St. Ronan's, and he had too much confidence in the Clavering Eleven to expect that to happen. And what misery to be compelled to hope for such a defeat!

What could he do? In his misery he wished he had never been selected to play in the college eleven—and at that thought, a way out of the difficulty flashed into his mind, a possible escape from his dilemma. What if he did not play for Clavering, after all?

He would resign. There were plenty of eager cricketers at Clavering who would jump at the chance of filling his place. If he stood out the team would suffer, but—

What would Bulkeley say? What would the whole school say? It would be impossible to give any explanation. Bulkeley would naturally resent having such a thing sprung upon him at the last moment, and if Clavering lost the match, Jack was pretty certain to be sent to Coventry as the cause of the defeat. Bulkeley would despise him, and he could never explain. But even that was better, than playing for the college and giving away the game to the rival team.

He turned towards the door.

"What are you going to do, Jack?" asked Nugent.

"I must speak to Bulkeley," said Jack, in a strained voice. And he hurried to the captain's study.

CHAPTER 10. Arthur Decides.

"CAN I speak to you for a minute, Bulkeley?"

The captain of Clavering looked up and nodded.

He looked a little surprised at the expression of Jack's face.

"Certainly, Stanley."

And he pushed his book away.

"I want to resign my place in the eleven."

Bulkeley stared at Jack, wondering whether the Fifth Former had taken leave of his senses.

"Do you know what you are saying, Stanley?"

"Yes," said Jack miserably. "I mean it, Bulkeley."

"And why?"

Jack was silent.

"You have a reason, I suppose?" said Bulkeley impatiently.

"Yes, I have a reason."

"And what is it?"

"I—I'd rather not play."

Jack's white face grew scarlet under Bulkeley's searching gaze. The captain of the school was puzzled and angry.

"I don't understand you, Stanley. Do you mean that you don't feel up to playing against St. Ronan's? Are you afraid that your form isn't good enough?"

"I—I couldn't do Clavering justice," said Jack, in a low voice.

Bulkeley's expression cleared.

"I see; you're feeling a bit nervous about it, a sort of attack of stage-fright—eh?" he said, with a laugh. "But you've no reason, Stanley. I tell you frankly that you are the one I chiefly depend upon to keep our end up in the St. Ronan's match, and I'd rather lose any other player than

you. And in any case it's too late now to think of altering the team. You could not possibly be permitted to fail us at the last moment like this."

"But—"

Bulkeley waved his hand.

"No more, my boy. I refuse to accept your resignation. Now be off, and think better of it."

And he turned to his book again.

It was impossible to pursue the subject. Jack left the study with a heavy heart.

He would have to play. The question remained, whether he would play his best for Clavering, or whether he would allow himself to be used as the tool of Rupert Cunningham's revenge.

He remembered Rupert's words—"I wonder what Arthur would think of your scruples?" He felt that he must consult Arthur. He could not make up his mind until he had seen his cousin.

He slept little that night. He had resolved to visit Arthur the next day, at the risk of being seen by Mr. Tomlinson. But he took every precaution against being followed. After morning school he cycled across to Marley, and leaving his bike at an inn there, entered Clavering Wood on the side furthest from Clavering.

He walked through the wood, crossing the little rustic bridge where Rupert Cunningham had kept the mysterious rendezvous with his father, and made his way to the gipsy's hut in the shady recesses.

"You here, Jack?"

Arthur Stanley looked at his cousin in astonishment.

"Yes, Arthur. I had to come and see you. I must speak to you on a matter of importance," said Jack.

Arthur's look became anxious.

"Has the detective discovered anything?"

"No. It isn't that."

"Sit down, old fellow, and tell me what's the matter."

Jack sat down upon a mossy log. Arthur stood leaning against the rickety wall, waiting for him to speak.

"I'm in horrible trouble, Arthur."

"Tell me what it is."

And Jack told of Rupert Cunningham's demand, and the threat which had accompanied it. Arthur Stanley listened in silence, his brow clouded and his gaze bent upon the ground.

"You can't do what he asks, Jack."

Jack's heart gave a great throb of relief.

"What do you advise, then, Arthur?"

"Play to win. Do your level best for the school. You're bound in honour and common honesty to do so."

"But—the consequences!" faltered Jack.

Arthur was very pale. But his face was resolute.

"Whatever the consequences, Jack, you must not allow yourself to be bullied into acting dishonourably," he said.

"I could not consent to it. You must play to win for Clavering. And if that hound betrays me—"

"He is sure to do so, Arty. He will be furious."

