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PLUCK

1^D

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AND

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An Indian Story.



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LAY HIDDEN, CHOKING WITH LAUGHTER.

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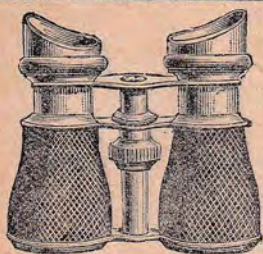
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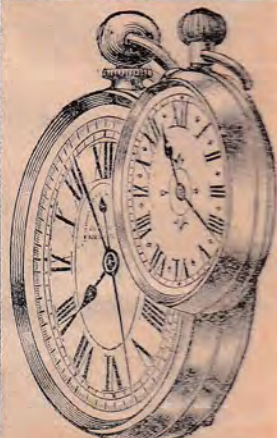


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[VOL. 4, No. 101, NEW SERIES.]

THE FIRST LONG, COMPLETE STORY.

THE MASTER OF THE FIFTH

A Tale of School Life.

By CHAS. HAMILTON.



CHAPTER 1.

The Football Match.

"WELL kicked, sir—well kicked!"

Right between the posts the leather whizzed, missing by inches the goalkeeper's frantic clutch, and lodging fairly in the net. And from the eager, watching crowd came a burst of cheering.

No wonder, the boys of Melthorpe were delighted. It was close upon half-time, and this was the first goal scored for the school, while their opponents, Clavering Town, had three to their credit.

Clavering Town usually sent a strong team into the field,

but on this occasion they had surpassed themselves, and for the first half-hour the Melthorpe players simply had not had a look in. The third Clavering goal had caused faces to lengthen among the Melthorpe lads; while the Town supporters, of whom a good many were gathered round the field, gleefully anticipated a sweeping victory.

The Town players were mostly bigger and older fellows than the school eleven, and only one master was playing for Melthorpe—Mr. Gilbert, the master of the Fifth. A handsome young athlete, with a somewhat grave face and serious eyes, was Arthur Gilbert. He was very popular in his Form, and his prowess in the football field caused him to be looked up to by all Melthorpe. He was captaining the school team, in the absence of Clare, the football captain—who, for some reason known only to himself, had not turned up for the match—and he was doing it well.

More than once had the young master's splendid play stemmed the tide of defeat and baffled the efforts of the Townsmen, and all the spectators realised clearly that but for Arthur Gilbert the score against the school would have been much heavier. But it was still heavy enough, and the Melthorpe lads looked anxiously to Arthur Gilbert to retrieve the fortunes of the day.

And when, just before half-time, the first goal for the school was kicked by the master of the Fifth, the cheering was loud and prolonged. Luck had changed at last, and Melthorpe were no longer fighting a wholly losing battle.

"Goal!"

"Well kicked, sir!"

"Bravo, Mr. Gilbert!"

"Good old Arthur!"

The last shout came from an enthusiastic Fifth Former, and it brought a good-natured smile to the master's face.

Clavering 3, Melthorpe 1, the score read when the whistle went and the teams strolled off the field for the brief interval.

"Good old Arthur!" said Redmayne, of the Fifth, gleefully. "I told you he would pull the game out of the fire, didn't I, Norroys?"

"He hasn't done it yet," said Norroys. "The Townies are three to one, remember."

"Wait till Arthur fairly gets to work," said Redmayne, with a confident nod. "He will give 'em socks! But I

wonder why Clare didn't turn up for the match? He can't be ill."

"He was looking pretty seedy this morning, when I saw him," said Norroys. "But I should have expected him here to see the match. He isn't about, though."

And he cast his eye over the mingled crowd of schoolboys and townsmen and idlers who were thronged round the ropes.

"Hallo! What's that brute doing here, I wonder?" he muttered.

His glance had fallen upon a stout, red-faced man, dressed in loud check clothes, with a silk hat worn at a rakish angle. He had a little book in his hand, and seemed to be making mental calculations.

"Who is it?" asked Redmayne carelessly.

"Don't you know him? It's Green, the bookmaker. He's up to no good, you can be sure of that. A lot of interest he takes in footer!" said Norroys contemptuously. "I saw him in Clavering Lane the other day, talking to Clare, and—"

The re-entrance of the players into the field interrupted the Fifth Former. He immediately turned his attention to the team.

"I say, Reddy, don't Selby look sulky?" he muttered, with a nod towards the Sixth Former, who played inside right for the school. "He fancied he would captain the team when Clare didn't turn up, I believe. He looked cross from the start."

"And he's been more than a bit of a slacker, too," said Redmayne; "he hasn't put any heart into the game."

The second half commenced, the school kicking off, and following up the kick-off with a fine attack. Mr. Gilbert had the ball, and he dribbled it through the Town halves in fine style, and the eyes of the Melthorpians followed him eagerly. But a Town back robbed him of the leather and sent it to midfield, and ten minutes of lively play followed, without either side gaining any advantage.

Then the superior strength of the Townsmen began to tell, and the school side were driven slowly but surely back, till a tussle was raging right in front of the home goal. Once twice, thrice the Townies drove the ball in, but each time the goalie saved, and then a school back sent it out to Selby.

The Sixth Former was away with it in a moment, eluding a couple of Townies, and the whole forward line of Melthorpe raced up the field, followed by a cheer from their supporters. Selby still had the ball, but the Town backs were rushing upon him, and a shade of anxiety crossed Mr. Gilbert's face.

"To me—to me!" he cried.

Selby's lips set obstinately. He was, as Norroys had keenly guessed, annoyed at having to play second fiddle to the master of the Fifth, for he had confidently counted upon captaining the team in Clare's absence. A goal would have been certain if he had passed to Mr. Gilbert, but he did not do so. Even while the words were on Arthur Gilbert's lips the Sixth Former shot for goal. A Town back rushed in and headed the ball up the field.

There was a deep-drawn breath from the school crowd. Redmayne looked at his chum with a feeling too deep for words.

"The silly duffer!" muttered Norroys.

The game was in midfield again; the chance of the goal was gone. Whatever Arthur Gilbert thought of the Sixth Former's selfishness he said nothing. Selby was savagely annoyed by his failure to score.

Presently the school forwards got going again, and a thundering cheer followed a successful kick at goal by the master of the Fifth.

"What did I tell you?" chuckled Redmayne. And then he shouted with all the force of his lungs: "Good old Arthur!"

Melthorpe were two up now. The Townies began to look a little less confident. The team "bucked up," and from the kick-off they carried the war into the enemy's camp. They were soon besieging the school goal; but again the Melthorpe goalie proved equal to his trust, and he sent out all that the Townsmen sent in. Then the game surged away to midfield, and the school worked their way almost along the touch-line into the visitors' territory. There was no stopping them, hard as the Townies tried, and at last a Town back played the ball behind the flag.

Arthur Gilbert instantly claimed the corner kick, and signed to Selby to take it. There was a brief, breathless hush. The ball came down, and a minute later it shot like a bullet past the goalkeeper's head and lodged in the net.

"Hurrah—hurrah!" roared all Melthorpe. "Goal—goal—goal! Hurrah—hurrah!"

Redmayne tossed his cap high into the air, careless whether it ever returned to him.

"Good old Arthur!" he yelled. "Good old Arty! Good old Art! Are we downhearted?"

"No!" came back a roar.

The school had, indeed, no reason to be downhearted. They

had equalised, and the second half was yet young. They were playing up like Trojans, and their captain was a host in himself. It certainly looked as if the Townsmen would leave the field defeated. But the Townies looked grim as they lined up again. They meant to make a desperate fight for victory yet.

"Go it, my chicks!" grinned Redmayne. "Go in and get licked! You can't come it over Arty!"

"Hang him," muttered a coarse, thick voice behind Redmayne—"hang him!"

The Fifth Former turned his head, and saw the loudly-dressed gentleman, with the rakish hat, at his elbow. Mr. Green was not looking at him, however, nor had his remark been addressed to anybody in particular. The bookmaker was staring at the master of the Fifth, and his expression was far from amiable.

"Hallo, fatty!" said Redmayne disrespectfully. "What are you talking about?"

The bookmaker scowled at him, but made no reply.

"Whom do you want hanged?" went on Redmayne cheerfully, not at all scared by Mr. Green's frowning brow. "Are you talking about our Arthur?"

"The pig's been making his dirty bets on the game," said Norroys; "he's backed the Town, that's what's the matter with him. Green, old son, you're going to lose your money, and serve you jolly well right!"

The bookmaker was about to make an angry retort, but he checked himself. He was in the middle of a Melthorpe crowd, and it was not quite safe. The Melthorpians would not have needed much inducement to wipe up the ground with him.

"No offence," he said, with unwonted civility. "You've got a splendid player there."

"Rather!" said Redmayne, somewhat mollified. "He's as good as an International any day in the week, and don't you forget it!"

"I believe I've seen him before somewhere," said the bookmaker, staring at Arthur Gilbert, whom the play had now brought very near to the side of the field where Mr. Green stood. "Is he a master at Melthorpe?"

"He's master of the Fifth," said Redmayne. "I'm in his Form," he added, with due impressiveness.

"And what might his name be?"

But a keen bit of play was absorbing Redmayne now, and he did not reply.

The Town were attacking the school goal, and the struggle was hard and fast. It ended in the ball suddenly shooting out of a press of players, like a pip from an orange, right into the net. Redmayne's face lengthened.

"Hallo! There's four up for the Town!" he said.

Mr. Green chuckled. Redmayne turned upon him savagely. "Oh, get off!" he exclaimed. "Go and do your cackling somewhere else, fatty!"

And the bookmaker decided that he had better go. The disappointment of the Melthorpians was not of long duration, however. Ten minutes after the Townsmen's success, a school winger brought the ball up to the visitors' goal and baffled the goalie with a low, swift shot.

"Goal!" shouted Melthorpe.

The score was equal again, and time was getting near. Both sides were determined that the game should not end in a draw, but to which side victory would finally incline was a puzzle. Redmayne remained confident in his hero.

"Leave it to Arty," he said. "Arty will give 'em socks!"

And, indeed, the Melthorpe captain was putting all he had in him into the struggle for victory. The school forwards came on with the ball, passing splendidly one to another, till Mr. Gilbert got away with it and raced straight for the goal. But a full-back was in his path. He gave a hasty glance to the right, and saw that Selby was ready to receive the ball. He raced on, dribbling finely, till the back was almost upon him, and then passed out to Selby, who kicked for goal with only the custodian to oppose him, and the goalie's attention until the last moment was fixed upon the master of the Fifth. Whiz went in the ball, and the goalkeeper whirled at it too late.

The cheer that followed drowned the shrill pheeep of the whistle.

The match was ended, and the school had won the hardest-fought battle of their experience, and the enthusiasm was almost delirious. In the midst of it the bookmaker strode from the field, unnoticed, his brow black with rage. For Mr. Green had counted confidently upon the Town winning, and the victory of the school meant a good many pounds out of his pocket. But nobody had a thought to waste upon Mr. Green. Melthorpe had won, and it was to Arthur Gilbert that they owed the victory. The field was black with a hurrahing crowd, and the lion's share of the cheering was given to the master of the Fifth.

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IN "PLUCK," 1d.

CHAPTER 2.

The Fifth Form Master.

ARTHUR GILBERT, master of the Fifth Form at Melthorpe, sat in his study. The defeated football team had departed, and the enthusiasm of the Melthorpians had abated a little—though some excited and jubilant Fifth Formers were still "keeping it up." An occasional shout from the quadrangle reached Mr. Gilbert's ears as he sat in the quiet room.

The excitement of the match, the keen enjoyment of the game he loved, had brought a boyish brightness into the young master's face while he was in the football field; but now that he was alone his expression was serious enough. He had a book in his hand, but he was not reading. He glanced occasionally at the clock. Sometimes a little wrinkle of thought appeared upon his brow. There came a tap at the door of the master's study.

"Come in!" called out Mr. Gilbert, in his clear tones.

The door was opened somewhat timidly, and an athletic young fellow made his appearance. It was Clare, the football captain, whose unaccountable absence at the match had led to Mr. Gilbert taking his place as centre-forward and captain. He looked tired, dusty, and depressed. His eyes met the master's only for a moment, and then dropped. Mr. Gilbert did not appear to notice it.

"Redmayne said you wished to see me as soon as I came in, sir," said Clare.

"Yes, I asked Redmayne to tell you," said Mr. Gilbert. "Sit down, Clare; you look tired."

Clare sat down.

"I am tired," he said. "I had a long spin, and had a puncture the other side of Repley Wood. I had to walk my machine home, and that is how I came to miss the match."

Mr. Gilbert's keen grey eyes were upon his face, but the captain did not meet them.

"That was what I wanted to see you about, Clare. Everyone was surprised when you did not appear with the team, and the fact has excited a great deal of comment. Wasn't it rather reckless to go on a long cycle ride just before the match?"

Clare coloured a little.

"I suppose it was," he said. "Of course, one couldn't foresee the puncture. And I hadn't my outfit with me."

"How unfortunate," said Mr. Gilbert.

"But I wasn't much loss, as it turns out, sir," said Clare eagerly. "I have been feeling seedy for the past few days, and I doubt if I should have put up a very good game. And you filled my place splendidly, sir."

"Well, we succeeded in keeping our end up," said Mr. Gilbert. "But it was a hard-fought contest, and we missed you sorely, Clare. Melthorpe might have been beaten through your absence, and that would have been very awkward. The team cannot be expected to be satisfied with a captain who does not appear to lead them to the fight."

Clare coloured more deeply.

"I think I know what you mean, sir. If we had lost I should have been asked to resign?"

"It is quite possible."

Clare hesitated a few moments, more than once opening his lips and closing them again. It was evident that he had something to say, and did not quite know how to say it. Mr. Gilbert waited for him to speak.

"I—I shouldn't be wholly unwilling to resign, sir, if you thought it advisable," blurted out Clare at last, his face very red. "It might be for the good of the school for me to make way for a better man—Selby, for instance."

Mr. Gilbert looked at him steadily.

"I don't regard Selby as a better man, either in football or in other respects," he said. "And I am far from counselling your resignation, Clare. I think you are fitted for the post you hold, if you make up your mind to stick to it and do your duty. That is the point, not to allow other interests to come between you and your duty."

Clare looked quickly at the master.

"I hope I shall always try to do my duty, sir," he muttered uneasily.

"I hope you will," said Mr. Gilbert. "And your first duty is to see that the Melthorpe first eleven gets a good record of victories this season. I do not wish to pry into your secrets, Clare—I should be the last to do that—but I cannot help remarking that during the past few weeks you have not been quite yourself. It has been my aim to make myself trusted by all the boys of my Form. If any one of them were in difficulties, I should like him to come to me, as to an elder brother."

Mr. Gilbert's voice was singularly soft and winning when he chose. There were few who could have resisted his appeal. But Clare did not speak. The master of the Fifth waited a few moments, then he sighed.

"Very well, Clare," he said; "I take it that you have

nothing to tell me, and if that is so I am glad. I need not repeat my advice to you. You have attained an honourable position. Although you are only in the Fifth, you are football captain of Melthorpe, and your example influences a large number of your schoolfellows. You must always bear that in mind. And now you may go, for I see you are fatigued."

Clare rose.

"I sha'n't forget what you have said to me, sir," he said. And he quitted the room.

Mr. Gilbert shook his head sadly.

"What is the secret there?" he muttered. "What is wrong with Clare, who used to be the frankest and brightest lad in the Form? Why did he miss the match to-day? The puncture was an excuse to account for his absence, not the cause of it. Why is he willing to resign his post, which so many others are eager to fill? I must see into this; and, if anything is indeed wrong, I will save him from the downward path which has led others to ruin." And a dark shade crossed the master's face.

He left his study, and made his way towards the head-master's quarters, a shade of thought still upon his brow. It was chased away by a smile as a voice fell upon his ears, coming from the open door of a Fifth Form study.

"I told you that Arthur would do it, kid"—it was Redmayne's voice—"and he did it, did Arty. Good old Art. That's what I say!"

Mr. Gilbert tapped at the door.

"Come in, fathead!" called out Redmayne cheerfully.

Mr. Gilbert walked in. Redmayne looked inclined to fall through the floor when he saw who the visitor was.

"I—I beg your pardon, sir," he stammered; "I didn't know it was you!"

Mr. Gilbert concealed a smile.

"No, I suppose you did not," he said drily.

Norroys was grinning hugely, but Redmayne was scarlet. He recovered himself, however, as he saw that his Form-master did not look angry.

"I'm very sorry, sir," he said, in his frank way; "I thought it was one of the fellows."

Mr. Gilbert nodded.

"I want to speak to you, Redmayne," he said. "On the football ground to-day I noticed that you were talking with a certain bad character from Clavering."

Redmayne flushed again.

"Do you mean Green the bookmaker, sir?" he exclaimed.

"Yes. Of course, I do not mean to imply that there was any harm in it," said the master of the Fifth quickly. "You probably exchanged only a few casual words with him. But I want you to understand that that man is barred; that it is forbidden to any of the boys of Melthorpe to hold any communication with him. He is a bad man, and I have reason to believe that he wishes to establish a connection with some of the Upper Form boys here, for his own profit. A few terms ago a lad in the Sixth was expelled for betting on horse-racing. An acquaintance, commenced in the most harmless way, may lead to disaster. You will bear that in mind, Redmayne?"

The Form-master's tone was very kind and gentle.

"Yes, sir," said Redmayne; "but—but I don't like you to think that I could ever have anything to do with such a howling outsider as that fellow. I just spoke a few words to him. He was growling because we were beating the Town."

"Oh, he was, was he?" said Mr. Gilbert, with a look of interest. He turned to go. "That's all I wished to say, Redmayne. If my warning was unnecessary, so much the better."

And he quitted the study. The chums of the Fifth looked at each other.

"Keen, ain't he?" said Redmayne. "And he must have heard me talking about him as he came in, but he never said anything."

"He wouldn't take any notice of anything accidentally overheard," remarked Norroys. "That wouldn't be like him. All the same, you'd better be careful he's out of hearing when you call him Arty, Reddy, old chap."

Redmayne grinned.

"He's down on the bookie," he said. "I wonder—"

He paused reflectively.

Norroys looked at him.

"You wonder what, Reddy?"

"Why, you know about Clare meeting the bookmaker," said Redmayne. "You saw him, didn't you?"

Norroys nodded.

"I wonder what Mr. Gilbert would say if he knew that! I say, do you think Clare can be mixed up with that rotter at all?"

"Shouldn't think so," said Norroys, with a shake of the head. "Clare's too decent to get into anything like that,

I fancy. But Mr. Gilbert certainly seems to have the idea in his head that Green means some kind of mischief."

While the chums of the Fifth discussed the problem, Mr. Gilbert had gone on his way to the doctor's study. In response to his tap the deep voice of Dr. Talbot bade him enter. The doctor was seated at his desk, a pen in his hand. He laid it down as the Form-master came in, and nodded to a chair. A grave, kindly face had Dr. Talbot, and his hair, which was plentifully streaked with white, made him look older than he really was. At present there was a worried wrinkle in his broad brow. He looked at Mr. Gilbert over his gold-rimmed pince-nez.

"A rather unpleasant matter has been brought to my notice, Mr. Gilbert," he said; "it refers to a boy in your Form. You are aware that for the past few weeks a disreputable character has located himself in Clavering—a bookmaker named Green."

"I am aware of it, sir."

"Squire Laverock called upon me to-day. As a governor of Melthorpe, he considered it his duty to call my attention to the fact that this bookmaker was seen to meet a Melthorpe lad. The meeting was not a chance one, but evidently a rendezvous, at the old barn in Acre Field, and, from the description of the boy, I am afraid that it is Clare of your Form, Mr. Gilbert."

Arthur Gilbert drew a quick, deep breath.

"I have been afraid of something of the kind, sir," he said, in a low voice. "My attention has been drawn to Clare lately. But—"

He paused, and Dr. Talbot looked at him inquiringly.

"I shall, of course, see into this matter," said Mr. Gilbert; "but I trust that it is not your wish to be severe with the unhappy lad. Clare is one of my best boys, but he is unfortunately of a careless, generous disposition which makes him an easy prey to the designing. I have not the slightest doubt that, at the worst, he will prove to have been more sinned against than sinning."

"I am far from wishing to be severe, Mr. Gilbert," said the doctor sadly. "Once, many years ago, I was severe with a culprit, one who had every right to expect mercy at my hands; but I have been terribly punished."

Mr. Gilbert's face was disturbed for a moment by some emotion.

"Indeed, sir?" he said, in a quiet voice.

The doctor's eyes were moist. A dark and painful memory was stirring in his mind.

Although Mr. Gilbert had been little more than a year at Melthorpe, a deep and sincere regard had grown up in the doctor's breast towards the young man.

In Arthur Gilbert, grave beyond his years, yet with a boyish and healthy love of athletic sports, the doctor reposed more trust than in any other master at Melthorpe. More than once in speaking to Mr. Gilbert he had alluded to the sorrow that had shadowed his life for many a long year, but never definitely.

"You have been some time at Melthorpe," he remarked. "You have doubtless heard something of the story. You know that I had a son?"

"I have been told so, sir."

"Cyril was my only boy, and he was led away by evil associates—men like this Green," the doctor said, with a sigh. "Of course, he was to blame, but not so much as I deemed at the time. I was hard—very hard; but I was angered that he should have brought shame upon a name that was never sullied before. Of what he was guilty I need not say; but I drove him harshly away, and he took me at my word, and never returned."

"You wished him to return?"

"When my anger had died, I would have been glad to see him," said the doctor. "I realised then that a father's duty was to reform, not to condemn. But it was too late. My boy died abroad."

"He died?"

"Yes; the information I received was almost certain, and his silence all these years confirms it. Cyril Talbot is dead."

The doctor bowed his head for a moment. Mr. Gilbert sat silent.

"You will understand, then," went on the doctor, "why I wish to be as merciful as possible to this erring lad. I want to save him from his folly if possible, and only in an extreme case shall I resort to expelling him. The matter, therefore, had better be left in your hands, and need not come officially to my notice at all."

"I hope I shall be able to justify your faith in me, sir," said Mr. Gilbert rising.

"I have no doubt of it," said Dr. Talbot cordially.

There was a strange expression upon Arthur Gilbert's face as he quitted the study. He paused once in the hall, but shook his head, as if dismissing a thought that had come to him.

CHAPTER 3.

An Unexpected Discovery.

"I SAY, it looks like rain, Reddy," said Norroys, looking out of the window of the study shared by the chums of the Fifth.

"Let it," said Redmayne. "You aren't afraid of a little wet, I suppose?"

"Oh, no! I'm ready if you are!"

"Then come along, and don't croak."

Both Redmayne and Norroys cherished the hope of getting into the first eleven, and they were working hard of late to get themselves fit. They were about to set out on a good long sprint after school, when Norroys drew attention to the threatening state of the sky.

"Hallo, there's Clare going out!" he added, as the stalwart form of the football captain was seen crossing towards the big bronze gates. "Wonder where he's off to? He ought to be at practice now."

The Fifth-Formers were soon in their running-clothes, and they left the school and started off at a swinging trot in the direction of Repley Wood.

The sky which had been overcast when they started, grew blacker, and a few drops of rain fell. Redmayne gave a discontented growl.

"Hang it all, we shall be soaked!"

"What did I tell you?" replied his chum.

"Oh, rats! Don't start being a Job's comforter. Look here, it's going to pour."

"It looks like it."

The two lads paused. They were now about a mile from the school, and there was no shelter close at hand.

"Better keep on and get into the wood," suggested Norroys.

"That's better than nothing, I suppose," grunted Redmayne. "Come on!" They started off again, the rain falling faster and thicker, and suddenly Redmayne uttered an exclamation: "Ah, I have it!"

"What?"

"There's the old barn in the Acre Field, over yonder behind the willows; we can get shelter there until this blows over."

"Right-ho! I never thought of that!"

"We can cut across this field," said Redmayne.

And he vaulted over a fence and led the way. Norroys followed, glad of a chance to get out of the rain, which now threatened to become a regular downpour.

In a few minutes they reached the old barn.

It was a rusty, old, half-ruined building, sometimes used as a shelter for cattle, but now quite deserted. The door was gone, and the window looked like an eyeless socket. The floor was all mud and puddles, and the rain dashed in with the wind at the many apertures.

Norroys shivered.

"What a beastly hole!"

"There's a loft up there," said Redmayne, pointing to a rickety ladder in one corner. "That will be a bit more comfy, I fancy."

They ascended the ladder cautiously, for it was in the last stage of dilapidation. The loft was dry and sheltered from the wind, though dark and chilly. But the boys were glad of the shelter, for the rain was now descending in torrents.

Redmayne looked out gloomily upon the falling rain from a gap in the wall.

For a good half-hour it poured down, and then the sun showed through a rift in the clouds, with a far from cheerful gleam.

The rain slackened, and Redmayne gave a grunt of satisfaction.

"We shall be able to get out soon, Norroys."

"I hope so," said Norroys, who was going through exercises with imaginary dumb-bells to keep himself warm. "I'm about sick of this. What an obstinate mule you were to come out and get caught in it!"