"Well, let him. I will leave here to-night."

"But where will you go?" said Jack miserably. "There is no other safe hiding-place near Clavering."

"I shall try to reach Liverpool. I have a friend there who would help me to get abroad, if he could. If I get there—"

"But—"

"It's the only thing to be done, Jack. After all, I am not safe here, with the secret known to Rupert Cunningham. Even if you yielded to him this time, he might make some fresh demand you could not meet. He might betray me out of sheer malice. He is not to be trusted."

"No, that is true."

"I will make a bid for freedom, and take my chance. With the workman's clothes you have brought me, and the beard I have grown during the past two weeks, I think I may be able to escape recognition. And the search cannot now be so hot as it was at first. I think I shall very likely get clear."

The cousins had a long talk, and Jack, though with many misgivings, agreed to Arthur's plan. It was evidently the only thing to be done.

They parted at last, Jack hastening back to Marley, and mounting his bike for a scorch back to Clavering College. He had left himself none too much time.

Rupert Cunningham smiled as he saw Jack come in. He guessed where he had been; but he was far from guessing the decision Jack and Arthur had come to.

The great topic now at Clavering was the morrow's match. Bulkeley and his merry men were in fine form, and eager for the fray. All the eleven, and all the college, looked forward to the contest with confidence. St. Ronan's was known to be a strong team, and it was certain that they would put up a good fight, but Bulkeley's eleven was one of the finest Clavering had ever sent out, and there was good reason to hope that they would win another victory for the old school.

"Well, what do you say about resigning now?" exclaimed Bulkeley, as he met Jack that evening.

Jack shook his head.

"I'm going to do my best for Clavering, Bulkeley."

The captain of the school patted him on the shoulder.

"That's right, Stanley; stick to that."

Jack's mind was made up. Arthur's counsel had strengthened him to follow the path of duty. Whatever happened to him, he would not betray his trust. If his play could help to bring victory to Clavering, Clavering would win.

And, although fears for Arthur still haunted him, a definite decision brought him something like peace of mind.

But while the whole school was talking and thinking of the coming match, there was one boy whose attention was engrossed by another matter. It was Tommy Hughes.

Jack, entering his study that evening, met the enterprising Fourth Former coming out of it, and promptly collared him.

"Up to your tricks again, you little monkey?"

Tommy wriggled.

"Cunningham sent me to borrow your Latin dictionary, Stanley. You can ask him," said Tommy, in an injured tone.

"Oh, that's all right, then," said Jack unsuspiciously.

"Here it is."

And Tommy went off with the dictionary under his arm and his tongue in his cheek.

At a safe distance from the study, he broke into a chuckle.

"It's all right. The lockers in all the Fifth Form studies have the same pattern locks, and Stanley always leaves his key in the lock. He hasn't anything to hide, like a certain other party. While they're all at the cricket match to-morrow, I shall have a chance. I'll collar Stanley's key, and then I'll see what Cunningham's got in his locker," he murmured.

And Tommy chuckled again. His chuckle changed to a howl of anguish as a thumb and forefinger fastened upon his ear and twisted it.

"Oh, Cunningham, don't!"

"I told you to toast my cheese, you whelp. Why didn't you do it?"

"I—I forgot!" mumbled Tommy.

"A fag has no right to forget. Take that and that, and perhaps you'll remember next time."

Tommy scuttled off, rubbing his ears, which were burning like fire. There was a vengeful look upon his face.

"Just you wait till to-morrow, you beastly bully!" he muttered. "You wait till I've had a look in your locker, and then I'll make you sit up."

CHAPTER II.

The Great Match.

THE great day dawned—a glorious summer's day, serene and sunny, with a sky of cloudless blue.

The stumps were pitched pretty early, and the match-ground was pretty well crowded, for a crowd of friends had come to see St. Ronan's lick Clavering, and all the college was out to see Clavering lick St. Ronan's, and there was a considerable sprinkling of the sisters and the cousins and the aunts of both teams, and the glorious weather had brought spectators from all along the country-side.

When the visiting team arrived in their brake, they were heartily welcomed by Bulkeley and the doctor, and their admirers followed fast in hired vehicles, or on bikes or Shanke's pony. Clavering fellows and "Saints" fraternised with perfect good-humour, each side quite confident in its champions.

It was apparent to Bulkeley at a glance that the "Saints" were in fine form, and he knew that Clavering had all its work cut out to win. Knott, the St. Ronan's captain, had made a century only the week before, playing against the County, and Taggart and Sherlock were bowlers of known and dreaded skill. But Bulkeley looked over his own team—the very best material that Clavering College afforded, selected with the most fatherly care—and his hopes rose.

Among the faces round the match-ground, there was one that was dark—one upon which the beauty of the summer's day, and the prospect of witnessing a splendidly fought game had no brightening effect. It was Rupert Cunningham's.

He watched Jack Stanley as he went to the pavilion with the rest, but Jack's face told him nothing. Whether he intended to yield to the dastardly demand made upon him, Rupert could not tell. He said to himself that Jack would never dare to disobey him. He longed with a savage longing to see Clavering's colours lowered, and he swore inwardly that if Jack disappointed him he would have no mercy. If Clavering College won, ere the sun set Arthur Stanley should be in the hands of the police.

Clavering won the toss, and Bulkeley elected to bat. He opened the innings with Mannering and Noel.

Knott placed his men deep, and sent on Taggart to bowl. The great game commenced, and a thousand pairs of eyes were upon it.

"THE CAPTAIN'S RIDE."

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NEXT SATURDAY.

The British

The Clavering innings opened respectably, if not brilliantly. Mannering knocked up twenty-five before he was bowled by Taggart in the third over. Lesley went on in his place, and added ten to the score before Knott caught him at mid-wicket. Then the Clavering wickets fell with a fair average of runs, till Bulkeley himself went in, and the captain made things hum a little. He had knocked up sixty off his own bat, when Sherlock, getting desperate, sent down a ball which took his middle stump out of the ground.

Bulkeley was heartily cheered as he carried out his bat. Jack Stanley donned pad and gloves.

"Look out for Sherlock's bowling, Stanley," said Bulkeley a little ruefully. "Look out for a ball that looks like a wide, and then breaks in just in the way that you least expect."

Jack smiled and nodded, and went on. There was a buzz among the Clavering fellows as he took his place at the wicket. The St. Ronan's crowd weren't much impressed, however. They did not look for miracles from a Fifth Former.

But they took Jack a little more seriously as the innings progressed. When he had added forty to the score, Knott realised that in this youth he had got hold of a tough customer, and he put on Taggart to annihilate him.

The first ball of Taggart's over Jack swiped for a boundary; the second he sent past point and cover point, and took four while the St. Ronan's fieldsmen were leather-hunting; the third and fourth gave him two; and the fifth and sixth dropped dead on the crease.

The Saints muttered things to each other as they crossed after the over. In the next, Jack's partner went out, and Popham came in to join him. Popham lived through the over, and then Knott threw the leather to Sherlock, and told him to pulverise Jack.

And Sherlock went on to bowl against the Fifth Former with a look of immense determination. Jack cut the leather all over the field, and piled up the runs. He had made ninety now, and the figures went up. The third ball gave him six, and Jack was at his wicket again.

And then Sherlock threw all his cunning, all his skill, into the last ball of the over—that cunning which had hauled Bulkeley—and Jack played a little too forward, and the next second his off stump was lying on its back. He carried out his bat for ninety-six, and the crowd cheered him, albeit a little disappointed that he had not gone over the century.

Bulkeley patted him on the back.

"Bravo, Stanley! Keep that up, and we shall be all right." "I ought to have been on the look-out for that ball, especially after you warned me," said Jack. "Sherlock is a terror, and no mistake."

"He did the hat trick against the County last week," replied Bulkeley. "You stood up to him wonderfully well."

"But I shall do better in the next innings," declared Jack. "I know just what to look for now."

"All right; but if you knock up another ninety-six I shan't grumble," laughed Bulkeley.

The Clavering innings ended for 200. It was a bigger figure than Knott had expected to see, and he realised that he was in for a hard fight.

Jack bowled the first over against St. Ronan's. It cost the Saints a wicket or two. The innings had not opened auspiciously. Four wickets were down when the score stood at twenty-five, and the faces of the St. Ronan's supporters

began to grow long. They brightened, though, when the mighty Knott grasped the willow and went in.

And then the Saints' prospects looked up. Knott simply defied the Clavering bowlers. He made nine in an over bowled by Jack Stanley, and knocked the balls sent down by Mannering and Noel all over the field. His men came in and went out, but Knott seemed set for the day. An exultant roar from his side told that he had topped his century, and still he went on, with a cool confidence in his looks.

Mannering was bowling again. He sent down a ball that broke in just to Knott's fancy. The glancing bat sent it on a journey, and Knott started to run. But what was that roar that went up from the whole field? Knott glanced round, and he saw the ball go up skyward from the hand of Jack Stanley, at cover point, and come down again straight as a die.