"Oh, rats to you!" said Redmayne politely.

He gave a sudden start.

"Hallo, we're going to have company!"

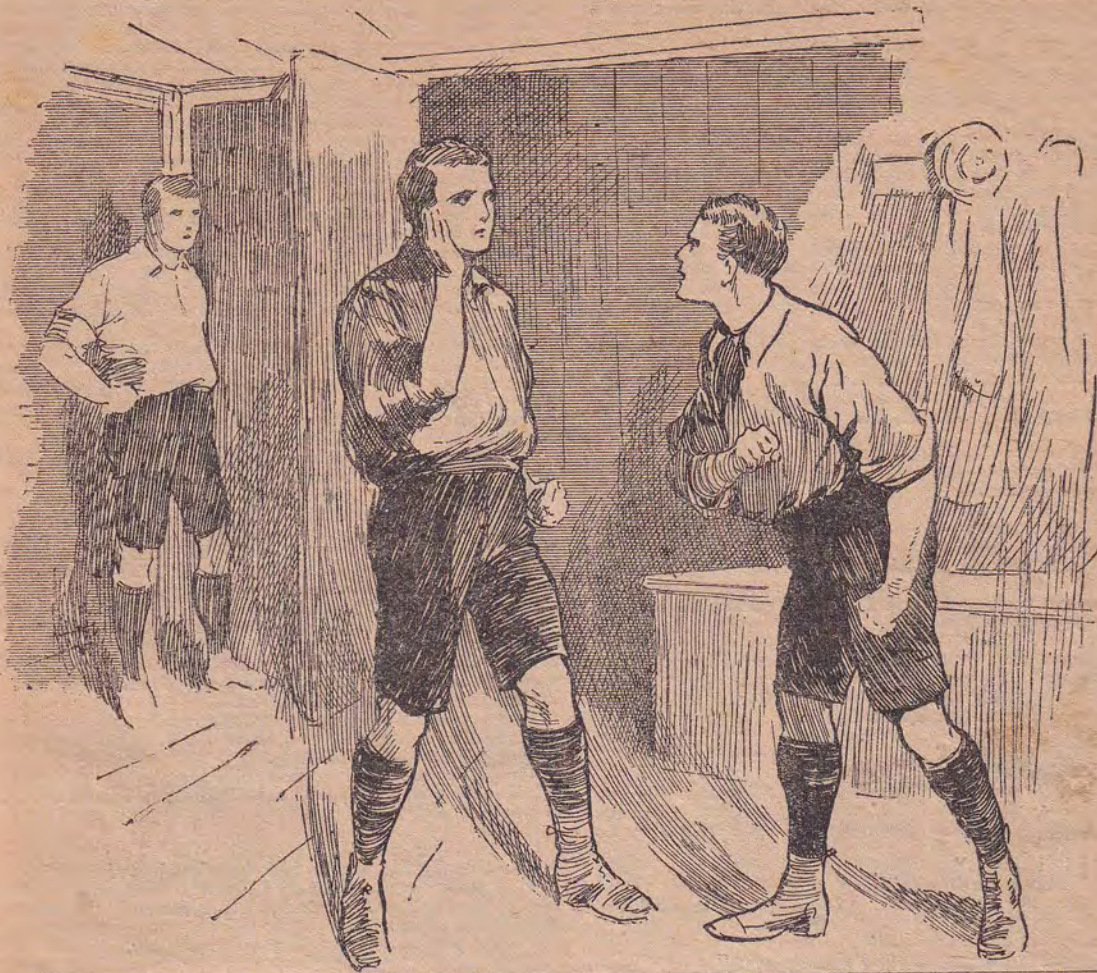
"What do you mean?" asked Norroys, joining him at the gap in the wall where a plank had fallen away.

"Look there!"

"Selby!" ejaculated Norroys, in wonder.

A figure was running swiftly towards the barn, and both the boys recognised the prefect at once. He stopped and turned his head, with a rapid glance over his shoulder, and then ran on again towards the barn. His action filled the two boys with amazement. The rain had now quite ceased, and why the prefect should hurry into the barn in that manner was a puzzle.

The chums, silent with astonishment, heard the Sixth Former moving below. Then Redmayne gripped Norroys' arm suddenly, and pointed. Two figures had appeared from beyond a row of drenched willows, coming from different



Clare's eyes blazed. His hand shot out, and the open palm smote Selby upon the cheek with a crack like a pistol-shot, and the prefect reeled under the blow. (See page 13.)

directions, but both evidently heading for the barn. One was Mr. Green, the bookmaker, the other Clare, the football captain of Meithorpe College. As Redmayne sighted them, the bookmaker caught sight of Clare, and waved his hand to him.

Then both came on towards the barn. The prefect below was quite silent now.

"What's the game?" said Norroys, in a whisper.

Redmayne's brow was dark.

"It's plain enough," he answered, in the same tone. "Clare is meeting the bookmaker again, and this barn is the rendezvous. That's where he was going when we saw him leave the school; but the rain has delayed him. He's been under shelter somewhere."

"I say, that's rotten of him, you know. He oughtn't to meet that horrid bouncer," muttered Norroys. "But what is Selby's little game, then?"

"Looks as if he was spying on Clare."

"Think he would do that?"

"Well, it looks like it. I imagine he's got an inkling of Clare's little games, and has come here to make sure."

"Of course, it's his duty as a prefect to look into anything of that kind."

"But not to play the spy," said Redmayne, in disgust. "And, by Jupiter, that's what I believe he intends doing!"

"What the dickens are we to do, Reddy?"

"Goodness knows! If we make a row, it may get Clare into trouble, and we don't want that. He's doing wrong, of course; but we don't want to give him away. We mustn't let Selby know we are here. He'd never forgive us for seeing him play the spy, and he'd be all the more down on Clare."

Had not the chums seen Selby enter the barn, they would never have guessed that anyone was in the apartment below, for the prefect was perfectly silent. Clare and Green met at the barn, and stopped. They did not enter it. As chance

would have it, they stopped just below the gap at which Redmayne and Norroys stood, in the loft. They were out of sight now, but their voices were plainly to be heard.

"I was near kept away by that blessed rain," said Green's voice. "I see you've got wet, Master Clare."

"It does not matter. I got under a tree, but it wasn't much use. I'm glad I didn't miss you here. I had your note."

"Well, what are you going to do about it, Master Clare?"

There was a long pause.

Redmayne and Norroys looked at each other in an extremely uncomfortable way.

The last thing they desired was to play the eavesdropper; but they seemed to have no choice in the matter. They had stepped back from the gap, but the speakers were still only a few yards away, and, believing themselves to be alone, had taken no care to moderate their voices.

The chums could not escape from their unpleasant position without betraying themselves to Selby—a course from which they naturally shrank.

While they hesitated, not knowing exactly what to do, the voice of the football captain was heard replying to the bookmaker.

"What am I going to do about it, Green?"

"Yes, that's the question I asked, Master Clare."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Don't you? Then I'll explain, Mr. Blooming Innocent!" sneered the bookmaker. "I had ten quid on the match yesterday, trusting to you. Where is that ten quid now?"

"I suppose you lost."

"Yes, I suppose so," said the other sarcastically. "As I laid agin the college, and the college won, I suppose so, Master Clare."

"Well, that wasn't my fault, was it? I stood out of the match, as I promised."

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IN "PLUCK," ID.

The chums of the Fifth caught their breath. Here was a revelation with a vengeance.

"Wasn't your fault?" growled the bookmaker. "Yes, it was, for you distinctly led me to believe that your standing out of the match would give the game to the Townies. Instead of which, a chap plays in your place who is worth two of you any day."

"I couldn't foresee that Mr. Gilbert would play. I thought Selby would take my place."

"Gilbert! Is that his name? Now, Master Clare, I asked you to lose that game in settlement of the six quid you owed me. I'd have taken that in full satisfaction."

"I told you I couldn't do it."

"Oh, yes, you could, if you liked! Why, what was your standing out of the game, except a roundabout way of doing it?"

Clare gave a groan.

"I suppose it was."

"You suppose?" snarled the bookmaker. "You know it was. But you've made a mess of it, and the school won after all, and I'm ten quid out of pocket."

"Well, what do you want me to do?" said Clare wearily. "I'm getting about sick of this. I wish I had never seen you."

The bookmaker chuckled.

"Pay me up my cash, my boy, and you will see the last of me as soon as you like."

"You know I can't do it, or I'd have done it long ago."

"Then, if you can't pay, you must make the debt good."

"What do you want?"

"Melthorpe play St. Mona's next week. It's a big match, and there is a lot of interest taken in it. The school has a good football reputation, and I can find plenty of backers. You'll captain your side?"

"I suppose I shall."

"Then give me a promise that the college will lose—that's all I want, and the account between us is squared. Mind, no standing out this time; you're to play, and to lose fair and square. You can easily manage it."

"I can't!"

"What do you mean?"

"I can't do it!"

"You won't, you mean!" snarled the bookmaker. "More squeamishness—eh? Mind how you play the fool with me, Master Clare! To speak plain English, you've got to do it!"

"I can't! I won't!"

"Then look out for squalls!"

The bookmaker turned away. Clare sprang forward and caught him by the arm.

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going up to the school to show you up."

"You beast! You hound! But they'll never believe you."

"Won't they?" sneered Green. "Not when I've got your own fist to prove my words? Have you forgotten the I O U's, you young fool?"

"You—you cad! You said you'd destroy them if I stood out of the match," panted Clare.

The bookmaker laughed brutally.

"Well, I didn't, and when Dr. Talbot sees them—"

"Wait a minute. Give me time to think. For Heaven's sake, don't be in a hurry!"

"I've no time for fooling around," said the bookmaker, in a surly tone. "I'll tell you what. The St. Mona's match is on Wednesday. Let me know up to any time on Tuesday that you've decided to do as I ask. That will satisfy me. But if I don't hear from you, look out!"

And with that Mr. Green jerked his arm loose from the other's detaining clutch, and stalked away.

Clare stood for some moments rooted to the ground, and then he hurriedly walked away in the direction of Melthorpe.

In the loft the two chums, who had heard almost every word, were very pale. They heard a sound of stirring below, and a few minutes later saw Selby quit the barn and cross the field at a rapid pace.

"I say, this is a go!" muttered Norroys. "What a ghastly business, Reddy."

Redmayne nodded.

"Rotten! I thought there was something fishy about Clare's cutting the match as he did, but I never dreamed of this."

"What are we going to do?"

Redmayne's eyes gleamed.

"I think the most important thing is to make that mongrel Green sit up. The hound! He's planned to get poor old Clare into this fix, of course, and now he's blackmailing him. He's going back to Clavering now, Norroys."

"What of it?"

"Why, he'll have to cross the plank over the Clave, that's all. If we cut round we can get ahead of him, and—"

Norroys chuckled.

"Come on!" he ejaculated.

The chums quitted the barn, and sprinting at a good pace, they made a detour, and arrived on the bank of the little stream which ran past the hamlet of Clavering. The stream, swollen by the recent rain, was deeper and more impetuous than usual, and the water raced along only a few inches lower than the single plank which crossed it by way of a bridge. The bookmaker would have to cross the plank bridge to reach the village from the field where the old barn stood, hence Redmayne's brilliant idea for discomfiting him. The boys had made good time, and the bookmaker was not yet in sight when they reached the plank bridge.

"Now then, lend us a hand," said Redmayne, running lightly across the plank.

The plank rested upon two large flat stones, which raised it above the water, the banks being very low. Having crossed the bridge, the boys seized the end of it, and pushed it across so that only the extreme tip of the plank rested on the stone.

As the reeds grew thickly round the stone, the change in the position of the plank could not be seen from the opposite side; it presented its usual appearance, but it was certain that no one could cross it in safety. Before he had advanced to the middle, the plank was certain to slip and fling him headlong into the swollen stream.

"That's all right," said Redmayne. "Now to get out of sight, in case the brute suspects the little game."

A clump of willows afforded cover to the boys.

Thence they watched for the bookmaker to appear.

He soon came down the opposite bank, and stopped to light his pipe before he stepped on the plank bridge. It was clear that he had not the slightest suspicion. He puffed out a cloud of smoke, and stepped on the plank.

Two steps he made, and then he staggered drunkenly as the end of the plank slipped from the stone, and he was hurled forward.

With a sounding splash he smote the water, sending the spray as far as the willows where the chums of Melthorpe lay hidden, choking with laughter.

Right under the bookmaker went, and came up again gasping like a porpoise, and he struck out frantically while he gurgled and yelled for help.

The chums ran down to the bank instantly.

"Hallo! Plank slipped?" said Redmayne cheerfully. "Is it wet in there?"

"Help!"

"Oh, I'll help you."

The unlucky bookmaker had floundered to the shore, and was grasping at the reeds. Redmayne stooped down and caught him by the collar and jerked him loose, and sent him floundering again.

"Want any more help?" he asked politely.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Norroys.

The stream was not deep enough to imperil the man's life, as Redmayne knew well. Green, half choked, and mad with rage, splashed back to the other side and dragged himself out. He shook his fist fiercely at the chums of Melthorpe.

"You moved the plank, you whelps. I know you did!" he yelled. "I'll make you suffer for this!"

Redmayne wagged his finger at the exasperated man.

"Now, don't you get excited!" he exclaimed. "You've had a wash, anyway, which is bound to do you good. I am sure you wanted one."

And leaving the furious man raving and gesticulating across the stream, the chums turned their backs on him and sprinted away towards Melthorpe School.

CHAPTER 4.

The Price of Silence.

"OH, what shall I do—what shall I do?"

It was Clare who uttered the words as he paced to and fro in his study at Melthorpe, his face pale and twitching, and untold misery in his eyes.

"What shall I do?"

Tap!

The football captain paused in his hurried walk, and glanced towards the door. In his excited and miserable state of mind he did not wish to be intruded upon. But as he paused, the tap was repeated, and then the door opened.

It was Selby of the Sixth who entered.

Clare gave him an irritated glance.

"What do you want, Selby?" he asked abruptly.

"I want to speak to you."

"Will some other time do? I'm—I'm a bit worried just now, and—"

"I'd rather speak now, if you don't mind," said Selby, in his thin, cold voice, and with an obstinate expression upon his spare features. "It's important."

"Oh, you can go ahead, I suppose! What is it?"

And Clare stood waiting, with a far from patient look.

The prefect looked him over before replying. Clare had

not changed his things since coming in; his clothes were wet, his boots muddy. Selby, on the other hand, was clean and neat. It was second nature with the prefect to be always spick and span.

He could read in Clare's pale face the signs of mental stress and strain, but what he observed moved him very little. Selby's was not a sympathetic nature. He was not a bad fellow, but he was hard and cold and obstinate, and had very little cordiality even towards his friends.

"Well, what is this important matter?" said Clare impatiently.

"It's a matter that has come to my knowledge," said Selby quietly. "I hope you will believe that I am thinking of the good of the school, and not of myself, in what I am going to say, Clare."

Clare looked astonished at this preamble.

"I suppose I shall give you proper credit," he said. "But I can't imagine what on earth it is you are driving at."

"To put it in a nutshell, I think you ought to resign your position in the football team," said Selby coldly.

"What are you talking about?"

"You understood what I said!"

"Why should I resign? What business is it of yours, anyway?" demanded Clare, with a flash of anger in his eyes.

"It is the business of everyone who has the honour of Melthorpe at heart," said Selby.

Clare clenched his hands.

"Do you know you are insulting me?" he said. "I give you a chance to explain yourself, Selby, before I throw you out of my study."

"I have no desire to go into details, but if you insist, of course I shall fully explain."

"Well, I do insist, confound you, so get on with the explanation."

"Very well. I am aware of your dealings with the bookmaker Green. I know that you sold a match for Melthorpe, and intend selling the next, on Wednesday."

The words seemed to strike the unfortunate lad like bullets. Clare staggered, and caught at the back of a chair to support himself.

"What do you mean?" he gasped, in a hoarse whisper.

"What are you saying? How do you know anything about it?"

"I was present at your interview with the bookmaker to-day."

"You—you cur! You spied!"

"I considered that was justifiable under the circumstances," replied Selby, though a faint flush came into his pale face.

"I had reason to suspect what was your motive for deserting your side in the Clavering match, and as I had learned of your rendezvous with the bookmaker, I determined to go there and ascertain exactly how matters stood."

"If you heard what we said, you must know that I refused the scoundrel's demand."

Selby shrugged his shoulders.

"That would be a broken reed to lean upon," he said contemptuously. "I do not think you would dare to disobey him. You obeyed him once, and would again."

Clare sank helplessly into a chair, and covered his face with his hands.

"God help me!" he groaned. "What a mad fool I've been!"

"You cannot expect me to stand idly by while you lose us matches," said Selby. "As a prefect, I ought to take some notice of your conduct. You know very well that if the doctor were informed of it, you would be expelled. But I don't want to be hard upon you. If you choose to resign from the eleven, I am willing to give you a chance of turning over a new leaf."

"Resign! In whose favour?" asked Clare bitterly.

Again Selby flushed faintly.

"That is for others to decide," he replied. "The point to be settled now is, that you resign."

"I understand, Selby. You have never forgiven me for becoming captain of the team."

Selby bit his lip.

"You have no right to say so," he answered coldly. "My personal feelings have nothing whatever to do with the matter. If I were not a member of the eleven at all, I should still consider it my duty to turn out a traitor in the ranks."

Clare started at the word, and clenched his hands convulsively.

"You had better take care," he said hoarsely.

"I don't want to wound you, Clare, but that's what it amounts to. I have been kinder than you deserve in this matter. I might have brought it out before the football committee, and shown you up before the lot of them, instead of coming here quietly to talk it over with you."

Clare smiled bitterly.

"Yes, I suppose I owe you something," he said. "Very well, I agree. I would have resigned before, only Mr. Gilbert

did not wish me to do so. There's a meeting of the committee to-night, and I'll place my resignation in their hands."

The surrender that Selby's hard face softened a little.

"I don't see any other course you could follow," he said. "It's the only thing you could do, Clare. I'm—I'm sorry you are in this fix."

"Oh, that's all right! It's my own fault, and I deserve to suffer for it," said Clare bitterly. "And now, Selby, if there's nothing more you want to say, I'd rather be alone, if you'll excuse me."

Selby nodded, and left the room. When the door had closed behind the prefect, Clare resumed his restless pacing of the room.

"So that's settled," he muttered. "The question of winning or losing the match is out of my hands now. I'm glad of it. But what will Green say? He'll think I have resigned on purpose not to do his dirty work. What will he say—what will he do?" And the question, what would the bookmaker do? haunted the unhappy lad, and he could not drive it from his mind.

CHAPTER 5.

A Friend in Need.

THERE was a good deal of surprise at Melthorpe the next day when Clare's resignation became known.

Selby, of course, said nothing about the interview in the study. The act was supposed to be a voluntary one on Clare's part, and his friends were puzzled to account for it. But to all questioning Clare made the same reply, that he didn't feel equal to the position, and that the football team would get on better under a new captain.

"But that's all rot, you know!" said Wynyard, of the Fifth. "The fact is, you've been seedy lately, Clare, and you've got the blues. Why don't you buck up, and withdraw your resignation. You ought to stick to the captaincy for the honour of the Form."

Clare shook his head.

"You know we shall have Selby in your place, and he isn't nearly up to your form," went on Wynyard. "You ought to think of that."

"I haven't acted without thinking."

"Then there's something behind it," declared Wynyard. "Get it off your chest, old man. We have always been chums, and you can confide in me. What's bothering you?"

"Nothing."

"And you've made up your mind?"

"Yes."

And that was all Wynyard could get out of him. In the Fifth Form at Melthorpe, only Redmayne and Norroys had an inkling of the truth.

"You've heard the news, Reddy?" asked Norroys, when he met his chum during the morning. "Clare's given himself the sack."

Redmayne nodded.

"Yes; I suppose that's his way out of it," he said. "I'm glad of it, Norroys. I don't know what we could have done, but we couldn't have left matters as they were, and risked getting sold out on Wednesday. This step of Clare's settles it."

"Do you suppose Selby had anything to do with it?" Norroys asked thoughtfully. "Of course, he'll step into Clare's shoes. It was always between them."

"I shouldn't wonder; he's mean enough for anything."

The prefect was counting upon that himself, and it seemed certain that his ambition would be realised. With Clare out of the way, his path to the captaincy seemed clear. But he was destined to discover that there is many a slip 'twixt cup and lip. He had reckoned without the master of the Fifth.

Mr. Gilbert had pursed up his lips when he heard of Clare's retirement, but he said nothing. But he thought a good deal about it during the day, and after school he sent a fag to ask the Fifth Former to come to his study. Clare came, with a decidedly uneasy expression upon his face. He guessed what the Form-master wanted him for, and he did not know how to answer the questions Mr. Gilbert was sure to put. He dreaded the interview, but there was no avoiding it. Mr. Gilbert greeted him with a genial smile, and asked him to sit down.

"What's this I hear about your resignation, Clare?" asked the master of the Fifth. "I hope you have not finally decided?"

"I have, sir."

"You know I take an interest in you, Clare," said Mr. Gilbert, "and in the football success of the college. I do not think you ought to resign. If only for the sake of Melthorpe you ought to stick to your post. You are the finest

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footballer in the school, and the captaincy is certain to fall into less able hands."

Clare was silent.

"I have sent for you to have a serious talk, Clare. I have some inkling of the reason why you have resigned."

Clare gave a violent start.

"Has Selby—" he began, and then checked himself abruptly.

It was Mr. Gilbert's turn to look surprised.

"What has Selby to do with it?" he asked sharply.

Clare did not reply. Mr. Gilbert's brow contracted slightly, but he did not pursue the subject.

"I have said that I take an interest in you, Clare," he said; "I will explain the reason. Years ago I knew a young fellow very much like yourself—careless, of an easy and unsuspicious temper, who fell into bad hands, and drifted into wrongdoing."

Clare started again.

"He ruined his life, and brought shame and sorrow to the best of fathers," went on Mr. Gilbert. "Yet he was more sinned against than sinning; and if, when first he drifted onto the downward path, he had had a friend at hand to warn him and help him, he might have been saved from the results of his own folly. He was not saved; he brought shame upon an honourable name, and went forth into the world an outcast."

Clare was very pale, and he did not dare to look at the Form-master.

"For years," resumed Mr. Gilbert, "he was an outcast. If he was saved from misery, it was because a friend found him, and helped him, and set him on the right path again, and assisted him to work out his redemption. Now he is seeking to atone for the past, but his life is shadowed by a memory of guilt, and by the knowledge of the suffering he brought to others. I knew him well, Clare, and when I see a lad likely to fall into the same errors, to share the same fate, I wish to stand to him as a friend in need, to help to set him in the right path before it is too late. Do you understand?"

Clare did not speak.

"I want you to confide in me freely, not as a master, but as a friend," went on Mr. Gilbert, his voice very kind and gentle. "I want to help you."

"You cannot help me," said Clare, in a stifled voice; "it is useless."

"I can and will help you. It has come to my knowledge, Clare, that you have some relations with the bookmaker, Green. A friend of mine learned that you met him; he thought it his duty to make the fact known to those who are responsible for your welfare. I want you to tell me exactly how you stand with this blackguard."

Clare seemed turned to stone. Expulsion was all that he expected if his secret came out at Melthorpe, and the kindness of Mr. Gilbert was a complete surprise to him. He understood that the master's object was to help, not to condemn, and the tears came into his eyes.

"You may speak freely," said Arthur Gilbert. "Come, Clare!"

The lad hesitated no longer. The whole wretched story came out. How he had, by imperceptible degrees, as it were, fallen deeper into the clutches of the cunning bookmaker after he had once allowed himself to be drawn into a connection with him. When he told why he had stayed away from the Clavering match, Mr. Gilbert's face was very grave, but Clare, having once started, concealed nothing.

"I couldn't lose the match as the brute asked," said Clare miserably; "so I went on a long spin, and got a puncture on the other side of Repley Wood, so that I had to cut the match. I suppose it came to the same thing in the end, but it seemed less mean. I would have defied him, only—he's got a paper of mine, and he threatened me—"

"I quite understand."

"But I was determined not to lose the St. Mona's match whatever he did," went on Clare eagerly. "I—I am sure I should have played up to win, sir."

"I hope so. But now that the matter is in my hands, I shall see you through. How much money do you owe this man?"

"Six pounds," said Clare, with a shudder.

"My dear boy, how came you to owe so much as that?"

"I—I betted on horses. He said they were sure to win, but they didn't. He put the money on for me, you see, and had to pay up when the horses did not win, and so I owe him the money," explained Clare.

Mr. Gilbert smiled slightly.

"I am afraid he has taken advantage of your innocence," he replied. "I think it extremely doubtful that he has paid money out of his pocket at all."

"But—but that would be swindling."

"That is the way such men live. He is, as a matter of

fact, entitled to nothing at all from you, unless it is a thrashing," said Mr. Gilbert grimly.

"But he has my paper, sir; and—and I think I ought to pay him. Even if he has cheated me, and I suppose he has, I—I don't want to get out of it. I could pay him next term if he would give me time."