"Oh, well caught!"

Knott had carried out his bat for 119.

After that the St. Ronan's wickets fell faster, till all were down for a total of 199.

Then came the interval. It was very clear that confidence on both sides was as strong as ever. It seemed as if there was not a pin to choose between the two teams. The single run in favour of Clavering did not count for much.

During the play, the excitement had kept Jack Stanley from thinking of anything but cricket. But now he caught Rupert Cunningham's eyes upon him, and a chill ran over him.

His thoughts ran to Arthur. Where was he? He had left the gipsy's hut in Clavering Wood, but had he gone to safety, or from one peril to another? That was a question Jack could not answer.

But he had one comfort. He had observed Mr. Tomlinson's face amongst the spectators. The gentleman from Scotland Yard was looking on at the match with a great deal of interest. And Jack was glad to see him there. It showed that he, at least, was not on the track of Arthur.

And Jack, naturally, glanced more than once towards the spot where he had seen Mr. Tomlinson standing, to assure himself that he was still there. And just before the second innings he observed a peculiar incident, which made him wonder a good deal.

Tommy Hughes sidled up to Mr. Tomlinson and twitched his sleeve. The detective looked down a little impatiently, but Tommy apparently said something that mollified him, for his expression changed, and, after a brief exchange of words, he walked away with Tommy towards Clavering College.

Jack wondered what the incident meant, but he had little time to think about it. The second innings of the college commenced, and all his thoughts were given to the game.

The St. Ronan's bowlers were evidently in deadly earnest. Three wickets went down for twelve, and Bulkeley whistled.

Then Mannering went in, and Taggart caught him in the slips the first ball of the over, and poor Mannering went out without his duck broken, but his heart very nearly.

But that was not the end of the ill-luck, for Lesley was stumped in attempting his first run.

The faces of the collegians gradually lengthened as unmerciful disaster followed fast and followed faster in this way, and the countenances of the Saints correspondingly brightened. Five down for twelve! A sort of groan went through the college ranks, and the Saints counted for certain upon victory.

"You see how it is, Stanley," said Bulkeley. "Go in and do your best for the old school, my boy."

"Right you are, Bulkeley. Trust me."

"I do trust you to pull the game out of the fire, Jack."

And Jack determined to do it, if it lay within human powers.

The Clavering crowd watched Jack open his innings, breathlessly. They knew well enough that the question of victory or defeat rested mainly upon him.

And when Jack began to bat, their spirits revived, and the Saints found that a change came over the spirit of their dream.

For Jack was in perfect form. It did not matter in the slightest degree what kind of ball they sent down to him, he sent it back, and he began to pile up runs in a way that made the Saints open their eyes, though in the previous innings he had made them regard him with a certain respect.

It was in vain that Sherlock sent down balls that would have baffled many a County batsman. Jack played them all with a cool confidence which delighted his side, and exasperated the Saints. Lucas came in to join him, and then Popham, and then Macdivey. Still Jack was batting, and, like the famous brook, seemed likely to go on for ever. Wickets went down, but not his, and the Saints exhausted their efforts against it in vain.

"Last man in!" at last was the cry, and Bulkeley went in. And then the Clavering fellows opened their eyes, and prepared to see sights. And they were not disappointed.

Bulkeley made twenty in the first over. Then Jack gave the Saints some more leather-hunting. His score was at

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eighty-seven, and during that over it crept up to ninety-one, ninety-five, ninety-nine, for three successive boundaries, and then there was a buzz over the whole field. Was he going to top the century this time?

Yes. Three for the fourth ball, and an exultant roar from the Clavering sympathisers greeted the Fifth Former's century. Then Bulkeley made a couple.

Knott and his men faced the situation with plucky determination. It looked as if they were fated to pass the remainder of the day in chasing the elusive leather round the Clavering match-ground, and the batsmen were still looking as fresh as daisies. The score for the second innings stood at 200, and was still going up.

"Hang it!" said Knott. "Something will have to be done. Sherlock, old man, go on, and get that young villain out."

"I'll try," said Sherlock, not very hopefully. He had tried before. Jack was ready for him. He sent these balls all over the horizon. His wicket was impregnable, and the fieldsmen, watching hungrily for a chance to catch him or stump him, watched in vain. Jack did not give them the least glimpse of a chance.

Three hundred! How Clavering College roared! The Saints looked blue. Rupert Cunningham gritted his teeth.