"Very good. It is not unjust that you should have to pay for your folly, Clare. The man shall have his money, and you shall break off all connection with him. You will give me your word of honour to that effect, and the matter will be ended."

"But—but—"

Mr. Gilbert smiled.

"I shall advance the money, Clare, and you will repay me next term."

"Oh, sir! You—you are too good to me; I don't deserve it." There were hot tears in the lad's eyes. "I will pay every penny, sir; but I can never repay your kindness."

"If you are careful never to get into such a position again, Clare, I shall consider myself repaid," said the master of the Fifth. "That is all I ask."

"You may rely upon me, sir. I have had a lesson that will last me all my life, I think." And there was no doubt that he meant it.

"Very good. I do rely upon you."

"I shall be only too glad to pay the man and get my paper back, sir, and I promise that I will never speak to him again."

"I do not think he would lightly part with the paper," said Mr. Gilbert, with a smile. "He would take your money, but you would find that he had mislaid the I O U's, or something of the sort. He would not let you go out of his power, if I know anything of the man's character. You are too valuable to him."

Clare's face fell. He had not thought of that.

"You must not expect a man of that kind to play the game," said Mr. Gilbert. "He does not know what is meant by a sense of honour. But he will not find it easy to play a sharp game with me. I will go to him with the money, and I think I shall succeed in getting back the paper you so rashly placed in his hands. He will not dare to deal with a master as with a boy. The man is to be found, I believe, at the Blue Boar, in Clavering."

"Yes, sir."

"Then I will go there this evening. Meanwhile, there is the question of your resignation."

Clare coloured.

"Could I withdraw it now, sir? Selby is counting upon becoming captain, and it would be a bitter disappointment to him."

"He has no right to count upon it. The position naturally goes to the man who is most fitted for it. In my opinion, you should withdraw your resignation, and leave the matter in the hands of the football committee to be decided."

"I will take your advice, sir."

"Very good!"

And Clare left Mr. Gilbert, with his face brighter than it had been for many a long day. Ten minutes later, Mr. Gilbert donned hat and coat, and left the school. There was a rather grim expression upon his face as he walked down the lane towards Clavering.

CHAPTER 6.

Mr. Green is Discomfited.

HALLO, there's that chap again! I wonder where I have seen him before!"

Mr. Green, the bookmaker, was seated at the window of his room at the Blue Boar in Clavering, smoking his pipe, and looking out into the village street. He uttered the words as he caught sight of the athletic figure of Arthur Gilbert striding towards the inn. The bookmaker's eyes rested upon the Melthorpe master with a good deal of interest. His bushy brows were puckered with a puzzled expression.

"Hallo! He's coming here!" Mr. Green ejaculated, in amazement, a few minutes later.

The Blue Boar did not bear a very enviable reputation, and it was certainly a matter for surprise that a master from Melthorpe should enter it. And Mr. Green was not the only one surprised. Coming down the street was Selby, of the Sixth, and he too stared as he saw Mr. Gilbert disappear into the porch of the Blue Boar.

"I wonder"—the bookmaker muttered to himself, as he turned from the window—"I wonder what he wants here?"

There came a tap at his door, as if in answer to his query. Mr. Green gave a start. But it was too unlikely that a Melthorpe master should be there to see him, and he jerked out, "Come in!"

It was, however, Arthur Gilbert who entered.

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AND

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IN "PLUCK," 1D

"Hallo! What do you want?" said the bookmaker, in a far from cordial manner.

Mr. Gilbert's cold, keen glance seemed to go through him, and Green felt far from comfortable.

"I have come to settle a little matter with you," said the Form-master, in calm, even tones. "You have had dealings with one of my boys, named Clare."

The man started.

"Who may you be?" he said insolently.

"I am Arthur Gilbert, master of the Fifth Form at Melthorpe. The boy in question has placed the matter entirely in my hands."

"So he's been blabbing, has he—the whimpering rascal?"

Mr. Gilbert took a step towards him, and the bookmaker started up from his chair with a look of alarm.

"If you speak of your dupe in that manner again, I shall thrash you, Mr. Green," said the master of the Fifth. "I hope you will not force me to do so. You deserve it a thousand times, but I should be sorry to soil my hands upon you."

Green turned a dull crimson with rage.

"You come and talk to me like that?" he gasped. "Get out of my room!"

Mr. Gilbert did not move.

"If he wants to settle the matter, let him come himself," went on the bookmaker. "I don't deal with no go-betweens. Let him come himself."

"That he will not do, as it is not permitted. The matter is in my hands for me to settle it with you."

"Have you got the money?" asked the bookmaker, anger giving way to greed for the moment.

Mr. Gilbert laid six sovereigns on the table.

"It is not by my wish that you are paid," he said; "but Clare desires it, and here is the money. Now kindly give me the papers he signed, and my business here is ended."

"I haven't got them by me at present," said Green.

Mr. Gilbert smiled contemptuously.

"I expected something like that, my man. I shall not leave this room without them."

Green had gathered up the money, and slipped the sovereigns into his waistcoat-pocket. He looked at the Form-master with an insolent smile.

"I'd better send them on," he suggested; "I haven't got 'em by me—What in thunder are you doing?"

Mr. Gilbert had turned to the door and locked it. The bookmaker rose to his feet in vague alarm. The master's face was far from reassuring in its expression.

"I am going to have those two papers before I leave this room," said Mr. Gilbert calmly. "Are you going to hand them over quietly?"

The bookmaker eyed him nervously.

"Suppose I don't?"

"Then," said Arthur Gilbert determinedly, "I shall give you the soundest thrashing you have had in your life!"

"You—you bound! You don't dare lay a finger on me!" said the bookmaker shrilly. "You don't dare! I'll have the law on you!"

"I do not think you will care to appeal to the law, which you spend your life in defying and outraging," said Mr. Gilbert. "But I am quite willing to risk it. You have had your money, the money that was not fairly due to you, for I am certain that you cheated your victim. But, at all events, you have had the money, and now you must hand over the papers signed by that foolish boy. If you had a grain of decency left you would not need urging. Are you going to give them to me?"

"No, I ain't!"

Mr. Gilbert took a tighter grip upon the light cane he carried, and stepped towards the bookmaker. The stout man dodged round the table, panting.

"Help!" he yelled. "Hel—"

A grip on his collar cut him short. A stern face looked down into his, and his fat cheeks were all a-quiver with terror. The cane whistled in the air.

"For the last time, Mr. Green!"

"Lemme go, you beast! I'll give you the blooming bits of paper!" gasped the man. "Lemme go, can't yer?"

Mr. Gilbert released him.

"Quick, then!"

The bookmaker, panting with rage and fear, no longer daring to disobey, took out his pocket-book, and sullenly handed to the master the I O U's signed by Clare. Mr. Gilbert examined them closely, and, satisfied that they were genuine, placed them in his pocket. The bookmaker watched him with gleaming eyes. Mr. Gilbert crossed to the door and unlocked it.

"That is finished," he said, opening the door. "Let me caution you to give the boys of Melthorpe a wide berth in future, or you may not escape so cheaply next time."

The bookmaker replied with a sullen curse, and Mr.

Gilbert passed out and down the stairs. From the window the man watched him go with glistening eyes of hate.

"Who is he? Hang him!" he muttered, between his teeth. "I know his face, or I knew it once, and his name wasn't Gilbert then. Where have I seen him before?"

He clicked his teeth as a new thought flashed into his brain, and jumped up, and began to pace the room excitedly.

"There's something fishy in this somewhere. I don't know the name of Gilbert, but I'd swear I know that chap's face. Who is he? Is it possible that he's skulking at Melthorpe under an assumed name?" The coarse, red face seemed to flame with spito and anticipated revenge. "By thunder, if so, what a chance for me! I'll teach him to take hold of my collar—to threaten me! I'll make him sit up!"

The bookmaker's brain was busy, and his look boded no good to the Melthorpe master. Ignorant of the evil thoughts in his enemy's mind, Arthur Gilbert strode on towards the school, satisfied with the result of his mission. He went to Clare's study as soon as he reached Melthorpe. Clare was waiting there for his return, and he looked eagerly at the master. Mr. Gilbert placed the papers in his hand.

"Oh, thank you, sir—thank you!" cried Clare.

"You had better destroy them," said Mr. Gilbert.

"Yes—yes; at once!"

Clare lighted the gas, and held the papers in it, and in a few moments they were reduced to ashes.

"That is a load off my mind!" he cried. "But was he willing to give them up, sir?"

"He was not willing," said Mr. Gilbert; "but I persuaded him."

Clare smiled; he could smile now. He guessed what the persuasion had been like, but he made no remark.

"And now about the football?" said Mr. Gilbert. "Have you acted?"

"Yes, sir. When the committee met I stated that I withdrew my resignation, but wished them to settle the question of the captaincy afresh, and without consulting me."

"That was right. I have no doubt how it will be settled. You will lead the team to victory next week, Clare."

Clare's eyes glistened. He had the feeling of a slave newly escaped from thralldom. In his satisfaction he had forgotten Selby. But soon after Mr. Gilbert was gone there came a tap at his door, and the prefect came in.

CHAPTER 7.

Bitter Blood.

THE sunny expression faded from Clare's face as he saw the prefect. But he faced Selby calmly, and waited for him to speak. There was a sullen look on the prefect's face, a cold glitter in his eyes. It was evident that he was angry.

"I want to know what is the meaning of this last move of yours, Clare?" he said abruptly. "After our talk last night, I didn't expect anything of the kind."

"Circumstances have changed since then," replied Clare quietly. "I am no longer under the thumb of that rascal Green."

"Then you are in earnest about withdrawing your resignation?"

"Quite."

"You think you are a fit person to captain the team?"

Clare kept his temper with difficulty. Selby's manner was most provoking, but Clare did not wish to quarrel with him if he could help it.

"Yes, I think I am a fit person, as I am now free from that entanglement," he said calmly. "Mr. Gilbert thinks so, too."

"Mr. Gilbert does not know the circumstances," said the prefect tartly.

"You are mistaken. Mr. Gilbert knows everything."

Selby stared at him in astonishment.

"Do you mean to say that you've told your Form-master of your dealings with that blackguard Green?"

"Yes, I have made a clean breast of it, and I'm jolly glad I did."

"And you're not to be expelled?"

"Apparently not," said Clare, with a curl of the lip. "I fancy Mr. Gilbert's standard of morality is quite as high as yours, Selby, only he doesn't believe in giving a fellow a kick when he is down."

The prefect flushed.

"I said you ought to resign for the good of the school," he replied hotly. "I was not thinking of myself. And I still think so. You have palmed off on Mr. Gilbert some tale of turning over a new leaf. But I know your sort. I know exactly how long your reformation will last."

"Indeed?" said Clare, his eyes beginning to glitter.

"Yes, indeed. It will last till you've got over this fright, and then you'll be at the game again," said the prefect,

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IN "PLUCK," IP.

with a sneer. "You cannot pull the wool over my eyes, even if you can fool Mr. Gilbert."

Clare breathed hard.

"I don't want to quarrel with you, Selby," he said, in a low voice. "I think this interview had better end."

Selby did not move.

"I want to come to an understanding first," he said. "I must know what to expect. Last night you agreed to resign the captaincy; this evening you reclaim it. I don't believe you are any more fit for it now than you were then. I believe that you ought to give it up in the interests of the first eleven, as I said yesterday."

"I have told you that circumstances are altered. My connection with Green is ended for good. I shall never speak to him again," said Clare patiently. "I suppose you have a right to preach at me, Selby, if you choose, after what has happened. But if, as you say, you are thinking of the good of the school, you cannot have any objection to the question being left in the hands of the committee, for them to choose the man they consider fittest. I am no longer in Green's power, and what is past will not influence me in the slightest degree in the future. Even if you do not trust me, you might be willing to rely upon Mr. Gilbert's judgment."

"As I have said, you have pulled the wool over his eyes."

Clare clenched his hand. But he still controlled his temper.

"Well, it is useless to argue upon that point," he said quietly. "Time will show, and, after my weakness in the past, I suppose you have a right to be down on me; though you might give a fellow credit for good intentions."

Selby shrugged his shoulders.

"I've no doubt about the goodness of your intentions," he said; "it's your performance that I am doubtful about. I repeat that I do not consider you are to be trusted as captain of the Melthorpe team. That's flat!"

"And I tell you that I don't care two pins for your opinion," cried Clare sharply. "And that's flatter!"

Selby drew a deep breath.

"Then you leave only one course open to me."

"Take any course you like," said Clare disdainfully.

"Wait a bit. You say the committee are to choose the man they consider fittest. You will acknowledge that they cannot choose properly unless they know all the facts."

"Do you mean that you are going to give me away after all?"

"I mean that I shall certainly acquaint the committee with the fact that you deserted your side on the occasion of the Clavering match, for personal reasons."

"You can't make allowance for the state of mind I was in at the time?" said Clare hoarsely. "I was not myself; I was worried almost to distraction by that demon—"

"Of course you can explain all that to the football committee," said Selby coldly. "It is for them to decide."

"You—you cad! You know I couldn't explain; I should be sent to Coventry. Do you know what you are doing?"

"I am doing my duty, as I understand it."

"You are blackmailing," said Clare bitterly. "Yes, that's what it amounts to. That's what your precious concern for the good of the school comes to in plain English. You're going to drive me out of the team because you know about this rotten business."

Selby turned livid. There was an uneasy feeling in his breast that Clare spoke something very like the truth, but that only incensed the prefect more.

"Well, there's no need for us to bandy words about the matter," said Selby, snapping his teeth; "I've told you what I am going to do."

He turned to the door. Clare stood still, not speaking. The prefect opened the door, and looked back. He seemed to hesitate.

"Then you're resolved, Clare?"

"Yes. Do your worst."

"Very well. You have only yourself to thank for what happens now," said the prefect; and he strode from the study, his teeth set hard. The next moment he ran into someone who was coming along the dusky corridor.

"Confound you—I beg your pardon, sir!" stammered the prefect, in confusion, as he recognised Mr. Gilbert.

"Is that you, Selby?" said the master of the Fifth cheerfully. "Will you come into my study for a few minutes? I want to have a little chat with you."

"Certainly, sir!" said the prefect, wondering uneasily what Mr. Gilbert could have to chat to him about. It was pretty certain that the Form-master had heard the last words spoken after the door was opened. Had they given him an inkling of what had been passing between the prefect and the football captain?

Selby was uneasy. He stole a glance at Mr. Gilbert's face as he followed him, but the master's features expressed nothing. Not till they were in his quarters, with the door

closed, did the master of the Fifth speak again. His first words confirmed the prefect's unquiet fears.

"I couldn't help hearing a few words just now," he said, looking directly at Selby. "From them, and from some words Clare let drop when he made his confession to me, I gather that you are in possession of his secret, Selby."

"It was my duty as a prefect to inform myself about it," said Selby half defiantly.

Mr. Gilbert nodded gravely.

"Undoubtedly; though how you informed yourself I cannot imagine. However, let that pass," he went on, as Selby flushed uncomfortably. "I presume, as you did not acquaint the doctor or myself with your discovery, that you decided that Clare had better be given a chance."

"Ye-es."

"I am glad of that. It shows that you can feel sympathy even towards wrongdoers," said Mr. Gilbert calmly. Selby shifted uneasily. "You will be glad to hear, Selby, that I have succeeded in extricating Clare from that wretched entanglement, and that I am assured he will never fall into anything of the kind again."

"So he said, sir."

"That being the case, it is, of course, incumbent upon us both to keep his secret. My lips are sealed, and it will be the same, of course, with you."

Selby smiled in a bitter way. He thought he could see now what the master of the Fifth was driving at. Mr. Gilbert did not appear to notice his expression. He waited for his reply.

"You have kept the secret for some time, Selby," added the master, as Selby did not speak; "it cannot be your intention to disclose it now. You cannot think that honourable."

"I kept the secret, Mr. Gilbert, on condition that Clare resigned from the team," replied the prefect. "I did not consider that he was to be trusted. He resigned, and I considered that he was entitled to have a chance to reform. But I don't think I ought to keep silence and allow him to captain us again, considering the probability that he may at any time turn traitor."

Mr. Gilbert's eyes gleamed for a moment.

"Don't you think you are hard upon him, Selby?" he asked. "Traitor is a very hard word. He certainly showed great weakness upon one occasion, but the cause of it is now removed. That he will ever get into such a difficulty again I do not think for a moment."

"I don't feel so sure about it, sir."

"Then what are your present views, Selby?"

"I think that the football committee ought to know the true circumstances before they make him captain again," the prefect said doggedly.

Mr. Gilbert's lips tightened.

"That will be equivalent to turning Clare out of the team, and making it impossible for him to ever play for Melthorpe again," he said. "Now, frankly, Selby, do you think that he deserves that?"

Selby did not reply.

"Do you really think it will be for the best interests of the school?"

"Well, yes, sir, I do."

"I cannot agree with you. More, I will say that our football record will suffer this season if you carry out your intention." The Form-master laid his hand upon Selby's shoulder. "My boy, I know that you believe you are doing right, and are actuated by a sense of duty; but, unknown to ourselves, our actions are often influenced by personal prejudices and dislikes. Will it be asking too much if I ask you to trust my judgment instead of your own in this matter? If I ask you to keep silent about Clare, I am willing to take all the responsibility."

Selby made an uneasy movement. It was not easy to refuse a request made by a master, or to declare that he valued his own judgment more than Mr. Gilbert's. The request was in effect a command, and the prefect did not know how he could elude it.

"I ask this as a favour," said Mr. Gilbert. "I take all responsibility. You will not refuse me, Selby?"

"If you put it like that, sir—"

"I do put it like that."

"Then, I suppose, I must do as you wish; but—"

"Thank you, Selby," said the master of the Fifth, without seeming to observe the prefect's sullen discontent. "I don't think you will regret it, my boy."

He shook hands with the prefect, and Selby left him, his heart full of bitterness. It had been impossible for him to refuse, but his heart was not in his consent. He could not speak now, and he could not realise his ambition, under the pretext of being deeply concerned for the honour of the school. He felt a bitter sense of defeat, and a feeling very like hatred towards the master of the Fifth; a feeling that was to bear fruit.

CHAPTER 3.

The St. Mona Match.

"HALLO, Redmayne, I want to speak to you!" sang out Clare cheerfully, as he spotted the lad in the quad on Monday; and Redmayne stopped.

He looked at the football captain with a very peculiar expression. As a matter of fact, both Redmayne and Norroys were much exercised in their minds about the forthcoming match with St. Mona's. The committee had unanimously decided upon re-electing Clare, and he was to lead the team into the field on Wednesday afternoon. In view of what they had learned at the old barn, the chums of the Fifth were at a loss to know what to do. Of what had happened since they had no knowledge. Redmayne was thinking about the matter when Clare hailed him.

"Yes, Clare, what is it?" asked Redmayne.

"We shall want you on Wednesday afternoon."

Redmayne flushed with pleasure.

"You'll want me?"

"Yes. Rogers is too much off his form, and I have noticed lately how well you have shaped as a half. I've had an eye on you for some time, as a matter of fact. You'll get your cap for the St. Mona's match, and see that you deserve it."

"I'll do my best, Clare." Redmayne's face became crimson as he went on, but he was resolute to speak out. "There's—there's another matter, Clare, I—I ought to mention to you while we're on the subject."

"Go ahead!" said the captain tersely.

"The other day Norroys and I were on a sprint, and we got into the old barn in the Acre Field for shelter from the rain." Clare turned deadly pale. Redmayne went on: "We didn't want to play the spy, Clare, but there was a reason why we couldn't show ourselves, and so—we saw you, and heard something."

It was out now, and Redmayne did not dare to look at the football captain. Clare breathed hard.

"So you know all about it, Redmayne?"

"Not all about it, but more than I like to know. I hope you believe that we didn't play the spy intentionally, Clare."

"Yes, I believe that; I know that Selby was in the barn listening," said Clare bitterly. "Have you spoken about this to anybody, Redmayne?"

The boy flushed indignantly.

"Of course not! Do you think I'm a sneak?"

"Why do you speak of it now?"

"Because—because—don't you see, Clare?" broke out Redmayne desperately. "When you resigned I thought it would be all right. Now you're going to captain us against St. Mona's on Wednesday, and I know what that blackguard wants you to do."

Clare smiled grimly.

"And you're afraid I may sell out the match?"

Redmayne became scarlet.

"No, I'm not; only—only—"

"You're quite right to speak out, Reddy," said Clare quietly. "If my resignation had held good I suppose you would have said nothing?"

"Nothing," replied Redmayne promptly. "I didn't want to let you know I knew about it, you know, only—only—"

"I understand. Now," said Clare, laying his hand for a moment on the younger lad's shoulder, "if I assure you that my connection with that man is severed for ever, and that I am no longer in the least in his power, will that reassure you, Redmayne?"

Redmayne brightened up at once.

"Of course it will, Clare!"

"Well, it is so. I have been got out of that scrape by Mr. Gilbert, Reddy. He saved me from the ditch I was fool enough to stumble in, and there will never be anything of the kind again, Redmayne. I've done with that for ever. Are you satisfied?"

"I'm jolly glad," said Redmayne sincerely. "It was just like Mr. Gilbert; he's a jolly good sort."

"He's the noblest fellow in the world," said Clare, with some emotion. "Of course, you'll say nothing about all this, Reddy?"

"Of course not. But what about Selby?"

"He is going to keep quiet; Mr. Gilbert asked him to."

"That's all right, then. But I say, Clare, you—you don't mind my having spoken out, do you?" said Redmayne diffidently. "I—I was worried about it."

"I'm glad you spoke out, and got it off your mind," said Clare. "That's all right."

"And—and it won't make any difference to—"

Redmayne haltingly.

"How could you think so? You'll have your cap on Wednesday."

"Right you are!" And Redmayne hurried off to tell his chum the good news, and Norroys was equally delighted.

"I wish you were in with me, old chap," said Redmayne regretfully. "But keep on pegging away, and you may get your cap in time for the St. Mona's return match. I know you'll go in sooner or later."

The chums of the Fifth, and, indeed, all Melthorpe, looked forward eagerly to the St. Mona's match. St. Mona's were generally a hard nut to crack, and they usually played one or two masters in the team. Last season the success had been all on the side of the Saints, and the Melthorpians were eager to wipe out the stain of defeat.

"And I think we shall do it, sir," Clare said to Mr. Gilbert, when the match day arrived; "we are very strong this time. I am sorry that you will not be playing, though."

"It is better for me to stand out," said Mr. Gilbert, "as on this occasion no masters are playing for St. Mona's. You may be able to put me in at the return match. But you have a fine team."

"Yes," said Clare, looking with an eye of pride over his men, who were waiting for the brake to take them over to St. Mona's College; "a fine lot!" Then his brow clouded for a moment. "There's only one I am a bit doubtful about."

"You are referring to Selby?"

"Yes. It's a hard thing to say of a fellow, but I don't think he's forgiven me for keeping him out of the captaincy. He's sulked ever since. I've tried to get on good terms with him, but it's no good. He just answers when I speak to him, and that's all."

"It's a very bad spirit to show," said Mr. Gilbert. "I am afraid there is little of the sportsman about him. A feeling of disagreement is the worst thing in the world for a football team. A good combination of very average players will do better in the field than a team of first-class men between whom there is disagreement. Still, you must do your best to get on Selby's right side. I've no doubt he will come round in time, for he is really not a bad fellow at bottom."

"I shall do my best, sir."

The brake came round, and the team clambered into it. Several other conveyances arrived for the masters and boys who were desirous of following the Melthorpe champions to the St. Mona's ground. Dr. Talbot himself intended to be present at the match, and with him was the master of the Fifth. A little later Squire Laverock drove over.

The afternoon was fine and clear, and the ground was in good condition. The Melthorpe representatives were accorded a hearty welcome. Clare tossed for choice of goals with Penrose, the Saints' captain, and rightly named the coin. The Saints had to kick-off against a breeze.

Mr. Gilbert, who was beside the doctor in the pavilion, watched the commencement of the match rather anxiously. He was as keen as anybody upon Melthorpe winning, but he had very strong doubts about Selby. The prefect, when he chose, was a splendid player, but the question was, would he choose on this occasion? That he would intentionally give his side away was unlikely, but he was in a sour and rancorous mood, and in that mood he was very likely to prove more than a little of a "slacker."

Mr. Gilbert's fears were not unfounded. More than once Selby failed to pass to his centre when he should have done so, and on one occasion, in the first fifteen minutes, his selfishness robbed his side of an almost certain goal, which Clare was in excellent position to take. Mr. Gilbert, watching every turn of the game, frowned slightly. He well remembered a similar incident in the Clavering match when Selby had acted in the same selfish way. Dr. Talbot glanced at the young master by his side.

"Selby does not seem to be up to his usual form," he remarked. "That was a chance missed. He is too fond of keeping the ball."

"I am afraid so, sir," said Mr. Gilbert.

A few minutes later, however, Selby was the recipient of a storm of cheering. Clare had passed to him, and he had sent the ball fairly into the St. Mona's goal, and the visitors were one up. Whether Clare had observed Selby's selfishness or not, he was clearly not at all inclined to imitate it; he thought of the game, and the game only.

The cheering seemed to animate Selby somewhat, and his face became less cold in its expression, and he threw more heart into the game. But the Saints were eager to avenge the check, and they made a determined attack upon the Melthorpe goal, with the result that the leather was slammed right into the net, and the scores stood equal.

Some sharp passages of arms followed, the ball going into touch more than once, but at last, towards half-time, the Saints brought it right up to the visitors' goal. Right before the goal-mouth there was a tussle, and twice the ball was sent in, but was fisted out again by the custodian. The second time Redmayne saw his chance. He was on the ball

NEXT SATURDAY:

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"IN THE EYES OF THE WORLD."

A True Life Story
of Today.IN "PLUCK." 1st

like a flash, anticipated a Saint by a fraction of a second, and he drove it up the field, where a Melthorpe forward captured it. It was Wynyard, who was at outside-right.

Away went the whole forward line of Melthorpe with a rush, and Wynward passed in to Selby, who dribbled the leather onward. Two Saints were charging at him, and he passed out again to Wynyard, heedless of the sharp call from Clare to let him have the ball. The centre-forward had a good chance, Wynyard had none. He was charged off the ball in a moment, and a Saints' back sent it right up the field with a powerful kick. The scene changed like a kaleidoscope; the fighting was instantly transferred to the visitors' territory. And the Saints were rushing on determinedly, and the attack might have materialised, when the sharp note of the whistle was heard.

The first half was ended, and the score was equal; but Clare's face was dark. He could no longer doubt that Selby was allowing his personal antipathy to influence his play, and, by reason of that, Melthorpe had lost at least one goal. The captain turned it over in his mind as the teams went off the field, and decided to speak to the prefect. An unpleasant look came over Selby's face as Clare came towards him in the dressing-room. Clare's manner was quite calm, and as cordial as he could make it.

"I want to make an appeal to you, Selby," he said, in a quiet voice, so that the others should not hear. "Last season the Saints beat us hollow, and if they repeat it this time, there will be no end to their crowing. Don't you think you might forget personal matters for a bit, and play the game?"

"Who says I am not playing the game?"

"Well, you take care never to let the ball come to me if you can help it," said Clare, a little tartly. "I'm not speaking on my own account; I don't want to shine. But I want Melthorpe to win this match, and we shall not win if you persist in your tactics."

Selby bit his lip. He did not confess to himself that his play had been governed by his dislike of Clare; he had half-unconsciously yielded to his sullen humour, and Clare's words only roused new bitterness in his breast.

"I am playing in the way that seems to me best," he said coldly. "If you are not satisfied with me—well, you're captain, and you can order me off the field if you like."

"You know I don't want to do anything of the kind, and if I did, it would be suicide to play a man short against a team like the Saints," said Clare hotly.

"What do you want, then?" said Selby, with a sullen look. "It isn't my fault if you don't get opportunities to cut a figure all the time."

"I want you to buck up, and do your best."

"That's what I've been doing, in my opinion, which I value a good deal more than yours."

Clare checked the hot answer that rose to his lips.

"If that's how you take it, it's useless for me to speak," he said. "But if you don't play a different game, Selby, I shall have to consider very seriously whether you can be allowed to play for Melthorpe again." And he turned on his heel.

Selby's eyes glittered.

"So you want to drive me out of the team?" he muttered.

"Well, there will be a row first, I fancy."

The whistle sounded. There was a spiteful glint in Selby's eyes as he lined up with his side for the kick-off. The wind was now in favour of St. Mona's, and they made the most of this advantage. There was no denying their attack, and in ten minutes from the whistle they had slammed the ball into the visitors' goal. The home crowd cheered vociferously.

"Goal! Goal! Hurrah!"

And a stout, red-faced man, who stood near the rail, grinned with satisfaction. It was Mr. Green. Though he was no longer able to influence the result of the match by underhand means, the bookmaker had some money on the game, and he was delighted to see that Melthorpe looked like losing. He cast a sour glance towards the pavilion, where Mr. Gilbert was visible, standing beside the chairs of Dr. Talbot and Squire Laverock. He chuckled as he saw the anxious shade that for a moment darkened the Form-master's brow. There was something cruel, something malignantly triumphant, in the bookmaker's eyes as he fixed them upon the man he hated.

"I've got you down fine!" he muttered. "I knew I had seen you before; I knew your name wasn't Gilbert. Oh, yes, I've got you, my beauty! I'll make you sit up for the way you treated me. By James, you'd be thinking about something else than football if you knew what was coming!" And the bookmaker chuckled again.

Mr. Gilbert had noticed the man on the ground, but he had not cast a second glance in his direction. He was far from guessing what was passing in the evil mind of the man who hated him.

The second half wore on, and ere long another goal was

taken by the home team amid ringing cheers from their partisans.

St. Mona's were now three up, and the most hopeful of the Melthorpeans had to admit that the end of the game was now a foregone conclusion.

Clare worked hard to stem the tide of defeat, and his men backed him up manfully. Even Selby threw more spirit into the game, but he did not back up the captain.

With the Saints working like one man for victory, the presence of a single "slacker" in the opposing team was fatal to their chances of success.

The Melthorpe lads looked blue, while the Saints were full of glee. It was another victory to be added to their list, another defeat for their visitors, and the Saints were naturally highly elated.

Hard as Melthorpe struggled, the utmost they could do was to keep their goal intact against further attacks until the whistle blew for time. The game closed with St. Mona's three to one.

Melthorpe were beaten! With glum faces the defeated team retired to their dressing-room after the match. The victorious Saints were escorted to their quarters by a hurrahing crowd. St. Mona's was wild with delight over the triumph. The cheering jarred upon Clare's ears, for he knew that with a sound player in the place of the slacker in the Melthorpe forward line his side might well have claimed the victory.

Even if they could not have defeated the Saints, the Melthorpe men might, at least, have claimed a draw had Selby dismissed private rancour and played up for his colours. A deep resentment filled Clare's breast—a resentment that was shared by several of the other players. Some of them, in the stress of the game, had not noticed Selby's failing, simply thinking that he was not playing up to his usual form. Others had remarked that he did not back up the centre-forward, and guessed the reason.

Redmayne and Wynyard and one or two more were looking daggers at the prefect, and he did not fail to observe it. He cast a challenging look towards Clare. He was secretly feeling far from easy in his mind, but his narrow pride would not allow him to show any sign of weakness.

"Well, you've had your way," said Clare bitterly. "You've lost us the match, Selby."

Selby flushed crimson.

"How dare you say so? I fancy my play was as good as anybody's; and, at all events, I took the only goal we have to our credit."

"Oh, it's no good talking!" said Clare impatiently. "You're a pigheaded brute, and I don't expect you to admit that you played slack on purpose!"

"I did not!" hissed Selby. "It is false!"

"That's for the football committee to decide," said the captain grimly. "I shall place the matter before them, and they shall decide whether you or I leave the team. One of us will have to go if the school is to win any of its matches this season."

"Oh, I know your game!" sneered Selby. "You want to drive me out of the team. I've known that all along, and I know your motive."

"Oh, shut up, Selby!" said Leslie, of the Sixth. "What motive could Clare have for wanting to drive you out of the team?"

The prefect smiled bitterly.

"Ask him," he said. "He knows well enough."

There was something so peculiar in the prefect's tone that every eye was turned at once upon Clare. The captain turned red and then pale.

"It's a lie," he said between his teeth—"yes, a cowardly lie! You fellows can bear witness how I've tried to get on good terms with the sulky brute, and put up with his humours without a word. What he's alluding to I shall not explain. Selby can do so if he likes. But one thing's settled—either I go out of the eleven or he does."

"There's no question about which it will be!" exclaimed Redmayne. "We all saw how Selby kept the ball away from Clare at the risk of losing the match. Selby gave the game away to the Saints."

The prefect, white with passion at this denunciation by a Lower Form boy, turned upon Redmayne, and struck savagely at his face.

"Take that, you whelp!"

The blow never reached Redmayne. Clare caught the enraged prefect's wrist in time, and turned it aside.

That was the finishing touch to Selby's temper. He wrenched his hand free, and struck Clare full in the face.

"Take that for meddling!"

Clare's eyes blazed. His hand shot out, and the open palm smote Selby upon the cheek with a crack like a pistol-shot, and the prefect reeled under the blow. He steadied himself, gasping with rage, and tried to make for Clare. Several fellows rushed in between.

"Stop it, for goodness' sake!" cried Leslie. "What will

the Saints think of us? We shall be the laughing-stock of St. Mona's—quarrelling among ourselves after losing a match. Stand back, Selby!"

"Hang you! I won't—I—"

"What is this?" said a cold, calm voice.

Selby broke off abruptly. The boys looked round in dismay. The master of the Fifth stood before them, a dark frown upon his face.

CHAPTER 9.

An Old Acquaintance.

MR. GILBERT looked over the circle of flushed faces with a sharp, hard glance. It was clear that for once the master of the Fifth was really angry.

"What does this unseemly brawling mean?" he said sternly. "Do you want to make your school an object of contempt and derision to the St. Mona boys? Some of them already know that a quarrel is going on here."

Clare hung his head.

"I am sorry, sir. It would have been better to say nothing till we were back at Melthorpe, but I was exasperated. I was wrong."

Selby was silent, but his look was still truculent.

"You were certainly wrong, Clare!" said the master of the Fifth. "I myself observed conduct in the game which will have to be inquired into, but this is not the place for it."

Selby started. It had not occurred to him until now that the keen eye of the Form-master, the finest footballer at Melthorpe, had been on him all the time.

"Are you alluding to me, sir?" he asked boldly. "Is it my conduct that will have to be inquired into?"

"Since you ask me, it is!" said Mr. Gilbert sternly. "You will be required to make an explanation to the football committee, but for the present—"

"Oh, I might have known you would side with Clare!" said Selby, with reckless bitterness. "You always take the part of your favourite!"

The words were scarcely out of the prefect's mouth when he would have given anything to recall them. He knew he had gone too far, and all the others knew it, too. A kind of shiver ran through them for a moment, and they did not dare to look at Mr. Gilbert.

"Do you know what you are saying, Selby?" said the Form-master in an altered voice.

The prefect was silent. He was sorry he had spoken, but he would not retract his words. He kept his eyes sullenly on the ground.

"Your words cannot be overlooked, Selby," said Mr. Gilbert quietly; "but this is no time to speak of that. Let me recommend that you return to Melthorpe, my boys, without any further recrimination. I shall speak to you again later, Selby." And the Form-master walked out of the dressing-room.

A painful silence followed his departure, and no one cared to break it. Selby's face was darkened by a sullen scowl as he dressed. When he had finished he walked out of the dressing-room by himself. He was in too bitter and unsociable a mood, and too keenly conscious of the hostile feelings of his fellow-players, to wish to drive back with them to Melthorpe in the brake.

He strode away from the football-ground with black thoughts in his mind, his heart full of hatred, more against Mr. Gilbert than against Clare. It seemed to his obstinate, narrow mind that the master of the Fifth was against him in everything, and he was less disposed than ever to admit himself at all in the wrong.

Mr. Gilbert's brow was clouded as he walked away. He had done his best many times to get on better terms with Selby, but the prefect's perversity had almost exhausted his patience. There was trouble ahead now, for Selby's insolent words could not be overlooked; and, at the same time, it was in Selby's power to make himself extremely disagreeable by revealing what he knew of Clare's transactions with the bookmaker. The situation was altogether an extremely awkward one, and the outcome might be unpleasant. In the midst of the Form-master's meditations, he felt a touch on his elbow. He turned his head, and saw Mr. Green at his side, an insolent grin upon his fat face.

"How dare you touch me?" exclaimed Mr. Gilbert angrily.

"Oh, get off!" exclaimed Green. "You can't come that dodge over me any longer, my boy! I've spotted you!"

"You must be intoxicated, I think! You had better take yourself off!"

"All right, Mr. Gilbert!" The bookmaker placed a peculiar emphasis upon the name, and the Form-master started. "Shall I go to Dr. Talbot, and tell him what I know?"

"I have not the faintest idea what you are talking about."

"Then I'd better explain. The first time I saw you I said

to myself that I knew your face. I couldn't place you. But after your visit to the Blue Boar I kinder tumbled. See? Your name ain't Gilbert any more than mine is Brown!" He chuckled as he saw the colour waver in the master's cheek. "Oh, I've got you down fine, my chap," he said. "I'll make you sorry yet that you meddled with Jimmy Green, by James!"

"You must be dreaming!" said the master of the Fifth calmly. "Whom do you take me for, may I ask?"

"For a cove who wouldn't be admitted to Melthorpe School if the truth was known!" the bookmaker grinned.

A look of relief flashed over Mr. Gilbert's face, somewhat to Green's amazement.

"Indeed!" said the Form-master, still calmly. "You are sure you are not mistaken?"

"Oh, yes; I'm sure enough!" said the bookmaker, with emphasis. "If I had wanted any proof, you've given it to me yourself."

"I? How so?"

"Because, if you was all square and above-board, you'd have shifted me before this. You see, you've given yourself away!" chuckled the bookmaker.

Mr. Gilbert compressed his lips.

"I do not wish to make a scene here, nor can I afford to be seen talking to you," he said. "If you have anything to say to me, I am willing to see you to-morrow—"

The bookmaker interrupted him.

"To-morrow is no good. I have got something to say to you, Mr. Blooming Gilbert, and it's got to be said to-day, if you don't want me to say it in public!"

Arthur Gilbert's eyes glittered, and his hands clenched. It was only with difficulty that he restrained himself from laying the ruffian upon his back there and then.

"Very well," he said. "The football team does not immediately leave for Melthorpe, and I can get away for a short time as Dr. Talbot is here. Where can I see you?"

The bookmaker reflected for a moment.

"In the beech-plantation on the Clavering road," he said. "That's a short walk, and we won't be seen there, as you're so pertickler about not being seen with me. You wouldn't have been so particular once upon a time," he said, with a sneering laugh.

"I will be there is half an hour," said Mr. Gilbert. "Now go!"

In spite of his assurance, the rascal was somewhat abashed by the look of the Form-master. "Contempt," says the Eastern proverb, "will pierce the shell of the tortoise"; and even Mr. Jimmy Green's thick skin was not wholly impervious to it. He nodded shortly and walked away.

Mr. Gilbert returned to his friends, and Squire Laverock looked at him curiously. The Form-master avoided his glance.

"Who was that fellow you were speaking to, Gilbert?" asked the squire. "I caught only a glimpse of him, but I thought I knew him."

"A rascally bookmaker, named Green!" replied Mr. Gilbert indifferently. "You may remember he is the man you warned us about in connection with a Melthorpe lad."

"Ah, yes; a regular rascal, I believe!" said the squire. "So that is Green? I did not know him by sight. It was my man who saw the meeting at the barn, and told me about it. But I have seen the fellow before somewhere; I am certain of it."

"Perhaps about the village?" suggested Mr. Gilbert.

The squire shook his head, as if not completely satisfied, but he did not pursue the subject. He began to speak to the doctor about the match, and Mr. Gilbert was glad to have the topic changed. Anything like dissimulation was repugnant to him, and, with the coming interview with the bookmaker weighing on his mind, he was not in much of a humour for talk.

The defeated team was entertained by the Saints previous to its return home, and it was not difficult for Mr. Gilbert to slip away unnoticed for the meeting in the beech-wood. Selby was also absent, but no one was in the least concerned about the prefect. His comrades thought he had gone home without waiting for the brake, and they were content to be rid of the "slacker" who had lost them the match.

Leaving the St. Mona's ground, Mr. Gilbert walked away rapidly on the Clavering road, and reached the beech-plantation bordering the road at the appointed time. A stile gave admittance to it, and at the stile the bookmaker was lounging, smoking a cigar. He nodded familiarly to the Form-master. Mr. Gilbert crossed the stile, and stopped under the trees. These were thick enough beside the foot-path to make a screen from general view.

"Now, what do you want with me?" he said sharply.

"Don't come the high boss with me," grinned Green; "it won't work!" I've got you down fine, my beauty!"

"Explain yourself! You apparently take me for some person other than I am. Tell me exactly what you mean,

and what you want with me, before I lose patience with you!"

"I'll tell you fast enough. You call yourself Arthur Gilbert at Melthorpe, but the last time I saw you—I mean afore I saw you round here—you was called by another name."

"What name?" cried Mr. Gilbert, with a trace of keen anxiety in his tones.

"Mellish," said Green. "Dick Mellish was the name."

The look of relief which had puzzled the bookmaker before reappeared upon Mr. Gilbert's face. Green scowled uneasily.

"Do you mean to deny it?" he exclaimed savagely. "Cause if you do, it won't be difficult for me to prove it to the satisfaction of Dr. Talbot. I can get you kicked out of Melthorpe College with two words, and you know it."

"I deny nothing and admit nothing," said Mr. Gilbert calmly. "But, assuming that your supposition is correct—"

"You know it's correct!"

"Assuming that it is, what do you want with me?"

"Well, that's cool!" ejaculated the bookmaker.

"I asked you a question," said Mr. Gilbert calmly. "Will you answer it?"

"Yes, I will!" snarled the bookmaker. "You've got to make it worth my while not to show you up, or I'll go straight to Dr. Talbot and let him know that you're an imposter. And I'm not going to keep my mouth shut for a trifle either. I might have, but after your meddling and confounded insolence—"

"Keep to the point. You must know that my salary as a master at Melthorpe is limited, and that I have no other resources. What do you expect of me?"

"Now we're coming to business," said the bookmaker, in a tone of satisfaction. "This ain't a matter that can be settled with a five-pound note. If Dr. Talbot knew that one of his blooming masters was a racing tout from the Paris racecourses—"

"Get to business!"

"Certainly," grinned the other. "Well, then, I don't want any of your beggarly screw, whatever it is. Anyway, not now."

Mr. Gilbert looked at him in surprise.

"If you do not want money, what do you want?"

"There's another way you can square me."

"Explain yourself!"

"You can let me alone, stop your rotten meddling, and leave me to turn an honest penny in my own way," said Mr. Green.

"I don't quite understand you."

"I'll make it clear. I can make a pretty good thing out of the Upper Form boys at Melthorpe. Some of the richer sort have fivers and tenners to chuck away, and if I wasn't interfered with I could get in a decent little harvest. You've interfered with me once, and crabbled it for me. You won't do it again. You'll stand out, and close one eye to what goes on."

"Ah, I see!"

The Form-master's calmness encouraged Mr. Green.

"That's the game," he proceeded. "I don't ask you for nothing; I'll pay myself if you do that much. You might give the chaps a chance to see me, too, and make it a bit easier for me to deal with them. And if you choose to go into the thing fairly with me, I don't say but what I'll forget the little rubs we've had, and give you a percentage of the profits."

"You are too good."

"Of course, I suppose you're playing some game at the college," went on Mr. Green. "You ain't there for nothing. However, I don't want to interfere with that. Just do as I ask, and I'll see you through."

"Unfortunately," said Mr. Gilbert, in low, even tones, "I cannot do as you ask."

The bookmaker scowled.

"Why not?"

"Because I do not happen to be a scoundrel like yourself."

Mr. Green's coarse face turned a brick-red with rage.

"Why, you hound—"

"Hold your tongue! Listen to me, you cowardly, contemptible rascal! The proposition you make is one I might have expected from one so base, so despicable as you are." Mr. Green spluttered with rage, but the Form-master went on unheeding. "If you were worth it, I'd thrash you within an inch of your life for daring to speak such words to me. As it is, I will keep my hands off you; you are too vile for me to touch. Now get aside, and let me go!"

"You—you dare to defy me?" gasped Green.

"Yes, you rascal!"

"I'll show you up—I'll have you kicked out of the college!"

And Mr. Green, beside himself with rage, was flourishing a very grimy fist in the Form-master's face. Mr. Gilbert brushed him aside, and stepped into the footpath. The bookmaker, mad with rage, struck at him furiously. The next moment he felt as if an earthquake had occurred. He lay on his back in the grass, staring dazedly upward, blinking his eyes. He rose slowly to a sitting posture, and rubbed his nose. He saw the stalwart form of the Melthorpe master striding rapidly away, and hurled a string of curses after it.

"Hang him! Hang him! How I hate him! I'll make him suffer!"

"Let me help you up, my man!"

A form stepped from the trees, and Mr. Green blinked at it doubtfully. It was Selby's.

"Hallo! Have you been listening?"

"I certainly heard your talk with Mr. Gilbert."

"You're one of the Melthorpe fellows I saw playing in the match, ain't you?" said Mr. Green suddenly.

"Yes." Selby gave the bookmaker a hand, and jerked the fat man to his feet. "He seems to have used you pretty roughly, and no mistake."

Jimmy Green gritted his teeth.

"I'll make him sorry for it yet!" Then he glared at Selby suspiciously. "What have you been a-spying for, you young 'ound?"

Selby smiled grimly.

"I was curious to know what there might be between you and Mr. Gilbert," he said. "I saw him meet you, and I determined to find out. Now, tell me, is there anything in the cock-and-bull story you were telling just now?"

"It's gospel truth," said the bookmaker sullenly. "I saw that feller on the Paris racecourse, and he had another name then. It was two years ago, but I know his face, though he's changed a good deal."

"It seems impossible. Mr. Gilbert has always been so strict and correct; nobody's ever had a word to say against him," said Selby musingly. "Are you sure you're not making a mistake? It seems impossible."

The bookmaker looked at the prefect shrewdly.

"I take it that you don't love him any too much, young feller. You wouldn't be sorry to see him kicked out of the school."

"I have no cause to love him," said Selby between his teeth. "He set himself against me from the first. I should be glad if he left Melthorpe, and if you could prove what you say, there would be no doubt about that. But Dr. Talbot trusts him implicitly, and you would have to bring pretty strong proof to make your story believed. But it can't be true. How could he have got his present position? One of the governors of the school introduced him there, and answered for him. How could he have deceived Squire Laverock?"

The bookmaker gave a nervous start at the name.

"Who did you say?"

"Squire Laverock, one of the governors of Melthorpe. He has always been Mr. Gilbert's friend, and I happen to know that he strongly recommended Mr. Gilbert when the former master of the Fifth left. He certainly wouldn't recommend a man who was unfit for the post; and how could Gilbert have deceived him?" Selby shook his head. "It sounds like a ghost story, Mr. Green. But if you had any proof—"

"You'd be glad to hear it?" suggested the bookmaker.

"Yes, I would. Look here, if you like to look up some particulars of this affair, and let me have something tangible," said Selby, lowering his voice, "I'll make it worth your while. Only remember, it must be something I can go upon."

"I'll do it, and glad," said Green viciously.

"Then I'll see you again." Selby's eyes were glittering. Impossible as it seemed for the bookmaker's story to be true, yet the man's positiveness was staggering, and then the fact that Mr. Gilbert had met him secretly gave colour to the story. If it should be true, it would be in the prefect's power to exact a crushing revenge for his injuries, imaginary as they mainly were. "There's a sovereign for you, and I'll make it a fiver when you give me proof enough to bring that man's head down to the dust."

The bookmaker looked after Selby with a curious expression as he walked away.

"There's the makings of a pretty rascal in that chap," he muttered. "But I'll do what he wants—rather; and I'll bring Mr. High Horse Gilbert low enough before I've done with him." And with that comforting reflection, Mr. Green walked away towards Clavering, occasionally stopping to rub his damaged nose, and to mutter things not fit for ears polite.

CHAPTER 10.
Exit Mr. Green.

JUMP in with me, Gilbert, my boy!" said Squire Laverock. "I'll drop you at the gates of Melthorpe."

Mr. Gilbert seemed to hesitate for a moment.

"It will take you out of your way, sir."

"Very little, and it does not matter anyway. Jump in!" The squire was not to be denied. And so when the Melthorpe party left St. Mona's, the master of the Fifth was seated beside Squire Laverock, who "tooled" the trap along the lane in the growing dusk. Mr. Gilbert sat silent, his face clouded. The squire looked at him once or twice, and at length spoke.

"You can tell me what's the matter, my boy. You can rely upon me."

"I should be an ingrate indeed if I did not rely upon the man to whom I owe everything," said the Melthorpe master, in a low, earnest voice.

"Nonsense! What I did was my bare duty, and as much for the sake of my old friend as for your own," said Squire Laverock hastily. "Never mind that. I can see that something is amiss, and that it is in connection with the loud individual I saw you speaking to on the football ground. Am I right?"

"You are, sir," replied Mr. Gilbert.

"What is he—some shady acquaintance of the days that are gone for ever?"

"No. I never knew him, and had not the slightest recollection of him; but he must have seen me. He remembers me at a time when I was not known as Arthur Gilbert."

"He knows all, then?"

"He recognised me as Dick Mellish."

The squire smiled.

"And what does he want?"

"He deems me an impostor at Melthorpe; he threatens me with exposure, and he demands a peculiar kind of blackmail. My salary is not large enough to excite his greed, but he has hit upon another method of paying himself for his silence. I am to stand quietly by while he inveigles my boys into betting transactions and swindles them. He has even offered to pay me a percentage of his profits."