But suddenly there was a shout from the Saints—a shout in which delight and relief were mingled.

The ball had glanced from Bulkeley's bat, and Knott, at point, had got it—got it!

"Well caught!" roared the Saints' crowd. And even the Clavering fellows, like the Fuscans watching Horatius of old, "could scarce forbear a cheer."

The innings closed for an even 300.

And when the Saints went on again, they went on with the look of men determined to do or die. But deep down in their hearts they felt that they needed a miracle to win.

Knott opened the innings with Reynolds, his best batsman, in order to encourage his side with a good start. And the start was good, for Knott made his century before Jack Stanley stumped him by a wonderful throw in from the long-field. Reynolds made sixty.

Five wickets were down when the board showed 200. Then Taggart went on, and showed unexpected form, knocking up fifty for his side before Bulkeley bowled him out, while Sherlock added twenty to the score.

Two hundred and seventy for six wickets! The hopes of the Saints rose. And the score stood at 285 when Sherlock's wicket fell.

Fifteen to tie, sixteen to win, and three more wickets to fall! The faces of the Saints were brightening wonderfully, and Bulkeley's look was just a little anxious as he tossed the ball to Jack Stanley.

The Collegians watched eagerly as Jack went on to bowl. Most of them expected that he would save the game, but they hardly looked for the treat he gave them.

The Saint at the wicket gripped his bat, and prepared for equals. But, in spite of his preparedness, the ball broke in just where he didn't expect it, and whipped his off stump clean out of the ground. The next man came in, and played too forward at a ball which curled in between his bat and his person in the most astonishing way, and before he knew what was happening his bats were on the ground.

Knott gave a solemn sigh as his last man went in. That sigh was justified, for the ball came down with a twist on it that completely baffled the unfortunate batsman; and while the glancing willow swept the air, the middle stump gracefully reclined on the ground. Out!

There was a roar of enthusiasm. Jack had done the hat-trick, and won the battle for his school. And the next minute he was being carried round the match-ground on the shoulders of his cheering schoolfellows.

The great match was over. Clavering had won. While the whole school was cheering itself hoarse, Rupert Cunningham hastened away, with set teeth and gleaming eyes. He went to seek the man from Scotland Yard.

CHAPTER 12

The Truth at Last.

"DO you want to know where to find Arthur Stanley?" Mr. Tomlinson looked curiously at Rupert Cunningham. Rupert had met him rather unexpectedly in the quadrangle at Clavering, and had at once addressed to him the above query. He was determined not to lose a moment in wreaking his revenge on Jack Stanley. His heart was on fire with rage and bitter malice.

"What do you know about Arthur Stanley?" asked Mr. Tomlinson.

"I know where he is hidden."

"Really?"

"He is hidden in a hut in Clavering Wood. I followed Jack Stanley last week when he visited him there."

"Last week! Then how is it you didn't mention all that to me when we were talking the other day?" asked Mr. Tomlinson suspiciously.

"Stanley asked me not to. But, upon reflection, I have decided that you ought to be told."

"That's very right and proper of you, Cunningham," said Mr. Tomlinson, with a satirical smile, which Rupert could not quite understand. "As it happens, I have been waiting here to speak to you. Please come with me to the doctor."

Rupert, a little uneasy, and greatly wondering, accompanied the detective. Immediately after the cricket match, Mr. Tomlinson had sent a message to the doctor, asking for an interview.

The Principal of Clavering was waiting for the detective in his study in a rather unquiet frame of mind. As Tomlinson entered with Rupert Cunningham, the doctor adjusted his gold-pince-nez, and looked questioningly at the detective.

"I have received certain information, sir," said Mr. Tomlinson, "which makes me desirous of questioning Master Cunningham in your presence."

"Certainly!" said the doctor wonderingly.

Rupert stared at the detective in amazement. He imagined that Tomlinson was about to refer to the information he had just given, but this was surely a strange way of leading up to it!

"As for you, Cunningham, you are not compelled to answer my questions; but I warn you that it will be for your own good to reply with perfect good faith and frankness," said Mr. Tomlinson.

"I don't understand you."

"Did you meet your father one day last week at the little bridge in Clavering Wood?"

Rupert stared.

"How do you know that?"

"Did you receive from him a packet, which he asked you to keep concealed with the greatest secrecy?"

Rupert did not reply. A hunted look was creeping into his eyes.

"Did you place this packet in the locker in your study? And is it there now?"