The squire made his whip whistle in the air.

"The scoundrel! What did you say to him?"

"I left him lying on his back."

Laverock chuckled.

"Then it will be war?"

"Assuredly. He will make it his business to make things as unpleasant as possible for me. He cannot harm me in the way he supposes; but in another way he can ruin all my plans," said Mr. Gilbert gloomily. "I see nothing for it but an exposure."

Laverock laid a hand upon his arm.

"And you are not ready for that, my boy? But think—you have been more than a year at Melthorpe—is it not time?"

The Form-master's face was strangely pale and strained.

"I shrink from it," he said. "Sometimes the thought of speaking out has come to me, and then I have wavered; but always I have decided to wait. I have so much to lose by haste, by being over-hasty. I dare not risk it. But now it is inevitable. I shall be driven to do what I dread."

"Because of this bookmaker?"

"Yes. He will not be silent."

"If that is your only fear," said the squire slowly, "I may be able to help you there. I am certain I know that man. I am almost certain that he was mixed up in a case which came under my notice as a magistrate last year. If my suspicion is correct, you will have nothing to fear from this Green. Do not, therefore, make any decision until I have seen you again. When I leave you at Melthorpe I shall go to him. I understand that he puts up at the Blue Boar, in Clavering. I think you said so?"

"Yes; you will find him there."

"Then take no steps till you hear from me again. I fancy I shall be able to deal with this man."

"Heaven bless you, sir!" said Mr. Gilbert, in a low voice. "If ever a man had cause to be grateful, I have."

"Tut, tut!" said the squire, flicking his horse.

At the gates of Melthorpe College Mr. Gilbert alighted, and the squire drove on to the village. There was a grim expression on his face as he drew up outside the Blue Boar. The coming interview was not likely to be a pleasant one to Mr. Jimmy Green.

"You have a man named Green staying here?" asked the squire.

"Yes, sir," said the innkeeper, with great respect. Squire Laverock was his landlord. "He's just come in, about ten minutes ago. Do you want to see him?"

"Yes. Show me into a room where I can see him in private, and bring him in. You need not tell him who it is."

"Certainly, sir!"

The squire was shown into a little parlour, where he waited impatiently for a few minutes. Then the bookmaker made his appearance. Mr. Green came in unsuspectingly enough, but he started and changed colour at sight of the squire, and showed a disposition to instantly retreat from the room. Laverock made a step forward.

"Come in!" he said sharply.

The bookmaker hesitated, and finally obeyed. The squire surveyed him grimly.

"So I am not mistaken," he said. "You are the man!"

"I don't know what you are talking about," said the bookmaker sullenly. "I ain't never seen you before."

"Haven't you? I will refresh your memory a little. I am Squire Laverock, and you came before me, sitting as a magistrate, on a charge of drugging and robbing a man. Somehow you contrived to escape the police; but, if I am not mistaken, you are still wanted on that charge."

"It's a mistake; I'm a well-known man."

"Better known than is convenient for you, my fine fellow. But do you mean to admit the truth, or shall I ask the landlord to send for a constable?"

Green turned a sickly colour.

"I'm an honest man," he said. "Give me a chance."

"I'll give you a chance, certainly, if you own up to the truth."

"Well, mebbe I was the man."

"And now you are trying to blackmail a friend of mine, one of the masters at Melthorpe College," said the squire sternly.

The bookmaker's jaw dropped.

"I—I didn't know he was a friend of yours," he stammered.

"At all events, you didn't know I should spot you," said the squire scornfully. "Now, I have no particular desire to rake up that old matter against you; it's no business of mine to play detective. If you immediately relinquish all designs against Mr. Gilbert, hold your tongue about what you think or know, and leave this neighbourhood to-morrow, you have nothing to fear from me. What do you say?"

The bookmaker's eyes gleamed with spite. But he was in a deep hole. There was no escape for him, and he stammered out a savage consent. The squire crossed to the door.

"Very well. If you are here to-morrow evening you will be arrested. If you say a single word against Mr. Gilbert I'll have you hunted for in every corner of the kingdom, if necessary, and brought up to answer for that old charge. Bear that in mind!"

And Squire Laverock strode from the inn.

He left the bookmaker grinding his teeth with rage. The blow had fallen suddenly, and all Mr. Green's plans were shattered, his projects scattered to the four winds. But there was no help for it. He was furious, but he had to obey. The next morning the village of Clavering knew him no more.

Squire Laverock drove away from the inn in a state of great satisfaction. He stopped at the school, and was shown to Mr. Gilbert's quarters. The squire was a well-known figure at Melthorpe. He was the most influential of the governors of the school, and he was known to be the friend of Mr. Gilbert, as well as of the doctor. In long-past days the squire and Dr. Talbot had been schoolfellows together, and their boyish friendship had lasted all their lives. When and where he had first met Mr. Gilbert was not known; the master of the Fifth was somewhat reticent concerning the past.

Squire Laverock tapped at the Form-master's door and went in. Mr. Gilbert was sitting alone in his study. His face was very dark and thoughtful. He gave the squire an inquiring glance.

"All's well!" said Laverock cheerily. "I have seen Mr. Green, and I have proved to his satisfaction that the safest thing for him to do is to hold his tongue, and to clear out of Clavering. He is going to-morrow."

Mr. Gilbert's face lightened.

"I am glad of it," he said quietly—"very glad. I have been thinking over it, and trying to nerve myself to face it out. But the nearer the disclosure comes the less I feel prepared to face it."

"Yet," said the squire thoughtfully, "I am certain you have little to fear. You were forgiven long ago."

"It is not that. I want to make him respect me, feel that I am worthy of confidence and regard. I want to prove that I have repented."

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"You have proved it. And he already respects you, he already esteems you. I think you are too exacting to yourself, my boy. You have nothing to fear."

"The time has been so short," said the other sadly. "It needs years of reparation to wipe out the black sin of the past."

"You *have made reparation," said Laverock. "I'll answer for it, my boy, that when Dr. Talbot knows the real identity of the master of the Fifth Form—"

He broke off abruptly. He turned quickly to the door, which he had not latched, and threw it open. Selby was standing there, with a slightly flushed face.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I was about to knock. I did not know that Mr. Gilbert had a visitor." And he walked away down the corridor.

The squire turned back into the room, frowning.

"Do you think he heard what I said, my boy?"

Mr. Gilbert's face was troubled.

"I fear so. I am afraid he listened. But it matters little."

But the squire's face was troubled as he left Melthorpe, and after he had gone Mr. Gilbert paced his study with wrinkled brow. He knew that Selby had heard, and he felt that something would come of it. He was right.

CHAPTER 11. Selby Speaks.

SELBY hurried away with his heart beating hard, his face flushed with excitement. He had heard little, but he had heard enough. The bookmaker had told him the truth. There was a secret in Mr. Gilbert's past—a secret that was known to the squire, who was the master's confederate in keeping it. There could be no further doubt now that he had heard their own words.

A "sin," Mr. Gilbert had said. What was it—what had he done? But whatever else was doubtful, one thing was clear. Mr. Gilbert was at Melthorpe under an assumed name, under a fictitious identity. There was no doubt whatever upon that point, and the prefect felt that he had the master at his mercy.

However plausible a tale Mr. Gilbert might tell, whatever explanation he could make, he could not escape from the fact that he was an impostor, that he had deceived the doctor and everybody else. Selby's heart beat faster.

This was the man who had preached to him, who had ridden the high horse, who had more than once made the prefect feel uncomfortably small and mean. This man—and he was a common cheat!

The prefect shut himself up in his room to think it out. He knew it now for a fact. Between what he had just heard and what the bookmaker had told him, he felt that he was acquainted with the whole story. Mr. Gilbert had certainly not been a reputable character in the past. It was a mystery how one of the governors of Melthorpe came to be his accomplice in an imposture. But there was no doubt about the fact. He was not what he seemed.

"I will expose him," said the prefect aloud. To his narrow, prejudiced mind that step appeared in the light of a duty. The man was an impostor. Whatever his motive might be, the truth ought to be told. Dr. Talbot had a right to know him in his true colours, and then to decide whether he should remain at Melthorpe. It was the prefect's duty to speak out.

Yet, at the same time, while he strove to think thus, Selby knew very well that it was his intense dislike of Mr. Gilbert that ruled his actions. But he would not admit it in so many words to himself.

"I will give him his choice," said the prefect to himself. "He shall leave Melthorpe, or the doctor shall know all. That is the utmost mercy I will have on him."

And when he heard the squire drive away, the prefect went to the Form-master's study. Mr. Gilbert's clear, strong voice bade him enter.

Selby entered, cool and self-possessed. There was something about Mr. Gilbert that usually made him feel ill at ease—the natural effect of a strong, manly character upon a nature that was niggling and petty. But now he felt master of the situation. This man, before whose steady glance his own had often dropped, was a cheat! There was a sense of exultation, of complacency, in Selby's breast.

"I expected you, Selby," said Mr. Gilbert quietly. "You have been unfortunate enough to again hear words that were not meant for your ears."

The prefect bit his lip. Then a wave of anger surged through him, that this man, whom he now knew in his true colours, should dare to lecture him.

"You are not the one to preach to me," he said, between his teeth. "What are you?"

"I am a master in this school, Selby, and entitled to re-

spect when I am addressed," said Mr. Gilbert sternly. "This is the second time you have forgotten yourself."

The prefect laughed sneeringly.

"I do not think you will be a master in this school long," he answered. "As for respect, I cannot consider that any is due to an impostor."

The Form-master drew a sharp breath.

"Selby!"

"What else are you? You are here under an assumed name. There is some disgraceful secret in your past which makes you afraid to have your name known. You have come here under an alias. You have deceived Dr. Talbot. You have deceived the whole school. And you talk to me of respect!"

There was a short, tense silence, and their glances met like rapiers. Something vaulting had come into Selby's manner. He felt more and more the master of the situation.

"You speak very bitterly, Selby," said the Form-master at last, and his tone was very quiet. "Are you sure you have your facts correctly?"

"I am sure! I have them from more sources than one. Do you venture to deny the truth of what I have said?"

"I deny nothing; yet I do not understand why you should take so keen a pleasure in unearthing matters to my discredit, in hunting me down like this."

Selby's eyes glittered.

"You have always been against me," he said. "You have been against me ever since you came to Melthorpe; now I am against you. One good turn deserves another, you know." And he gave a bitter laugh.

"You are mistaken. I have never been against you, as you term it. I have tried to do my duty to all; but you have a suspicious nature, Selby, and you suspect others of harbouring feelings which in reality exist only in your own breast."

The prefect ground his teeth.

"At all events," he said, "I have found you out, and your game here is up."

"Am I to understand by that that you intend to publish to the school this discovery that you have made?" asked Mr. Gilbert, with a calmness that puzzled Selby.

"Yes!" he answered sharply. "Can you ask me to hide it, to become your confederate?"

"It would be useless to ask, I presume; and I never felt less inclined to ask anything at your hands. You have, then, resolved?"

"Yes! Either you leave Melthorpe, or I shall expose you. You can take your choice."

"You are very kind."

"You brazen it out well!" said Selby scornfully. "You will look a little differently when the whole school knows you in your true colours."

"You have finished here," said Mr. Gilbert; "you need say no more. You have been very insolent—"

Selby laughed.

"Insolent! To you?"

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Gilbert. "I repeat, you have been insolent, but I shall not enter into that now. To-morrow morning I shall see Dr. Talbot, and make a full explanation to him, and it will be for him to decide whether I leave Melthorpe. Till then you will be silent."

"It is not for you to dictate."

"I repeat, you will be silent," said Mr. Gilbert, with an ominous look. "Can I depend on you or not?"

"Oh, I suppose I can allow that much!" said Selby, with an assumption of carelessness. "But I shall want to be satisfied that—"

"You shall be satisfied. Now go."

Selby walked out of the study. He had the best of it, he said to himself; yet he could not feel as if he had won a victory. Mr. Gilbert's manner was not that of a convicted cheat. Was it possible that there was something wrong somewhere, that he had jumped to conclusions too hastily? That uneasy doubt spoiled the prefect's sleep that night.

CHAPTER 12. The Son of the Doctor.

YOU read my note, sir?"

Dr. Talbot nodded as the master of the Fifth put the question, and made a gesture towards a chair. There were traces of strong emotion in the good old doctor's face.

"I have read it, Mr. Gilbert. I don't quite understand. You said that you had news to give me of my son."

"Yes, sir."

"I have had reason to believe that my son was dead."

"That was in a sense correct. He died—to his old life; he lives as a new man, and a better one."



Mr. Green rose slowly to a sitting posture and raised his fist threateningly as he saw the stalwart form of the Melthorpe master striding rapidly away. (See page 15.)

"He lives?" murmured Dr. Talbot. "He lives?" Mr. Gilbert sat down, with his back to the light. The doctor's lips were trembling.

"But how can you know this, Mr. Gilbert?" said Dr. Talbot. "How can you know anything of my poor Cyril? I do not understand."

"I will explain, sir, if you will be patient."

"Let me know all."

"After the robbery of which he was guilty——"

The doctor started.

"What, you know that?"

"I know all."

"Go on." There were tears in the doctor's eyes. "He was led and cajoled to that, Mr. Gilbert." He was in the hands of cunning and unscrupulous men, and he was far more sinned against than sinning. My poor lad! But go on."

"He left the country. Scapegrace, and worse, as he was, he had decency enough left to change his name. You had concealed your loss, hushed up the affair, and spared him. In his career as an adventurer he desired to spare you, and after he quitted Melthorpe he was known by another name. He was determined that Cyril Talbot should disappear, and he allowed people to believe that he was dead intentionally."

"I understand. Would that he had returned to me, had allowed me to know where he was, that I could help him. How did he live?"

"By any means that came to him," said Mr. Gilbert. "He had fallen by gaming and betting, and when he had to live by his wits it was to the racecourse that he turned. Under the new name he had taken he was known on foreign racecourses, and his associates were all sorts and conditions, mostly bad. The young man himself would irretrievably have gone to the bad, in spite of his inward longings to

reform, had not a friend found him and set him on the right path again."

"Heaven bless him, whoever he was!"

"This friend rescued him from his surroundings, gave him help, and, what was of more benefit to him, encouragement and hope. He helped him to realise his aspirations after a better and cleaner life. In a word, he saved him, and made a man of him again."

"Heaven bless him!"

"Then came a desire to Cyril's heart—a desire, I think, you will understand—to rehabilitate himself, to prove himself worthy of his father's forgiveness, worthy to resume his name, and return to you, sir. He resolved, by hard work and a steady, strict life, to prove his repentance, his reform. In this his dear friend aided him."

The doctor looked at Mr. Gilbert's face quickly, but the master's face was in the shadow.

"Who was this friend?" cried Dr. Talbot.

"Squire Laverock."

"My old schoolfellow!"

"Your friend, sir—and Cyril's. He desired the reconciliation. He agreed that the disclosure should not be made until Cyril had a right to ask for forgiveness. As an influential governor of Melthorpe College, it was in his power to help the young man in the plan he had formed."

The doctor started.

"The plan was this," resumed Mr. Gilbert, after a pause. "Years had elapsed. Cyril was older, and greatly changed. There was little fear of his being recognised by any who had formerly known him. You had intended him for the position of a Form-master here, and his training had been with a view to that end. It was easy for him to prepare for the position. Squire Laverock's influence contrived all, and, as the squire's protegee, few questions were asked him. He came to Melthorpe under a new name."

The doctor trembled.

"Mr. Gilbert, what are you saying?"

"For a year," said Mr. Gilbert steadily, "he has lived here trying to atone. The disclosure he had to make he wished to postpone, perhaps for years; but circumstances have occurred which render it necessary for him to speak out."

"Mr. Gilbert!"

The Form-master rose to his feet. The doctor also rose, his face white, his eyes shining.

"Father!"

"Heaven! Is it possible? Under my eyes, and I never knew!"

"You are glad to know?"

"Glad? Oh, my boy—my boy!"

The tears were running down the kind old face. The doctor put his hands upon the young man's shoulders and drew him nearer, and scanned his features.

"I never knew! Ah, I know you now, my son!"

CHAPTER 13.

The Winning Goal.

IT was a nine days' wonder at Melthorpe. Mr. Gilbert, the master of the Fifth, was Dr. Talbot's son!

Of the reasons why the young man had left home, few knew or suspected anything. There was a great deal of wonder, as a matter of course, and strange surmises as to why he should have chosen to return incognito, and take up a position as master in the school. Public curiosity was not satisfied upon these points.

The boys wondered and commented until other matters of nearer importance absorbed their attention, and the story of the master of the Fifth became an old one.

Selby's feelings when the disclosure was made cannot easily be described. He understood that, in his readiness to believe evil of the man he hated, he had made a blunder; and, instead of seeing Mr. Gilbert driven with ignominy from the school, he saw him in a position more honoured than before—as the son of the Principal.

And the prefect quaked in his shoes. He had been bitter, he had been insolent, he had been merciless, when he thought that power was in his hands.

It was now in the Form-master's power to pay him back with interest if he had chosen to do so, and Selby naturally did not look for much consideration. But, as usual, he misjudged his man.

Cyril Talbot—to give his correct name—had no intention of returning evil for evil, and he appeared to forget that Selby had ever wished to injure him.

The prefect could hardly believe at first that he was forgiven; but when there could no longer be any doubt, even his obdurate heart was touched, and remorse woke in his breast. And one evening, when some matter of business had brought him to the Form-master's study, he lingered after it was concluded, with a flush in his face.

The Form-master noticed him linger, and gave him a cheery smile.

"You have something more to say, Selby?" he asked genially.

"Yes, sir." The prefect paused, and then blurted out, with a scarlet face: "I—I want to apologise to you, sir."

"To me, Selby? For what?"

"For acting like a rotten cad towards you!" said Selby. "Yes, I know that's what I was. I tried to think I was doing right all the time, but I knew secretly that I was actuated by malice; and—and you could make me smart for it now, sir, if you chose, and you haven't. I—I am sorry I was ever against you, sir!"

The Form-master's face softened.

"I'm glad you've spoken out like this, Selby," he said. "I'm glad the misunderstanding between us is at an end, for that's all it was."

"It was worse on my side, sir; but it's ended now. I was a cad, but I'll try to do a bit better in the future, sir. And—and with regard to Clare, too, I was to blame." The prefect was evidently bent upon making a clean breast of it now that he had started. "But I'll put that right. I'm going to put my resignation in the hands of the committee."

The master of the Fifth dropped his hand upon the prefect's shoulder.

"Don't!" he said. "Before we had this talk, Selby, I should have considered that the most judicious thing you could do; but you have shown me that I, on my side, did not judge you fairly. Let me advise you. Speak frankly to Clare, as you have done to me, and retain your place in the eleven. We shall soon be meeting St. Mona's again, and every good player will be wanted to avenge our defeat away."

"I'll take your advice, sir."

The master of the Fifth held out his hand. Selby took it timidly, and the Form-master gave him a cordial grip. It was the burial of old animosities.

The prefect followed the Form-master's counsel, and Clare was quite willing to meet him half-way. When the day came to play St. Mona at home, the constitution of the school team had been somewhat altered, but Selby was in the front line with Clare. Redmayne kept his place as half, and had the satisfaction of seeing his chum Norroys in the half-back line. And as a couple of masters were playing in the Saints' eleven, Mr. Gilbert was included in the home team as centre-forward, Clare taking inside-left.

The great day arrived, welcomed with high hopes by the Melthorpians. The team were in fine fettle, eager to wipe out their late defeat. The ground was crowded, and in the pavilion were Dr. Talbot and Squire Laverock, both watching the master of the Fifth, handsome in the school colours, with eyes of pride.

"We shall pull it off to-day, sir!" said Clare confidently to the Form-master; and the latter nodded.

"I believe we shall, Clare."

Fortune favoured the Saints at the opening of the game, and in the first fifteen minutes St. Mona's were two up, a feat which was loudly cheered by their partisans on the ground.

But Melthorpe soon changed all that. Again and again the school forwards swept goalward, and once, twice, thrice the ball was slammed into the net by Selby, Clare, and then by the master of the Fifth.

The Melthorpians yelled for every goal, and the first half ended with the home team three to two.

In the second half the tussle was fierce and hard. The Saints made a desperate onslaught, and drove it well home; but the school goalie saved, and sent the ball out to Redmayne, who headed it to Clare, who was waiting. Away went Clare, dribbling finely, and passing in time to the master of the Fifth, who passed out to Selby, and the prefect sent the leather whizzing between the posts like a four-point-seven shell.

Four up!

No wonder the Melthorpians shouted.

Soon afterwards, however, the Saints claimed a corner, and a goal resulted from it. And still again the St. Mona's skipper slammed the leather in, and within ten minutes of time the score was equal.

The Melthorpe men lined up again with the determination that it should not end in a draw. And as the Saints had precisely the same intention, the tussle was a hard and obstinately-contested one.

Eagerly the crowd watched the varying fortunes of the teams, but as time drew nearer it seemed that the home players were getting the best of it. Right up to the mouth of the Saints' goal the struggle surged, and twice the custodian was called upon to save.

Anxious now were the Melthorpe faces. Squire Laverock had one eye on the game and the other on his watch. Again a whizzing shot, and again the goalie sent it out. Out it came, but it found a man ready, and from a forward's head it shot back into the goal, and before the goalie knew that it was coming it was climbing up the net. A roar of cheering greeted the winning goal.

"Goal—goal!"

"Well done, sir! Goal—goal!"

The whistle went. The players streamed off the field, fagged by a gruelling game, and a crowd of enthusiastic Melthorpians surrounded the master of the Fifth, who had kicked the winning goal for his side, and carried him shoulder high to the pavilion.

And here we take our leave of the boys of Melthorpe and the master of the Fifth.

THE END.

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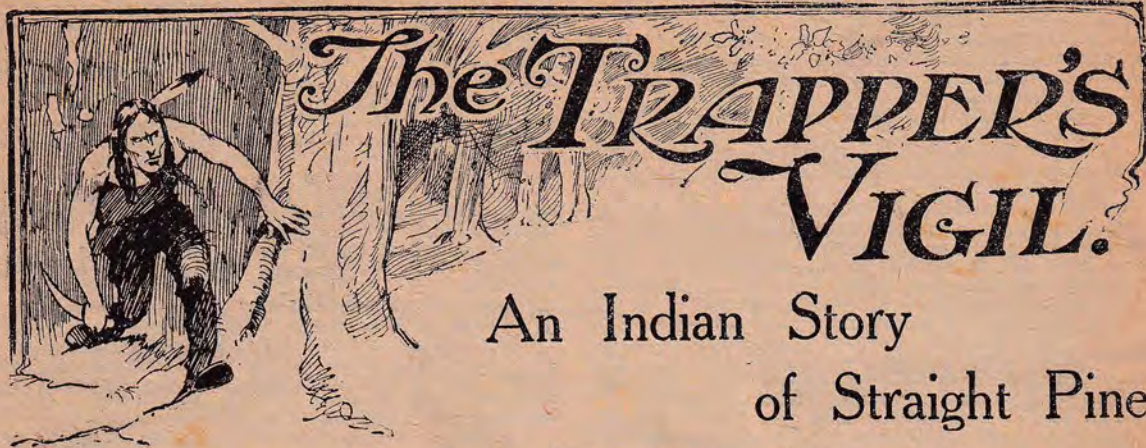
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CHAPTER 1.

The White Man's Foot—The Mysterious Trail.

"WHAT on 'arth do you make o' that, Dick? Look here—
—and here! Did you ever see anything like it?"
—And the speaker, Nat Wild, trapper and frontiersman, leaned upon the butt-end of his rifle and stared around him with an expression of blank amazement upon his bronzed countenance.

Dick Wild, to judge by his looks, shared to the full the astonishment of his elder brother; yet anyone not bred to forest life would probably have wondered what there was to make such a fuss over in a patch of trampled moss and the broken twigs of a bramble-bush.

But to Dick and Nat Wild the trampled moss and broken twigs were part of a language which they read as easily as the average man reads an open book—the language of the forest and the trail. From the signs around them they could reconstruct something, at least, of the scene that had taken place upon the spot on which they were standing, and the more they puzzled over these signs the more eccentric appeared the movements of the man upon whose trail they had unexpectedly stumbled in the depths of the primeval forest of the Far North-West.

To begin with, a casual glance was enough to show the trapper and his brother that the footprints which caused them so much surprise were the marks not of a moccasin, but of the ordinary leather boot of civilised regions, and a leather boot was as much of a rarity in those remote wilds as a moccasin would be in the paved streets of a European town.

Further, the wearer of the boots appeared to have been walking—or, rather, leaping—over the ground in a truly extraordinary fashion. On one patch of moss he had apparently careered round and round in a series of circles, not walking, but running, since the prints of his toes were deeply indented, while his heels had barely touched the ground. Thence he had seemingly taken a spring which had landed him in the midst of a little thicket of brambles, upon whose branches he had left several fragments of grey cloth from his garments. And, having extricated himself from the thorns, he must have fallen into a kneeling attitude on a piece of damp ground, since the marks made by his hands, his knees, and the points of his boots were plainly visible on the edge of a little pool of rain-water.