"You are talking nonsense!" exclaimed Rupert desperately. "My father gave me nothing, and—"

"Very good. Doctor, I wish to make an examination of this young gentleman's locker in your presence."

Rupert was as white as a sheet. The doctor looked at Mr. Tomlinson in amazement.

"Why do you wish to do so, Mr. Tomlinson? If Mr. Cunningham gave his son a packet, I fail to see how it concerns you."

"It concerns me very deeply. Mr. Cunningham is cashier of the City and County Bank, and I have reason to believe that the packet he entrusted to his son contains the bank-notes which were stolen from the bank, and which Arthur Stanley was accused of stealing."

"Good heavens!"

"It is false!" panted Rupert. "I will fetch you the key of my locker, sir, and—"

Mr. Tomlinson's grip fastened upon his collar as he made a dart to the door.

"No, you don't!" said the detective grimly. "You don't go to that locker alone, young 'un. Not for Joseph!"

"This is—terrible!" gasped the doctor.

"Will you come with me to the young gentleman's study, sir?"

"Yes, yes; certainly!"

And then Rupert's courage completely gave way.

"I—I didn't know what was in the packet, sir!" he cried, bursting into tears. "I'll swear I didn't, sir!"

"I don't doubt you, my boy," said the good old doctor.

"If what Mr. Tomlinson says is correct, you have been used shamefully, and by one in whom you had a right to place every confidence. I am deeply, deeply sorry for you, my poor boy! I am quite assured that you had no suspicion of the real contents of the packet."

Whereat Mr. Tomlinson winked solemnly at the ceiling, but he held his peace. And the three of them proceeded at once to Rupert's study, where Rupert produced his key and opened the locker. The disarrangement of the contents made it pretty clear that some investigator had been there before him, but in his dismay and agitation he hardly noticed it. He was too disturbed to even wonder how the detective had obtained his information, and certainly no thought of Tommy Hughes crossed his mind.

He drew out the packet with a trembling hand, and passed



As Jack burst from the thicket into the footpath he came face to face with Rupert Cunningham, and started back with alarm and excitement. (See page 4.)

to the detective. The string had already been broken. Mr. Tomlinson opened it, and a great roll of rustling bank-notes were disclosed. While Rupert Cunningham stood white and trembling, and the doctor pale with distress, Mr. Tomlinson methodically made an examination of the numbers of the notes, and remarked, with a great deal of satisfaction: "That settles it! These are the notes that were stolen from the City and County Bank. Will you let your man drive me over to Clavering, sir? I've no time to lose. I want to send a wire."

In five minutes the detective was rattling down the lane to Clavering. The wire was sent to Scotland Yard. The same evening Mr. Cunningham was arrested.

Jack Stanley, after the ovation in the cricket-field, received news which delighted him more than the victory over St. Ronan's—the news that the real thief had been found, and that his cousin's innocence was established.

It was from Tommy Hughes that he had the first news. Tommy was brimming over with importance at the part he had played, though it could not be said to be a part that reflected much credit upon him. Still, with credit or not, he had been the cause of the truth coming to light, and he was never tired of talking about it. Jack—amazed, delighted, but a little incredulous—hastened to the doctor, and received full confirmation of the news.

Meanwhile, Rupert Cunningham remained shut up in his study, overwhelmed with shame and mortification. He left Clavering College the following morning. And though the fellows were not so unjust as to blame him for his father's

crime, those who knew him best could not help suspecting that he had very probably had some idea of the contents of the packet; nor was it forgotten that when the accusation looked black against Arthur, Rupert had been loudest in professing belief in his guilt, and had attempted to make a set against Jack Stanley, because of his cousin's supposed crime. Many were sorry for the wretched boy, but none were sorry to see him leave Clavering.

The same morning that Rupert Cunningham left Clavering for ever, Jack had news of his cousin. Arthur had not succeeded in getting clear. He had been stopped a dozen miles from Clavering; but the truth was already known, and his arrest was only a matter of form.

Mr. Cunningham, when he learned that the stolen notes had been discovered in his son's locker at Clavering, confessed all, and Arthur's name was completely cleared. The villain went to penal servitude, as he richly deserved.

As for Jack, the cloud of the past few weeks was lifted from him. He had gone through many trials and anxieties, and had borne himself like a brave, true-hearted British boy. But it was over now.

He had won his cap for the Clavering Eleven, and he kept it; and after the great St. Ronan's victory, he played in many a match for his college, winning golden opinions by his splendid cricket.

THE END.

(Next Saturday's PLUCK will contain Two Long Complete Stories. Order in advance.)