"What on 'arth's the meaning of it all?" Nat Wild repeated, in utter bewilderment, as he bent over the trampled earth. "If you'd asked me five minutes ago, I'd ha' bet you ten thousand dollars to a red cent that there wasn't a pair o' boots within five hundred miles of us. And the fellow's wearing town boots, too! Look at this bit o' cloth he's left hanging on the thorn-bush. Tell you what, Dick, he must be a lunatic—an escaped lunatic, who has bolted from somewhere down East and managed to wander away into the backwoods. Though, if that's the case, it beats me to think how he's lived, for he must ha' been wandering about for weeks."

Dick shook his head, just as much mystified as his elder brother. A white man's trail was the last thing they had expected to come across in the lonely forest region where, for the last two or three weeks, they had been engaged in trapping the fur-bearing animals, whose skins they intended to sell later on at one of the frontier stations.

In the ordinary course of things they would have remained

some time longer in the district; but early in the morning they had been joined by their Delaware friend, Straight Pine, who had expressly sought them out in order to warn them that a tribe of Hurons was reported to be on the war-path in their neighbourhood, and that it was believed that more than one white trapper had already fallen a victim to their scalping-knives. Under the circumstances, an immediate retreat to more civilised regions had been decided upon; and, accordingly, having hidden the stock of skins, whose weight would have impeded the swiftness of their march, the little party of three had set out for Fort Brownlow, the nearest trading-station—a journey of fully two hundred miles. So far they had come across no sign of the hostile Hurons, through whose country they were passing; but that did not prevent them from taking the utmost pains to conceal their movements, and, when possible, to cover up their trail.

The discovery of the footprints which had so much astonished Dick Wild and his brother took place towards evening, when, after a long day's march, the little party had halted for rest and food. The supply of provisions they had brought with them from their last halting-place was a very small one, and it was in order to enable Straight Pine to add to it that the halt had been made earlier than usual. Bidding his companions kindle a fire of dry sticks beside a little streamlet, the Delaware had crept off into the woods, with the object of bringing down with an arrow either a bird or a deer—a rifle he dared not use, lest its report should reach the ears of the Hurons, and give them a clue to his whereabouts. It was just after he had vanished that Dick, while hunting around for dry twigs, had come across the mysterious trail which had aroused his astonishment and curiosity.

It was not to be wondered at that Nat Wild came to the conclusion that such a trail could only have been left by a lunatic, for who but a lunatic, he argued, would run round and round in a circle, and then make a flying leap into the midst of a thorn-bush? Yet that that was what the stranger had done his tracks proved clearly enough. Further, to leave such plain traces of his movements in the midst of the Huron country was, in the trapper's eyes, an act of madness in itself.

"Well," he said at last, after another puzzled survey of the footprints, "whoever the fellow is, we can soon catch him up, if we want to. The trail's fresh enough; it don't look to me more nor an hour old."

"Well, then," Dick broke in eagerly, "I'll go on after him and catch him up before it gets dark—I can't miss him—and you can stay here and let Straight Pine know where I've gone. Whoever the man is, he evidently doesn't know that he's in danger, and we ought to warn him."

Nat Wild grunted disapprovingly.

"Steady on, lad," he said. "I'm not sure that I'm altogether so keen on having the fellow's company. After all, we've got our own scalps to consider, as well as his, and a lunatic who goes blundering about leaving a trail like an elephant's behind him wherever he turns ain't a particularly safe companion when there may be a score of redskins within a mile of you on the look-out for scalps."

"You don't mean it, Nat?" Dick retorted, his face flushing. "You don't mean that you'd leave one of your own colour to fall into the hands of the Hurons without giving him a word of warning?"

Nat shrugged his shoulders.

"I tell you the man is a lunatic," he replied obstinately.

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"No one but a lunatic would go plunging about in the backwoods in hobnail boots and a cloth suit. And it ain't no go giving words of warning to lunatics; and it'll be no joke if we have to act as keepers to a madman and give the Hurons the slip at the same time."

Before Dick could open his mouth to reply he heard a light footstep behind him, and Straight Pine emerged from the gloom of the forest, carrying a newly-slain bustard which his arrow had transfixed.

"Ask the Delaware what he thinks of the business," Nat said, with another shrug. "If he's willing to follow up the trail, why, you'll be two to one, and I'll give in; but, as far as I'm concerned, I'd rather do without the company of the chap that's left it."

With his usual impassive expression, the Delaware listened to the trapper's explanation, and himself examined the mysterious trail; and, in response to Nat's question, "What do you think of it, Delaware?" he replied quietly:

"It may be that No Scalp is right, and that the footprints are those of one whom the Great Manitou has afflicted so that he knows not what he is doing; but it may also be that he is some white man wandering hither in ignorance of the danger that surrounds him. The heart of Straight Pine tells him that the Young Horse is right, and that we should follow the trail, and warn the man of his danger from the Hurons."

"All right," Nat grunted; "have your way, and if the Hurons get hold of us don't blame me. You can go and look for the fellow, if you like while I cook the bird."

And picking up the bustard, he began to pluck it; while Straight Pine and his brother, without another word, set out on their search.

Though the sun was just dipping below the horizon, the light was still good enough to enable them to follow the trail without difficulty—indeed, it would have been difficult for even the most inexperienced eyes to miss seeing the path that the stranger had trodden through the forest. Nat's comparison of his movements to the trampling of an elephant was hardly an exaggerated one, for he appeared to have been guided on the journey by the principle of doing as much damage as possible both to himself and the surrounding vegetation. Occasionally he seemed to have walked straight ahead for a few yards, but for the most part his progress must have consisted of a series of darts and dashes from side to side.

Now a bush showed that he had literally trampled and torn his way through it; again, on the edge of a forest pool, the mud revealed his footprints up to a considerable depth, and the sedge was stirred where he had waded about in it; while once the Delaware stopped and pointed to a tree up which the stranger had certainly climbed, since the bark was scored by the marks of his feet, and one of the lower branches had broken beneath his weight. The ground beneath it bore witness to his tumble; but evidently he had not been seriously hurt, for he had picked himself up and continued his progress in the same erratic fashion as before.

By this time Dick's curiosity was excited to the utmost; and though the Delaware, after the custom of his race, was careful not to betray any emotion, he was quite as bewildered as his companion. Both pressed eagerly onwards, anxious to come up with the stranger before darkness should put an end to the search; but the shadows were beginning to fall thickly before they actually came across him.

The first sign that they had of his presence came when the hunt had lasted a full hour. The Delaware, who was leading, halted suddenly and laid his hand on the boy's shoulder; and Dick, knowing that he had heard something, listened with all his ears, and as he did so the wind bore towards him the refrain of "Rule Britannia," whistled loudly and shrilly.

"The idiot!" he muttered beneath his breath.

With a muttered "Ugh!" Straight Pine again moved forward in the direction of the sound, and a couple of minutes later again halted, and, with Dick by his side, stood gazing anxiously at the scene before him.

CHAPTER 2.

The Beetle-Hunter—Professor Lovejoy Refuses to be Frightened—Straight Pine Takes Strong Measures.

STRAIGHT PINE and Dick Wild had come to a halt on the edge of a little glade, through which a stream wound its way, rippling over a pebbly bottom. On a stretch of clear ground on the edge of the stream a fire had been lit, and the flames made a patch of light amid the growing darkness.

Seated in front of the fire was the stranger upon whose traces they had been following for the last few hours, and as Dick saw him he could scarcely suppress a gasp of surprise, so utterly unlike was he to the ordinary traveller in the forests of the North-West.

Nothing more opposite to the woodsman or the trapper could be imagined than this elderly man, whose bald forehead and

gold-rimmed spectacles shone in the red glow of the fire as he bent over a tin box upon his knees, and surveyed its contents with evident interest. His rather stooping figure was clad in a grey suit, very much the worse for wear, and a grey felt hat lay on the ground at his side, amongst a miscellaneous collection of various articles, including two or three small tin boxes and glass bottles, a large green umbrella, a macintosh, a fishing-rod, a blanket, and a saucepan.

So engaged was the stranger in his occupation that he did not look up until Dick and Straight Pine had emerged from the shelter of the trees into the circle of light cast by the fire. Then, with a start, he ceased to whistle, and raised his eyes to his unexpected visitors.

"Ah, good-evening!" he said, as he raised his eyes, without appearing either surprised or disconcerted. "A fine night, is it not—a beautiful night?"

An astonished "Ugh!" was the only reply of the Delaware to this polite greeting. It was Dick who asked abruptly:

"I say, who are you, and what are you doing here?"

"Who am I?" the stranger replied mildly. "My name is Lovejoy, young man—Simon Lovejoy, and I am a professor of natural history at the university of Oxbridge, England."

"Professor of natural history at the university of Oxbridge, England," Dick repeated, in amazement. "But what on earth are you doing here, then?"

Far from appearing annoyed at the blunt question, Professor Lovejoy smiled with an air of amiable self-importance as he replied:

"I am spending a six months' holiday, my young friend, in adding, I hope, to mankind's store of knowledge. There is as yet no complete collection in existence of the coleoptera of North America, and I am not without hopes that the results of my wanderings will be a number of specimens as yet entirely unknown to entomologists."

Dick's eyes opened as widely as his mouth. Professor Lovejoy's long words were Greek to him, and he was only partially enlightened as to their meaning when his new acquaintance lifted up a small glass bottle half filled with powder, upon which were resting the corpses of some large green beetles.

"Beetles!" the boy exclaimed. "You mean you are hunting for beetles?"

"Yes, beetles—coleoptera," the scientist nodded. "Entomology is the branch of natural history which has always interested me the most, and I am devoting my holiday to the study of it."

Dick gave a gasp. So that was the meaning of the naturalist's extraordinary movements—his excursion into the muddy pond, his attempt to scale the tree, his dashes into the various bushes. Armed with nothing more formidable than a green umbrella, he was calmly occupied in investigating the insect life of the Huron country—while the Hurons themselves, it might be, only a few miles off, were hunting for scalps as indefatigably as he was hunting for beetles.

The Delaware, meanwhile, with a look of grave astonishment on his features, was scanning from head to foot this strange specimen of a white man. As the professor ceased speaking he opened his lips for the first time. Pointing, with a gesture of contempt, to the bottle which contained the beetles, he asked:

"Does my white brother think that his life is of less value than those insects? When his scalp is hanging at the belt of a Huron warrior what good will it do him that he has slain many beetles and placed their bodies in little bottles?"

The professor stared at the speaker through his gold-rimmed spectacles.

"I'm afraid I don't understand," he began apologetically.

"He means," Dick explained bluntly, "that you are doing your best to throw away your life. Perhaps you don't know it, but the Hurons are on the war-path; and that means that if they come across your track—you leave a pretty plain one behind you—your life wouldn't be worth a moment's purchase."

If Dick had expected to terrify Professor Simon Lovejoy by his announcement, he was much mistaken, the naturalist merely shook his head with a kindly smile.

"Hurons?" he said. "That means Indians, doesn't it? I'm afraid you are trying to frighten me. Why should the Hurons wish to injure me? I shall not try to injure them, and they surely can have no objection to my increasing the number of my specimens?"

"If they come across you they won't wait to talk to you about your specimens," Dick retorted. "The chances are that they'll put a bullet into you at sight and look at your specimens after."

"But, my dear young man," the professor objected, with the mild obstinacy that was one of his chief characteristics, "I feel quite sure that you are mistaken. A harmless traveller like myself, engaged simply in the pursuit of science, must surely be safe from molestation. At any rate, I shall not believe the contrary until I have proof."

"And by the time you have proof your scalp will be hanging at a redskin's belt!" Dick retorted, beginning to get really angry at the other's folly. "Look here, Mr. Lovejoy, or professor, or whatever you call yourself, this is your first visit to the backwoods, isn't it?"

"Certainly."

"Well, it isn't our first visit, and I guess we know a good deal more about the backwoods and the redskins that live in them than you do. And I give you my word that you've not often been in greater danger of sudden death than you're standing in this minute."

The professor looked round him doubtfully; then the peaceful appearance of the scene—the towering trees, and the little streamlet rippling through the glade, seemed to have a reassuring effect on him, for he replied tranquilly:

"I really think, my young friend, that you are exaggerating. I have been nearly a fortnight in the woods without being molested in any way, and if there are any savages about, I am sure that, when they understand that my intentions are peaceful, they will not try to disturb me. I have nothing of value with me—nothing, at least, which would appeal to the greed of the untutored savage, though, to the naturalist, my specimens are beyond price. My specimen-tins and bottles, a little store of dried meat, and the fishing-rod with which I supply my daily wants, are really all the property I have with me, except my macintosh and umbrella."

Uncertain whether to burst out laughing or be angry, Dick stood staring at the extraordinary being who proposed to encounter a tribe of redskins on the war-path with no more formidable weapons than a macintosh and an umbrella; and then, with a look of comical despair, he turned to the Delaware, who had stood silently listening to the conversation.

"What on earth are we to do with him, Straight Pine?" he asked, lowering his voice so that it should not reach the ears of the naturalist. "If we don't get him away from here, he'll lose his scalp to a certainty; but it seems he won't come."

"The ways of the white man are often strange," the Delaware replied gravely, "but never till now has Straight Pine met a man, white or red, to whom his life was of less account than a crawling insect's. All that the Eye of Glass has said Straight Pine has not understood; but he has understood that the Eye of Glass wanders through the forest seeking for beetles that he may slay them and put them in boxes. Also he has understood that the Eye of Glass has a great reverence for the slain beetles and would not willingly be parted from them. Has Straight Pine guessed aright?"

Dick Wild nodded.

"Whether he wills it or not," the Delaware went on, "the Eye of Glass must come with us, since only with our help can he save his scalp from hanging at the girdle of a Huron. And, since his knowledge of the forest is but as the knowledge of a child, it is as a child that Straight Pine will treat him."

"What do you mean to do, then?"

For answer, Straight Pine strode up to the naturalist, who was once more bending with a satisfied smile over the contents of the tin box—his precious specimens. Without a word the Delaware calmly snatched the box from Professor Lovejoy's hands, and then, before the astonished professor realised what he was about, he had swooped down upon the remaining bottles and boxes, and swept them into a large knapsack, which the naturalist had left lying on the ground. This he calmly swung over his shoulder, and, turning on his heel, began to stride slowly towards the forest, Dick, a broad smile upon his face, following closely upon his heels.

For a moment, with his mouth wide open, the professor sat gazing at the Delaware's movements; then, as he realised that his beloved specimens were actually being carried off under his very nose, he scrambled to his feet with a howl that would have been alarming if it had not been so irresistibly comical.

"Hi," he shouted, "what are you doing with my specimens, you scoundrel? Hand them over at once! Stop thief—stop thief! Police!"

The idea of calling on the police in the depths of a primeval forest appealed to Dick Wild's sense of humour, and he burst out laughing. Not so the professor, however, whose bald head reddened with fury, and who seemed quite prepared to do battle with the Delaware for his treasure.

"You unmitigated scoundrel!" he went on, dancing about from one foot to the other, and shaking his fist in Straight Pine's impassive face. "Put down my specimens, do you hear?"

Silent and unmoved, the Delaware continued to gaze steadfastly at the enraged naturalist, merely keeping a tight hold upon the knapsack, while the professor continued to caper around him, shaking his fists and showering abuse on him. Finding at last that neither words nor gestures had any effect, he turned to Dick, who, leaning against a tree, was watching the scene with a broad grin on his face.

"Young man," he gasped furiously, "as this unprincipled savage does not appear to understand what I have said, will you kindly make it clear to him that the theft of my specimens is a criminal offence, and that as soon as I return to civilised parts, I shall put the law in motion against him? Please make that clear to him."

"I am afraid," Dick returned, stifling his laughter, "that it isn't any good talking to Straight Pine, professor. He understands you well enough; your beetles and things are safe enough with him, and he'll give 'em all back to you when we get to Fort Brownlow—if ever we do get there, that is to say."

"But I have no intention of going to Fort Brownlow!" Professor Lovejoy returned angrily.

"That's just it," Dick returned; "you don't intend to go there and Straight Pine intends that you shall."

"Yes," Straight Pine interposed decidedly, "the Eye of Glass shall receive back his insect boxes if he journeys with Straight Pine to Fort Brownlow; if he does not, Straight Pine will crush the insects with his foot and hurl the boxes into the river. Also, if he decides to stay in the forest, the Eye of Glass will lose not only his insects but his scalp."

"Scalp? Nonsense!" the enraged professor snarled.

"Let the Eye of Glass choose," was the calm reply.

"Straight Pine returns to his own camp."

And, turning his back on the infuriated naturalist, the Delaware once more began to stalk away. If Professor Lovejoy had not been a man of peace it is probable that he would have tried to regain possession of his treasures by main force; but, angry as he was, he did not feel capable of tackling so formidable an antagonist as the tall, athletic Delaware, armed as he was with rifle and tomahawk. For a moment he stood gazing uncertainly after the Indian's tall figure; then the thought that his treasured specimens were about to vanish from his sight was too much for him, and, shouting to Straight Pine to stop, he began to gather up his scattered belongings—his blanket, fishing-rod, and umbrella, and the various odds-and-ends with which he had been travelling through the wilderness. Choking with laughter, Dick assisted him to get his luggage together and strap it inside the blanket; and, hoisting his pack upon his shoulder, the naturalist sullenly followed his two captors into the forest.

CHAPTER 3.

Nat Wild's Astonishment—The Trapper's Night Watch—A Shot in the Dark.

IT was nearly an hour later when Nat Wild, who had begun to be rather uneasy at the prolonged absence of his brother and the Delaware, looked up with a start of astonishment as his eyes lighted on the strange figure that had followed Dick and Straight Pine into the circle of light cast by the little camp-fire. And certainly such a figure as Professor Simon Lovejoy cut that evening is not often to be seen in the forests of the Far West, where spectacles and macintoshes are not familiar objects.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" was Nat's exclamation. "What in thunder have you got there, Delaware? A wandering lunatic—and dressed in a macintosh and umbrella, as I'm a living sinner!"

"I'm not a lunatic!" Professor Lovejoy interrupted him angrily. "I am an entomologist!"

"A what?"

"An entomologist."

"An' what's that?"

"It means a beetle-hunter, in plain English," Dick explained.

"A beetle-hunter!" Nat interrupted, looking his extraordinary visitor up and down. "So you are a beetle-hunter, are you? I never met anyone of that trade before. And what do you do with the beetles when you've hunted 'em—eat 'em?"

"Certainly not!" was the horrified reply. "Eat them—ugh! They are specimens—rare specimens for a museum."

"A museum," Nat said thoughtfully. "I believe I see'd one once when I was a youngster in one of the cities down East. I think 'twas called a museum—a big stone building with stuffed birds and beasts standing round the walls and staring at you with their glass eyes, and butterflies and beetles with pins stuck through 'em in a lot of glass cases. That's a museum, isn't it? Well, it's a mighty dull place, to my way of thinking. Folks as is partial to beetles can find plenty of 'em walking about in the grass any day. Then, what do they want to stick pins in 'em for, and keep 'em in a glass case?"

"You don't understand," the professor explained. "I am not hunting beetles in general; I am looking for rare specimens."

"H'm!" grunted Nat. "There's no accounting for some folks' tastes. If you ask me, I'd just as soon that all beetles

were ~~new~~ specimens—they're plaguey insects for running over your face when you're asleep. I nearly swallowed one that had gone creeping into my mouth the other night. Hope you ain't brought a supply of creepers with you."

"Straight Pine has the beetles of the Eye of Glass," the Delaware said calmly, seating himself by the camp-fire. "He will keep them until the Eye of Glass is within the walls of Fort Brownlow. Let the Eye of Glass sit and eat."

Drawing his brother aside, Dick recounted to him what had passed between himself, the Delaware, and the naturalist, including Straight Pine's stratagem for inducing Professor Lovejoy to set out for Fort Brownlow. Nat opened his eyes widely.

"Well, of all the poor silly creatures," he remarked, contemptuously eyeing the professor, who had seated himself sulkily by the fire—"of all the poor silly creatures to be wandering about the Huron country by himself! How the idjit hasn't come to grief already is what beats me altogether! Supposing he'd met a bear, what'd he ha' done—hit it on the nose with his green umbrella, or tried to stick a pin in it for his blessed museum? Don't believe the Hurons 'ud hurt him, don't he? Why, the creetur's nothing but a grown-up baby!"

"Tell you what, Dick," he went on gloomily, "it ain't no joke being saddled with him for the march. With those boots of his he'll leave a trail like a buffalo; and if we do come across the Hurons, a nice lot of use he'll be in a tight place. It'll take us all our time to keep him from losing that grey scalp of his. I wish to goodness we'd never stumbled across his blessed trail. Still, as the Delaware's bent on taking care of the creetur, I suppose we'll have to drag him along with us; but, as far as I'm concerned, I ain't sure that a beetle-hunting lunatic like that is worth the trouble of saving."

Dick knew that his brother must have his grumble, and made no rejoinder; and, little as he desired to leave the professor to his fate in a country swarming with hostile Indians, he realised that Nat's fears were not without a real foundation in fact. The presence of the professor would greatly increase the danger of discovery by the Hurons—there was no doubt about that. It was not only his blundering ignorance of woodcraft; his reckless disbelief in the danger that surrounded them was a danger in itself. However, it was clearly impossible to leave the naturalist to the fate that would certainly overtake him if he were allowed to roam any longer at his own sweet will; they must simply treat him as a naughty child, and drag him along with them somehow or another.

Professor Lovejoy, meanwhile, was becoming somewhat resigned to his captivity. Angry as he had been at Straight Pine's taking possession of his precious specimens, he was a thoroughly good-natured old fellow in the main, and a few slices off the breast of the bustard, followed by a pipe, helped to restore him to a better frame of mind; so that before he had finished his supper he was chatting quite amiably with his newly-made acquaintances. In vain, however, did the latter attempt to convince him of the reality of the danger by which he was surrounded; on that point Professor Lovejoy was obstinate.

"Indians, scalps—nonsense!" he grunted. "I'm not to be taken in by travellers' tales of that kind. You think it's a joke to try and frighten me—well, you have your joke, I suppose, but you won't have the satisfaction of thinking I'm alarmed by it. Stories about scalping are all very well for children, but they won't do for me."

It was useless to argue with him further; he met all their assurances with a bland smile, and a knowing shake of the head. And, still quite convinced that he was right, he at last rolled himself up in his blanket, and composed himself comfortably to sleep. Dick and the Delaware soon followed suit; Nat, to whom was allotted the first watch of the night, sitting motionless beside his sleeping companions, with his ears on the alert for the slightest sound. His rifle across his knees, the trapper sat silent as a statue, but with every sense on the alert; not the rustling of a leaf escaped his keen ears, and his eyes ceaselessly scanned the gloom of the forest.

More than an hour went by, and no sound broke the silence beyond the sighing of the trees, and now and again the crackle of the still glowing embers of the fire, which had been carefully fenced round with bushes lest its reflection should meet the eye of a prowling Huron. The Delaware was sleeping with his head pillowed upon the naturalist's knapsack; he had no intention of allowing the professor to take possession of his treasured specimens during his sleep. With his back placed against the trunk of a tree, Nat himself was completely enveloped in the thick shadow cast by the leafy branches above him, and not the sharpest eye could have detected his presence at the distance of two or three yards.

Suddenly, though he did not move by so much as a hair's

breadth, a thrill ran through him from head to foot, and the muscles of his hands involuntarily tightened their grip upon his rifle, while his eyes ceased to rove restlessly from side to side, and remained fixed in a steadfast, steely glare upon the patch of shadow cast by a bush about five or six yards away from him. Was it only his fancy, or had that shadow moved in a way that the mere swaying of the bush in the breeze did not seem to warrant?

Two minutes—five minutes went by, and still Nat Wild sat like a statue with his eyes fixed immovably upon the patch of shadow. And he had almost come to the conclusion that his eyesight had played him a trick, when once again the black patch moved, and grew longer. There could no longer be any doubt about it; something was crawling stealthily from under the bush towards the three sleeping figures outstretched upon the ground, and what that something was Nat Wild could guess only too well. It was no beast of the forest that was creeping nearer to fall upon its prey in so cautious a fashion; it was a Huron brave, crawling over the ground like a snake, bent upon adding to the string of scalps that hung at his belt. No doubt the blackness of the shadow in which he was engulfed had concealed the watching trapper even from his keen eyes; and as, knife in hand, he gradually neared his intended victims, he imagined that they were about to fall an easy prey to him.

Silently and inch by inch Nat Wild lifted his rifle to his shoulder; while inch by inch the shadow crept forward until it was less than a couple of yards from the nearest sleeping man, who happened to be Professor Simon Lovejoy, snugly wrapped in his blanket, and dreaming of anything but danger. And at last the shape of the shadow changed suddenly; a long black arm shot up and out, and, in the light from the dying embers, the trapper's eyes caught the glimmer of upraised steel—and the trigger of his rifle clicked back.

The sound reached the ears of the creeping Huron, and the shadow shrank back—but too late. The report of a rifle rang out, and brought the sleepers to their feet, and following on the report came a yell of rage and pain, and then the sound of hurried footsteps breaking down the bushes in flight.

"Hang it all, I've missed him!" Nat cried disappointedly. "I thought I should have done for the varmint sure and sartin, but the light was so bad I couldn't make out nothing but his arm with the knife in it. 'Twas a Huron trying for your scalps as you slept."

Straight Pine nodded as he kindled a dry branch of pine-wood at the dying embers.

"Straight Pine guessed as much," he said. "But No Scalp is mistaken when he says the Huron was not hit. Had he not been hit he would not have cried aloud, but slipped away into the darkness as silently as he came. And see, here is blood upon the ground—much blood! The Huron was hit, though it may be not in a vital part, since he had strength enough to take to flight."

"Let's follow him, then!" Dick cried eagerly, lighting another torch. "We can track him easily enough—see, there is blood at every footmark!"

The Delaware shook his head.

"Again is the Young Horse too rash," he said reprovingly. "Even though the man was wounded and lost much blood, he may yet have the strength to travel far towards the camp of his tribe. To find his trail we should have to carry torches through the forest; and their light might bring fifty foes upon us instead of one. Nor do we know that yonder snake of the Hurons was alone. There may have been others with him creeping upon the camp upon all sides. No Scalp's rifle has caused them to flee silently; but if we sought for the trail with torches they would follow us, and cut us off one by one. Let the Young Horse think of these things before he acts rashly."

"I don't think that there's much likelihood of their coming back to-night," Nat said, as he reloaded the empty barrel of his weapon. "They'll know we are awake and ready for them now; and there are few redskins who will attack unless they think they can take their enemies unprepared."

The Delaware nodded.

"No Scalp is right," he said. "They will not come again this night; but later they will come. The Hurons are very patient, and do not turn aside from the trail of their prey for one failure. Now that they have found us they will hang on our footsteps to the very gates of Fort Brownlow."

"You're right there, Delaware," Nat agreed grimly. "Well," he went on, turning to the professor, who, still wrapped in his blanket, was blinking with the look of a surprised owl—"well, and what do you say now? Does your scalp still feel as tight on your head as it did? I can tell you that when I put a bullet into that crawling snake he wasn't much more than a yard away from you."

The professor smiled cheerfully.

"Now, you really mustn't try to frighten me too much," he

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IN "PLUCK." P.

said amiably. "There is such a thing as carrying a joke too far. I am a very light sleeper, and if anyone had really been moving about in the bushes I should have heard him at once, I assure you. Please don't disturb me with any more of your little jests. An unbroken night's rest is an absolute necessity to me."

And, tucking his blanket round him, he once more settled himself comfortably on the ground and closed his eyes.

"By gum," Nat ejaculated under his breath, "the creature is a born idjit! It 'ud ha' served him right if I'd let the snake

"Because," Nat retorted angrily, "we aren't going to crawl now. We're making for Fort Brownlow as hard as we can pelt."

"Let the Eye of Glass have his way," Straight Pine interposed quietly. "When he is tired he will lay aside his burden of his own free will."

The Delaware's prophecy soon proved correct. For a little while, Professor Lovejoy, umbrella in one hand and fishing-rod in the other, puffed and panted along manfully in the rear of the trapper, sticking to his luggage. But before long he dis-



"Hi!" shouted the professor, "what are you doing with my specimens, you scoundrel? Hand them over at once! Stop thief! Stop thief! Police!" (See page 21.)

of a Huron take his silly scalp from him. But 'tain't no good argufying with him; he'll never believe he ain't as safe here as in London till he's dead and done for."

CHAPTER 4.

The March—On the Shores of the Lake—The Enemy Ahead.

AS Nat and the Delaware had expected, the rest of the night passed without any further attempt at hostilities on the part of the Hurons. Nevertheless, as may be imagined, a sharp watch was kept up until dawn in the little camp.

With the earliest morning, and after partaking of a hasty breakfast, the party were afoot. Three of them—Dick, Nat, and Straight Pine—were in light marching order, carrying only their rifles and a small provision of food for the journey. Professor Lovejoy, however, was laden like a packhorse. The carious odds-and-ends that he had brought with him from civilisation were strapped in an unwieldy bundle and hoisted upon his back, and it was in vain that Dick and Nat endeavoured to persuade him to leave at least three-quarters of the load behind. The naturalist was obstinate. He had managed all right so far, he said, why should he not do the same for the future?

covered that the rapid pace at which his companions were hurrying him forward was a very different thing from his usual gentle saunter. Soon the perspiration was pouring down his face in streams, and before the night's camping-place was a couple of miles behind him he had slipped the great bundle from his shoulders and left the greater part of it, including the heavy blanket, leaning against the trunk of a fir-tree. But even when he was thus lightened of his load he found it a difficult task to keep up with easy, swinging gait of the other members of the party, and more than once he entreated them to halt and rest. Once, indeed, he angrily threw himself down on a bank of moss, declaring that he could go no further; but something in the threatening looks of the Delaware, as the latter hauled him to his feet, and sternly bade him proceed, induced him to alter his mind; and, grumbling to himself and mopping his damp forehead, he once more fell into line with his companions.

Convinced as they were that the Hurons were hanging on their trail till nightfall should again give them a favourable opportunity of attack, the Delaware and his two friends were eager only to push forward.

By exerting the utmost speed they hoped to reach that evening the banks of a small lake, where Straight Pine, on his journey to warn Dick and his brother of their danger, had concealed a canoe capable of holding all the members of the party.

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By taking to this canoe it would be possible to perform a stage of their journey by water, if the night were sufficiently dark to conceal them from watchers on the bank.

After the lessons the Hurons had received on the previous night the Delaware did not anticipate an attack in broad daylight. The redskins always prefers to make his stealthy assault under cover of darkness, and the ill-success of their first attempt would have convinced the Hurons that the enemies with whom they had to do were not to be despised. All the same, Straight Pine, who brought up the rear of the party, kept a keen look-out throughout the day, but without catching sight of anything that betokened the presence of a lurking enemy.

If it had not been for the presence of Professor Lovejoy the little party would have reached the shores of the lake well before sundown; but the naturalist, during the latter part of the journey, was almost dropping from sheer fatigue, and his slowness delayed them sorely. Groaning at every step he took, he only dragged himself along from fear of the Delaware, who had more than once assisted his lagging feet with a smart blow from the butt-end of his rifle. Cruel as the action seemed, it was necessary in the naturalist's own interest. Had he fallen by the way his scalp would have infallibly have adorned the belt of a Huron brave almost as soon as his companions were out of sight.

This, however, the naturalist still obstinately refused to believe. His experience of redskins was confined to Straight Pine himself, and to some few allies of the white men with whom he had come in contact on his journey west, and so far Straight Pine was the most awe-inspiring member of the race he had met. He was quite sincere in his belief that the tales he had been told of the red men's ferocity were only fit to frighten children with, and as the day drew on, and he became more and more exhausted, he grew angrier and angrier at the cruel practical joke which he believed was being played upon him.

"Aren't you ever going to let me stop?" he exclaimed despairingly. "My feet—oh, my poor feet!"

"Better your poor feet than your poor head," Nat growled back. "Tain't everyone as has the luck to lose his scalp and live through it, like me. Just you buck up, and put your best foot foremost for a bit, or it'll be the worse for you!"

And Straight Pine would emphasise Nat's advice by a prod in the naturalist's back.

It was a little after sunset when they struck the banks of a fairly broad and deep stream, which a mile or two lower down emptied itself into the lake they wished to reach. Through the gathering darkness they followed the windings of the river, with every sense on the alert for danger.

At a distance of about a hundred yards from the spot at which the river entered the lake the Delaware called a halt.

"Let my white brothers stay here in silence," he whispered, "while Straight Pine goes forward to the lake. The canoe which he will bring when he comes again lies hidden under the bank of a little island in the lake. Straight Pine will swim out to it and return with the canoe."

"Why not all swim together, and save the risk of ye're being seen as ye bring the craft back?" Nat asked.

The Delaware shook his head and pointed to the naturalist, who had sunk on the ground in a limp heap.

"What of the Eye of Glass?" he said. "Could he swim so far, No Scalp?"

"Bother the Eye of Glass!" Nat muttered.

His rifle the Delaware left behind him, and armed only with a knife he slipped through the reeds on the river-bank and noiselessly entered the water, disappearing in the deepening darkness as he sped with silent stroke towards the lake.

He was back much sooner than they had expected. In less than half an hour the reeds parted without a rustle, and the dripping figure of the Indian emerged on to the bank.

"What news?" Nat whispered. "Where's the canoe?"

"Bad news," was the reply. "The Hurons have already reached the lake, and are on the watch for us. A large canoe, filled with warriors, waits just where the stream runs into the lake, and between us and the island where my canoe is hidden."

"Then you have not been able to get at your canoe?"

The Delaware shook his head.

"Straight Pine himself could have reached it unseen by swimming," he replied; "but he could not have brought it back to his white brothers, since the Hurons lie directly in the way."

"H'm!" growled Nat, with a side glance at the unfortunate naturalist, who was still lying prone upon the grass, exhausted by his forced march. "If we hadn't got that lunatic in tow we could have got past 'em right enough. What are we to do now, Straight Pine?"

The Delaware was silent, considering gravely. It was clear that he regarded the situation as perilous in the extreme. Since the Hurons had headed them off from the lake, there seemed nothing for it but to make a detour by its banks, thus

considerably increasing the length of their journey to Fort Brownlow, and exposing themselves to attack in a thickly-wooded country, favourable to Indian tactics. Further, it was clear that the unhappy naturalist would never be able to keep up the pace at which he had been walking for another day; he would drop by the way from mere fatigue and exhaustion. And meanwhile night was rapidly descending, and at any moment the lurking Hurons might make their presence known.

The first thing to do was to select a camping-ground where it would be difficult for their enemies to take them by surprise; and, as the ground along the river's edge was thickly wooded, Nat suggested that the safest thing would be for the whole party to spend the night in a tree.

The Delaware having fallen in with the suggestion, the next step was to select a suitable tree; and Straight Pine decided upon a large maple, which was standing nearly alone just on the water's edge. Its comparatively isolated position would prevent any enemy from attacking the party by creeping into its branches from adjoining trees.

Rousing the naturalist from the exhausted slumber into which he had fallen, the little party took their way to the maple; and, with many groans and protests, hoisted Professor Lovejoy on to the lowest bough. The others followed him swiftly. There was no question of lighting a fire, and they had to satisfy their hunger on the strips of dried meat they had brought with them.

While the naturalist, having securely wedged himself into a forked bough, promptly fell off to sleep again, and Nat and Dick set to upon their meal with a voracity that was the natural result of their long tramp, Straight Pine climbed as soundlessly as a cat to the summit of the maple-tree, and peered cautiously through the thick leafage over the surrounding landscape.

To the eye of a white man it would have seemed wrapped in such darkness that it would be useless to attempt to penetrate it. Beyond the sky above, and the faint gleam of the river rippling below him, he would have distinguished nothing at all. Not so Straight Pine. The blackest night could hardly hide its secrets from his keen and piercing eyes; and, after he had steadfastly surveyed the river-bank for a few minutes, he uttered an almost inaudible grunt of satisfaction, and began to climb down the tree as noiselessly as he had mounted it.

"Well," Dick whispered, as the Delaware dropped on to a bough beside him, "have you seen anything of the Hurons, Straight Pine?"

"Straight Pine has seen nothing of the Hurons," was the reply, "though he has twice heard a night bird call from the same direction of the forest—a night bird that had no wings. That shows that the Hurons are behind us on the land, as well as on the water."

"H'm! Nice look-out for us!" Nat grunted, with his mouth full.

"Straight Pine has little hope of seeing another sun if he remains here," the Delaware went on.

"Well, but how in thunder are we to get away with that darned beetle-hunter?" the trapper interrupted him angrily.

"If No Scalp will listen to his red brother," the Delaware returned quietly, "his red brother will tell him what he has seen while he was high among the leaves."

"What?"

"Thirty paces up the river," Straight Pine continued, "there lies, stranded in the mud against the bank, the trunk of a large tree, swept down from the mountains by the floods."

"And what good does that do us?"

"If it be not too firmly wedged into the mud it could be got afloat, when it would drift down the stream towards the lake. Upon it we could place our rifles, and also cling to it ourselves; even the Eye of Glass could hold to it with his hands, and thus drift through the water. And it might be that the Hurons, seeing only a drifting pine-log, might let us pass them in the night; and when we had passed them we could direct our course towards the island on which the canoe lies hidden."

"H'm, I doubt but that they'll see through the trick!" Nat said slowly.

"It may be; the risk is great," the Delaware agreed. "Yet, to stay here is a greater risk still. Is not No Scalp of my mind?"

The trapper nodded.

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"I guess you're right, Delaware," he said. "I am willing to try a cruise on the pine-log if you are."

"Good!" the Delaware returned. "Straight Pine goes now to see if the log can be floated. Let No Scalp come with him that they may push it into the water. The Young Horse can remain here, and when he hears the hoot of an owl, twice repeated, let him rouse the Eye of Glass from his slumbers, and bid him descend from the tree."

CHAPTER 5.

The Voyage on the Tree—The Fight with the Hurons—On the Island.

TEN minutes or so later the expected hoot reached Dick's ears, and he promptly woke the professor—for the second time that night. This time the naturalist was really indignant.

"Am I never to be allowed a minute's sleep?" he asked angrily. "As soon as I shut my eyes someone comes and disturbs me. It's really too bad."

"It isn't safe here!" Dick explained.

"That's what you always say!" snorted Professor Lovejoy. "You told me just now that it wasn't safe on the ground, and, to oblige you, very much against my will, I got up into this tree. And I have barely settled myself in it before you want me to get down again. It's more than flesh and blood can stand."

"For goodness' sake don't talk so loud!" Dick whispered anxiously.

"Well, let me go to sleep, then, and I won't talk at all."

"Rot!" Dick retorted. "Get down at once! If you don't I'll go and fetch Straight Pine, and he won't be long in making you. Get down, and quietly, mind!"

Straight Pine had managed to instil a wholesome awe of himself into Professor Lovejoy's mind, and the threat of his anger had its effect. Grumbling under his breath, the naturalist lowered himself to the ground—clumsily enough—and was followed much more quietly by Dick.

"I wish to goodness," the boy heard him mutter, "that I'd never come to this abominable country where people won't leave you to do as you like! If I can once get out of it I'll never set foot in it again."

And, growling to himself, he followed his companion along the bank to the spot at which Nat and the Delaware were awaiting them beside the log, which they had succeeded in launching without much difficulty. All was in readiness for the adventurous voyage; the only obstacle was Professor Lovejoy's unwillingness to embark upon it. If he had been angry at being roused from his slumbers, he was ten times more angry when the trapper explained to him that he was expected to enter into the water—in fact, he blankly refused to do any such thing. Nothing, he declared, would induce him to risk an attack of rheumatism by plunging into an icy cold river after sunset.

"You jabbering idiot," Nat threatened, between his teeth, "you do as I tell you, and catch hold of that there log, or I'm hanged if I don't scalp you myself! Hold your tongue—don't say another word, and catch hold when I tell you!" And Nat's hunting-knife flashed menacingly from its sheath.

Really believing that he was in danger of death, the trembling naturalist obeyed, and waded into the water, splashing, as Nat complained, like a buffalo. The pine-trunk was floating in several feet of water, and, as soon as they had all got a firm grip of its branches, the trapper and Straight Pine pushed it off into deep water towards the centre of the stream. There the current caught it, and drifted it rapidly downwards towards the lake.

The only sound that broke the breathless silence in which the little party glided along with the stream was the uncontrollable chattering of the naturalist's teeth—which Nat vainly tried to get him to check. Slowly the pine-trunk forged forwards until, rounding a slight bend in the stream's course, it reached the junction of river and lake. As it did so Dick, who was clinging to the front part of the tree, raised his head cautiously to see if he could catch a glimpse of the lurking canoe; but the shadow of the bank, beneath which it was doubtless lying, concealed it from his sight.

Though the Hurons were invisible, there could be no question but that the drifting tree must be visible to them, since the shadows cast by the trees on the bank did not reach it. Would they allow it to drift by without investigating it more closely, or would their suspicions be aroused? Dick's heart beat fast, and his right hand closed tightly round the rifle which he was holding carefully above the surface of the water.

Slowly the tree drifted along, swept by the current out into the lake. The particular islet on which Straight Pine had hidden his canoe before proceeding on his landward journey, was distant perhaps a third of a mile from the mouth of the river; and the current was carrying the drift-

ing tree right towards it, although very slowly. Several minutes went by, and the little party who clung to the pine-trunk were beginning to hope that they would be allowed to float on into safety unmolested, when their hopes were dashed to the ground as the faint dip of a paddle reached their ears. The next instant the black shape of a large canoe emerged from the shadow underneath the bank, and bore down swiftly towards them.

"H'st, lad!" the trapper whispered to his brother. "Have you got your rifle ready? Right—but don't fire till we do! If we give them a volley at close quarters there's a chance they may sheer off."

"Right!" Dick whispered back.

On swept the canoe, while the four men on the log awaited its coming in a tense silence. Even the naturalist understood the danger, now that he was brought face to face with it, and he gave a low groan of terror, which was instantly stifled as Nat hissed an order for silence into his ears.

It was not until the bow of the Huron canoe was scarcely ten yards distant from the floating tree that Straight Pine suddenly raised himself half out of the water, thrust the barrel of his rifle over the trunk, and fired. Nat and Dick instantly followed his example. The three shots rang out almost simultaneously, and a wild yell of rage and astonishment rent the air.

One of the Hurons, who had been standing up in the bow of the canoe and peering at the log, flung up his hands, and, after swaying for a moment, pitched head foremost into the lake with a heavy splash. Whether he was the only one who was in it was impossible to tell in the darkness; but the effect of the volley was decisive. Without a moment's delay the Hurons turned the canoe and dashed away out of range. As soon as they had reached the shelter of the darkness, about fifty yards away, they halted and began to fire, in their turn, at the drifting tree.

"Keep your head down, lad," Nat whispered, "and let 'em blaze away—they're only wasting powder and shot!"

His advice was good. The stout pine-trunk acted as a rampart, and the Hurons' bullets merely buried themselves in it without inflicting the slightest harm on those behind it. Soon the redskins themselves realised that they were only wasting their ammunition, and their fire first slackened and then ceased altogether, while the log continued to drift further and further out into the lake.

"Guess we've shaken 'em off for the present, Delaware," Nat remarked.

"Straight Pine hopes so," was the reply, as the Delaware raised himself further out of the water to peer into the darkness ahead. "Let the Young Horse and No Scalp swim hard so as to send the pine-tree to the right, since the current will otherwise sweep it round the island."

By striking out vigorously with their legs the three managed to steer their strange craft in the desired direction; and, as no further attempt was made to molest them by the baffled Hurons, in another quarter of an hour or so the branches of the floating pine grounded on the mud alongside the islet. The water was still too deep to stand in; but while Dick swam backwards and forwards to the shore with the rifles and powder, the trapper and Straight Pine managed to bring Professor Lovejoy ashore between them, and land him, shivering with cold and terror, amongst the bushes that edged the banks of the island.

Their place of refuge was one of several small islets dotted about the surface of the lake. Small though it was—it could not have been more than a hundred yards in circumference—it was thickly wooded. Fuel was therefore abundant; and, having found a sheltered spot whence no glimmer of the flame could penetrate the surrounding brushwood, a fire was quickly kindled at which they warmed their limbs, chilled by the long immersion in water which was fed by the snows of the mountains.

"What's the next move, Straight Pine?" Dick asked, as he crouched over the fire and wrung the moisture out of his dripping garments. "Are we to take to the canoe at once—I suppose it's all safe, by the by?"

"The canoe is safe," the Delaware replied. "Straight Pine made sure of that as soon as he had landed. It was well hidden under the bushes on the bank, and the Hurons have not discovered it. But if the advice of Straight Pine is taken we shall not leave in it to-night. Though there is no moon the night is clear, and many eyes are watching us. It may be that the Hurons have more than one canoe; but even if they have not, that which we have seen is large and swift, and carries many men. We cannot again take them by surprise, and if they pursued us they would certainly overtake us."

"You're about right there, chief," Nat agreed. "That canoe holds seven or eight warriors at least, and we are only three—for the beetle-hunter don't count. But what's your advice, then—we can't stay here for ever!"

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"We can stay many days," the Delaware replied. "From the lake we can obtain fish, and, though the Hurons will lie watching on the bank as snakes watch their prey, they will fear to approach us openly, knowing that we can shoot them hidden among the bushes. Then, on a night when the rain or the mist covers the face of the water, we can steal past them and escape."

"Guess you're about right," Nat nodded. "It seems our only chance, anyway; but we shall have to keep a pretty sharp look-out while we stay here. Though the Hurons won't dare to attack us openly, they'll be trying to get at us by stealth."

"No Scalp speaks the truth," was Straight Pine's reply. "So long as we remain here two pairs of eyes must watch ceaselessly—one on either side of the island. If No Scalp will watch for the first part of the night, upon the eastward bank, Straight Pine will watch upon the westward. When No Scalp is tired let him rouse the Young Horse to take his place."

"And you, chief—when are you going to sleep?" Dick asked.

"When the morning has dawned," the Delaware answered, as he picked up his rifle, and glided away from the fire towards his post of observation.

CHAPTER 6.

The Professor Goes Beetle-Hunting and Finds More Than He Expected—Dick to the Rescue—Face to Face with Death—A Perilous Voyage—The Rapids.

THE rest of the night passed without incident; no sign of the Hurons' presence was detected by the keen-eyed watchers upon the island, and when morning dawned the lake lay calm and still in the light of the sun—its banks apparently untenanted by any human being. But the little party upon the island—three of its members, that is to say—knew well enough that this was far from being the case, and that from among the fringe of trees and rushes on the shore of that placid sheet of water stealthy eyes were watching them, and savage hearts were beating with a fierce determination to avenge the defeat of the previous night.

As the Delaware and his friends were perfectly well aware that their enemies must have seen the log ground upon the shore of the island, they decided that it would be labour in vain to attempt to conceal their presence on it, and as soon as day had dawned Dick selected a likely spot for a cast, and set to work to provide the day's breakfast by fishing for it. Needless to say that he kept both a sharp look-out and his rifle ready at his side; but, though he had not the faintest doubt that his movements were being closely observed from the opposite bank, he cared little for that, since it was much too far removed for a bullet to reach him from it.

His fishing operations were very successful, and the half-dozen lake trout that rewarded his efforts made an excellent breakfast for the little party of crusoes. Under its influence Professor Lovejoy's spirits speedily recovered from the effects of his flight and ducking, though he no longer expressed his disbelief in tales of Indian atrocities, and was greatly relieved at finding a wide stretch of water between himself and the Hurons. And, having finished his breakfast, he promptly set to work on his favourite occupation, and began to creep about the island on all fours searching for specimens.

"Did ye ever see such a poor, demented creetur?" Nat said contemptuously. "Well, he does less harm that way than another; we'd better let him alone to amuse himself in his own silly fashion."

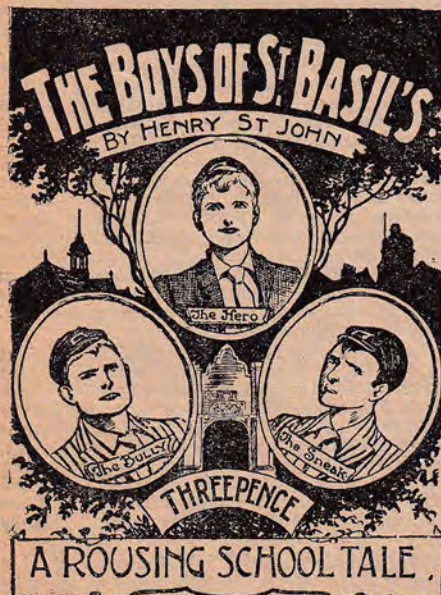
But if Nat had any idea of what the naturalist's way of amusing himself would lead to, he would have put a stop to the beetle-hunting as soon as it began.

While Straight Pine lay down to take the rest that even his iron frame was in need of, Dick returned to his fishing, while Nat kept the opposite side of the island under observation. Meanwhile, the enthusiastic naturalist had made his way to a point upon the shore—not far distant from where Dick was sitting, but concealed from him by a tangle of reeds—where he discovered some water-beetles swimming about on the surface of the lake. A close survey of the insects convinced the professor that they were of a species as yet unrepresented in his collection, and, in a state of great excitement, he leant over the bank and endeavoured to capture one in his hand.

The beetles, however, were far too quick for him, they skimmed lightly over the water to a spot a few yards further up the bank, the professor crawling through the brushwood after them in hot pursuit. Again they eluded him, and again he followed—always with the same result; until at last, as he craned over the water in a vain attempt to reach his prey, the bank beneath him gave way, and he slipped into a couple of feet of mud and water.

He scrambled to his feet, spluttering and choking, and as he turned to the bank which had given way beneath him, he saw the cause of his tumble. It had been hollowed out by the water, and in the hollow thus made, and concealed from sight on the side of the lake by a bed of rushes, he perceived the bow of a canoe—the canoe which the Delaware had hidden. With a chuckle, the professor pulled it out, tumbled into it, seized the paddle, and, with a clumsy stroke, sent the little craft in the direction of his prey, the water-beetles. Now he would soon overtake them and add a new specimen to his collection.

All the same, it was not until he had urged the canoe forward with three or four strokes that a successful grab of the hand captured one of the much-desired insects. It nearly had the effect, at the same time, of upsetting the canoe, which lurched and rocked violently. In his agitation Professor Lovejoy clutched at the side of the canoe, and thereby

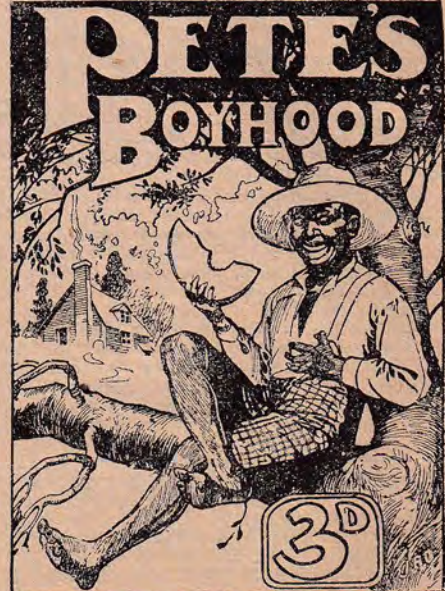


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allowed the paddle to slip out of his hand and drift into the midst of a clump of reeds.

In his joy at discovering that the new specimen was safely captured, the naturalist did not notice the loss of the paddle, and after examining the beetle—which he held between finger and thumb—by means of a pocket-lens, he carefully stowed it away in a pill-box.

It was not until he had done so, and while he was still smiling triumphantly over his capture, that a sudden shout caused him to look up, to discover that the current had drifted his frail craft fully fifty yards from the shore, and that Dick Wild, on the bank, was waving his arms and calling to him angrily.

"Paddle in, you idiot!" he yelled. "What are you doing in that canoe? We didn't want the Hurons to know that we've got it! Now the chances are that you've given the whole game away! Paddle in at once!"

Thus adjured, Professor Lovejoy looked round for the paddle, and found that it was not there.

"I—I can't," he called anxiously, for with each moment the current was drifting him further away from the islet and down the lake. "I haven't got the paddle. I remember, I dropped it overboard just now."

The breeze, which was blowing strongly, and driving the canoe before it, prevented his words reaching Dick Wild's ears; but his gestures showed their meaning plainly enough. Nor were they lost on other eyes as well, for, to his horror, Dick saw the Hurons' large canoe suddenly shoot out from the bank of the lake and dart swiftly through the water towards the unfortunate naturalist.

Dick hesitated not a moment. Uttering a shout intended to warn Straight Pine and his brother, he snatched up his rifle and pouch, and, holding them high above his head, waded into the water and struck out towards the drifting canoe. Good swimmer as he was, the necessity of keeping one arm out of the water tried him terribly; while, at the rate at which his enemies' canoe was advancing, he saw that he should need all his speed to reach the professor before it.

But reach it first he did, and the Hurons were still some distance away when he swam up to the side of the drifting craft. And he was about to haul himself into it when once again, the professor's talent for doing the wrong thing added to the peril in which he and Dick were placed. As Dick began to scramble into the canoe the naturalist, instead of trimming the craft by throwing his weight against her opposite thwart, leaned towards the boy in a clumsy attempt to assist him, and, as a consequence, the canoe lurched, and all but capsized. She righted only when Dick let go of the gunwale; but the lurch had sent him right under water for the moment, and when he finally climbed aboard the canoe his pouch was saturated, and the water running off the barrel of his rifle.

He uttered an exclamation of dismay as he realised how utterly helpless the professor's clumsiness had left him, for the Hurons' canoe was within a hundred yards now, and he was powerless to fire a shot. Already one of the crew of the nearing canoe was kneeling in the bows with his rifle raised to his shoulder, waiting only to fire until he should be well within range.

In his despair, Dick did not even attempt to hide himself by following Professor Lovejoy's example, and flinging himself down on the bottom of the canoe. What would be the use? he argued. Death was certain, and it was as well to die by a bullet as under the tomahawk of the Hurons when they came alongside. Even had he made up his mind to abandon the naturalist, it would have availed him nothing now; the Hurons would overtake him long before he could swim ashore.

Standing upright in the canoe he stared at the nearing redskins with despair in his heart, when he suddenly heard the sound of quick-drawn breathing behind him, and turned to see Straight Pine, with one hand holding his rifle above his head, and with the other outstretched to grasp the gunwale. Roused from his slumbers by Dick's shouts, the Delaware had hurried to the bank and plunged after him into the water; and the boy, whose eyes were turned in the opposite direction, had not heard his noiseless stroke until he was alongside the canoe.

Dick's cry of joy was cut short by the double report of a rifle, and a couple of bullets flew past him, one chipping the gunwale of the canoe in its flight.

"Lie down, Young Horse," the Delaware ordered, as he aimed at the advancing canoe.

Dick obeyed, and, as he flung himself down by the naturalist, who was groaning with terror, Straight Pine's rifle rang out. An answering shot followed; but the Delaware had reloaded with the speed of lightning, and, with the utmost coolness, he fired again.

"Let the Young Horse take courage," he said, as he again reloaded. "Straight Pine has aimed well."

Again he fired, and this time a sharp yell followed the report, and Dick heard the rapid dash of paddles, as if the

hostile canoe's advance were being hurriedly checked. Such, indeed, was the case. Straight Pine's unerring rifle had already done considerable damage amongst her crew. Not one of his three shots had missed its mark—two of the Hurons were slightly, and one severely, wounded. The canoe's head was turned until she was just out of range, and though two or three more shots were fired at Straight Pine, the only damage inflicted by them was a slight graze upon the Delaware's left shoulder.

Though the attack had been repulsed for the time, the position of the successful party was none the less an extremely grave one. The strong breeze which was blowing from the head of the lake was drifting them rapidly before it, and, being without a paddle, they could not guide their craft. Each moment they were getting further away from Nat, while they had no doubt that the remainder of the Hurons were watching them from the shore, and that if they should drift on to it, their position, with enemies before and behind would be perilous in the extreme.

As has been said, the upper portion of the lake was studded with small islands; and towards one of these Straight Pine and Dick endeavoured to urge their craft, using the butt-ends of their rifles as paddles. But, as the Delaware had expected, the manoeuvre was detected; the Hurons' canoe shot rapidly towards the islet, and had Dick and his friend persisted in their attempt, they would have reached it first, landed, and fired from the shelter of the shore. They had to give up the idea, and continue to drift onwards towards the lower portion of the lake—a broad sheet of unbroken water. Meanwhile their enemies continued to follow them at a safe distance and keep a watch upon their movements.

Hour after hour they continued to float onwards. More than once a gust of wind blew them towards the shore, and only by working hard with their clumsy paddles did they contrive to keep their craft away from it. Once when they had been blown within a hundred yards of land, a shot was fired at them from the reeds, showing plainly enough that the Hurons on land were following them step by step. And when evening began to fall they were only about a mile from the lower outlet of the lake—a swift river, whose course, as the Delaware well knew, was broken by formidable rapids. It seemed impossible that without paddles they could steer the canoe through those rapids, yet the only alternative to doing so was to try to land in the teeth of their waiting enemies.

In a few words the Delaware acquainted Dick with the gravity of the situation, and the lad saw that Straight Pine had little hope of coming through the ordeal ahead of them. Still, to attempt to land would be madness, so, wielding their makeshift paddles, the pair did their best to direct the canoe towards the outlet of the lake. It was not long before the current caught it, and they were carried onwards with increasing swiftness.

"Lie down," Straight Pine ordered, as the banks narrowed. "The Hurons will fire as we enter the river, and it is enough for one to show his head and steer."

Dick tried to protest; but the Delaware was firm, and once more the boy crouched down beside the naturalist, who, during the whole of his perilous voyage, had never ceased to groan and lament his fate.

The Delaware was right. As the canoe entered the river shots rang out from either bank, and had it not been for the growing darkness, in all probability some of them would have reached their mark. As it was, though the canoe was hit several times, those within her remained untouched, and the current, which was now rushing at a terrific rate, bore the little craft onwards into a steep canyon formed by two high walls of rock.

For the moment they were safe from pursuit, but to land was out of the question, not only because of the steepness of the rock on either side, but because it was impossible to guide their craft against the strength of the rushing torrent. All that Straight Pine and Dick could do was to attempt to keep her head straight. Soon they would be in the midst of the rapids and the thickening darkness would prevent them from steering their way amidst the rocks.

As the nearing roar of the rapids reached his ears, Professor Lovejoy sat up, and, finding himself being swept at a tremendous pace along a river whose dark waters were already streaked with bubbling foam, he promptly demanded to be set ashore.

"Shut up, you idiot!" Dick muttered between his teeth.

The next instant the canoe plunged rapidly forward. The naturalist yelled in terror, and Dick held his breath.

For a few seconds they sped onwards at a breathless rate, and then a white mass of foam became visible just ahead—a jagged rock, around which the water was spouting. With a cry of horror Dick followed the Delaware's example and dug his rude paddle into the water in a frantic attempt to alter the course of the canoe, but in vain. The next instant she was hurled against the rock and smashed into fragments that were swiftly borne away by the roaring torrent.

NEXT SATURDAY:

"COLONEL SILVERSHOT,"

A Tale of Dr. Nevada,
the Famous Detective.

AND

"IN THE EYES OF THE WORLD,"

A True Life Story
of To-day.

IN "PLUCK."

CHAPTER 7.

A Hopeless Prospect—In the Nick of Time—The Voyage Down the River—Fort Brownlow at Last—The Professors Farewell.

AS the canoe was swept against the rock Straight Pine dropped his rifle, turned like lightning, and seized Dick round the body, and before the lad knew what was happening he was being hurled through the air towards the black crag that rose some ten or twelve feet above the water. Luckily his hand caught a projecting corner, and he gripped it and held on, half in and half out of the stream. Turning his head, he saw that the canoe and its other occupants had completely vanished in the darkness, and he was just about to haul himself out of the water when he felt one of his legs gripped in the despairing clutch of a drowning man.

With a struggle, he managed to drag himself, with the man who was clinging to him, a little higher up, and saw the head of Professor Lovejoy emerge from the surface of the stream. Gasping and choking, the unhappy naturalist crawled on to the rock; while Dick, with a sinking heart, peered into the darkness.

"Straight Pine!" he called frantically. "Straight Pine, where are you?"

"Here!" came back the reply, as a figure appeared on the summit of the rock—Straight Pine, who almost by a miracle had managed to grasp at the rough granite as the current swept him past it.

Dick uttered an exclamation of thankfulness.

"Then we are all safe," he said, as he wrung the Delaware's hand.

"Safe till the morning," was the grave reply. "Straight Pine fears that with dawn death will come also. To-night the Hurons believe that we have met death in the rapids; but to-morrow they will search the banks for our bodies, that they make take our scalps. This rock will not hide us from their eyes, and we have now no rifles with which to answer their bullets. And even if they did not see us death awaits us—more slowly—for no swimmer, however strong, could swim the rapids to the shore. Let the Young Horse bear himself to the end like a brave warrior!"

And the Delaware laid his hand upon the boy's shoulder. Dick looked up proudly.

"You sha'n't be ashamed of me, Straight Pine," he said. "It's hard to die like this; but there's one thing I'm glad of, and that is that Nat is not with us. There's a chance for him still."

"Say nothing to the Eye of Glass," the Delaware whispered. "Let him sleep to-night in peace; he will know his fate to-morrow. And let the Young Horse sleep, too. To-night there is no good in watching."

But Dick found it hard to follow his friend's advice. Although the naturalist, after a great deal of preliminary groaning and grumbling, ended by falling asleep on the top of the rock, and Straight Pine, with the stoicism of his race, did likewise, the young scout tried in vain to follow their example. He lay staring up at the sky, thinking of the morrow that was so fast approaching—in all likelihood the last one he would see. His only comfort lay in the thought that there was still a chance for Nat. Although the trapper no longer had a canoe, it was possible that, while the Hurons were away searching for his companions, he might have swum ashore and slipped into the woods. Dick only hoped that he would not risk his life uselessly in attempting to come to the help of his companions.

It was only towards morning that Dick fell into an uneasy doze, to wake an hour or so later, just as a faint flush of dawn was appearing in the eastern sky. Though the naturalist was still sleeping and snoring, Straight Pine was already awake; and as the light broadened he and Dick surveyed their surroundings.

The survey only convinced them of the hopelessness of their position. The large rock on which they were perched offered not the slightest concealment from an enemy's eye, and it was situated just at the foot of the rapids, with the water boiling and bubbling around it.

It was hopeless to think of getting ashore without the aid of a canoe. The strongest swimmer would have been instantly sucked down or dashed to pieces.

As the sun rose, Straight Pine's eyes turned to the valley behind them, in expectation of the approach of the Hurons; but as yet no sign of them was visible, and it was not until the sun was well above the horizon that the Delaware suddenly laid his hand upon Dick's arm.

"What is it? Do you see them?" the boy whispered.

"No; but I heard a shot."

"A shot?"

"Yes; in the distance. Listen!"

And he pointed up the valley. Dick strained his ears, but could hear nothing but the roar of the water around him. Not so Straight Pine, who, after a moment's silence, said curtly:

"Again—this time two shots!"

"Look!" Dick cried almost at the same instant, pointing to a puff of smoke which was curling up into the air from the side of the cliff. "There's a rifle! What are they firing at?"

Almost as he spoke the question was answered, for a canoe swung into sight round a bend in the river, its solitary occupant plying his paddles furiously.

"Nat!"

"No Scalp!"

The words came simultaneously from Dick and the Delaware. It was indeed the trapper, who, having possessed himself of a canoe, was just about to shoot the rapids, and whose heart gave a leap as he saw the figures on the rock.

As soon as he saw that he had attracted Nat's attention the Delaware flung himself face downward on the rock, bidding Dick hold his ankles, and leaned as far as he could over the water, with the intention of clutching the gunwale of the canoe as she shot by. For Nat unaided to bring her to a standstill in that swift current was impossible; he could only steer her within the Delaware's reach.

There was a moment of breathless uncertainty, and then as the canoe swooped by Straight Pine's arm shot out, and the next instant the little craft had been drawn to the side of the crag, and the astounded naturalist, still only half awake, was being pushed into her. Dick followed, then the Delaware, and snatching up some spare paddles from the bottom of the canoe they dug them into the water and shot onwards down the river.

They were only just in time. The Hurons, enraged at seeing their prey escape them, were running along the banks, yelling and firing at the fugitives. But, though several shots came perilously near the latter, they escaped untouched; and, when once they had started, the rate at which their craft was borne onwards by the current soon enabled them to leave their enemies behind. The shots fell further and further astern, the yells grew fainter and finally ceased altogether, and in a few minutes nothing but the rush of the river and the dip of the paddles broke the silence of the wilderness.

There was still the danger that the Hurons might pursue them by water, and it was not until a good many miles had been covered that the fugitives ventured to slacken their pace sufficiently for Nat to tell how he had managed to come so opportunely to the rescue. Briefly his story was as follows:

Finding himself cut off from his friends, and guessing that the Hurons had all gone in pursuit of them, as night fell he had swum ashore from the island, and, as luck would have it, had discovered amongst the reeds a second and smaller canoe, which the redskins had concealed there. In this he had embarked, and, under cover of night, made his way down the lake; but, not daring to shoot the rapids in the dark, he had hung about till daylight before entering the river. As he had expected, he was soon perceived, and, though he had obtained a good start by water—since the Hurons had drawn up their canoe on the banks of the lake the previous night—he had to run the gauntlet of their fire from the banks of the river. He had almost given up the rest of the party for lost when he saw Straight Pine and his brother waving to him from the crag amidst the rapids.

The fact that the fugitives now only possessed one rifle between them rendered the rest of the journey to Fort Brownlow an anxious one; but, greatly to their relief, they saw no further signs of the enemies from whose hands they had so narrowly escaped. Doubtless the Hurons, when they decided not to give chase, had no idea of the defenceless condition of the party.

It was on the evening of the third day after their escape that Professor Lovejoy entered the gate of Fort Brownlow, the outpost of a civilisation to which he was now heartily anxious to return. His ideas on the subject of the savage races of North America had undergone considerable alteration during the last few days, so much so that the very mention of scalps made him shudder. From Straight Pine and his companions he parted with the warmest gratitude; and, although they at first declined anything but thanks for their care of him, the Delaware and Dick were finally induced to accept each a rifle in the place of those they had lost in the naturalist's service.

Before they set out for the wilds again, Straight Pine, Nat, and Dick had seen the professor off on the first stage of his eastward journey, fully determined that not even the prospect of adding another fifty hitherto unknown species of coleoptera to his collection should tempt him back again to the Far West.

THE END.

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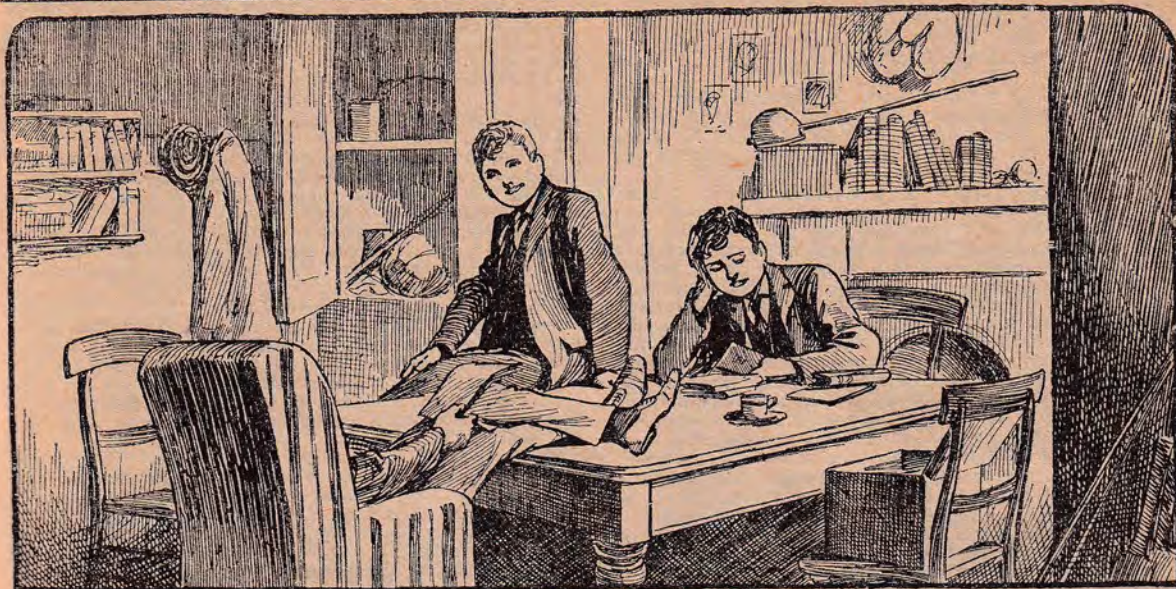
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STUDY No 13

GLANCE OVER THE LIST OF CHARACTERS AND START THIS STORY NOW.

- LORD VICTOR STANBOROUGH** - - - Commonly called Vic. A member of Study No. 13.
FRED HAWLEY - - - - - An old Kingswood College boy, who goes in for one and every hobby. A sharer of Study No. 13. Accused of smoking in the dormitory.
CHRISTOPHER K. CONNELL - - - "An American." His ambition is to make a name for the school, and also for Study No. 13.

From the first day of the term at Kingswood College the Uniteds cause a wave of excitement to run through the school. In the first place, they are successful in practically saving the life of the headmaster's niece Florrie. In the second, an attack is made upon Buzzy Harris—one of the masters—in mistake for the Uniteds by the Lower Fifth, led by Bully Croft, who strikes the master on the head with a cricket bat. Croft sneaks out of the dormitory, and the culprit is not for the time being discovered. The chums decide to rent and furnish a cottage for an old and homeless woman whose name is Meg and who has lived in the neighbourhood of the college all her life. Florrie asks the Head to let the three chums have a special half holiday, and offers to help them arrange the furniture in the new home. Later on they all have the pleasure of seeing Meg settled down in her new home. Meg is the victim of thieves, and the Uniteds visit her to inquire into the matter. Things have come to such a pass that the masters determine to break up Study No. 13. Chris, one night, comes across a ruffian just about to attack the Doctor. The Head is injured, but with the help of Hanson, captain of the school, the Uniteds capture the burglar. The three chums are chosen in the school's trial game. Croft isn't, but he referees, and gets his own back by constantly giving Vic off-side.

(The story continues from this point.)

Croft Does Not Play the Game.

Chris did not answer. He was looking at Croft keenly, and his eyes were gleaming brightly.

"I guess I'd have given Vic a good five yards on!" he muttered. "Mistake!"

Welby took the free-kick, and placed the ball nicely in front of goal. His forwards tried to rush it. Then someone shot, and, flinging himself in the way, Chris caught the ball on his chest with a thud. Croft whistled loudly, and pointed to the penalty-mark savagely.

"You handled, Connell!" he said. "Stand back a bit, you chaps!"

"Oh, I say, Croft," exclaimed Hanson, stepping forward, "nothing of the sort, old man!" Connell chested—look, there's the mark, and—"

"You couldn't have seen, Hanson!" he said. "A little American dodge—eh, Connell? Rather neat, but risky if the ref's looking. How much longer are you going to be, Welby?"

The Sixth Form bully glanced at the other captain, but Hanson did not answer, so he placed the ball on the little white patch. Then he rushed forward, and slammed the ball yards the wrong side of the post. However shady many of Welby's actions may have been off the field, on he was perfectly scrupulous. Chris glanced at him as he ran back to his place up the field, and grinned. The American lad was thinking of a certain receipt he had in his jacket-pocket, which he had obtained that morning from a bookmaker. Chris regretted still less the four pounds it had cost him.

Now the game was restarted, and Vic came within an ace of scoring; Fred just "saving" by flinging himself along the ground. After that Vic seemed to be able to do nothing right. Time after time Croft whistled him up for off-side and "hands," and on almost every occasion Chris could have been certain there was nothing in it. At last he walked across to Hanson, who was looking anything but pleased.

"Watch Croft, partner," he drawled; "I guess he's not giving Stanborough a chance. There—some of the spectators seem to think the same! Hook on?"

Hanson started, and an expression came into his face that would have considerably frightened Croft had he seen it. But things went on in exactly the same way. Every time Vic got near goal, or looked like getting a pretty run in, Croft whistled him up. From a distance Vic appeared to be making a frightful hash of it. Hanson watched closely, but did not utter a word, and half-time arrived without either goalkeeper having been beaten.

Then Hanson, Kingswood's usually good-tempered captain, strode up the field, and his honest, pleasant face was darkened furiously.

"Croft," he said sharply, "I want to speak to you. Come over here!"

Chris moved away, and no one, except the two themselves, ever knew the nature of the conversation that took place between them. But as it progressed Croft's face flushed a deep red, and he glanced round nervously. A moment later the captain pointed towards the pavilion, and Croft slunk away. Then Hanson spoke to Mr. Colville-Stanton, and the

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young master took the whistle. Chris looked at Fred and grinned.

"Poor old Vic is down in the dumps, I guess," he drawled. "Drop the word to Hanson!"

Fred nodded, and just before the game restarted under the charge of Mr. Stanton, the college captain stepped up to Vic.

"It was a dirty piece of work, Stanborough!" he said quietly. "I have told him what I think of it, too. Didn't notice what was going on until Connell mentioned it. Buck up!" And without another word Hanson beckoned his players to their places.

The second "forty-five" was a veritable cup-tie, so keen were the youngsters. With Croft out of the way, Vic showed the enthusiastic spectators what he could do, and the way he slipped past Welby time after time pleased that senior almost as much as it did Hanson. With a centre-forward who could play as Vic was then playing, Kingswood would stand a good chance of having a splendid season.

But Welby and his fellow-defenders knew how to tackle, and as often as Vic led his line up the field, they were driven back again. The combination was good, but the defence better. Vic saw this, and he also saw that the sun was sinking. The game was nearing the end. Suddenly the ball came to him, and he trapped it neatly. Then away he dashed. His inside men followed him up closely, but Vic took no notice, and Welby sprang to meet him.

With a quick movement, the junior passed his foot over the ball, and Welby darted to the wrong side. Vic was past. The other back made a great effort, but the United had set his teeth. For a single moment he caught sight of Fred and the goal-net, but it was enough, and the next moment the ball was sent crashing in.

Fred hurled himself wildly across the goal-mouth, and a few inches more reach would have enabled him to save. But, as it was, the ball flashed past his finger-tips. Then a terrific cheer rang out, a cheer in which both sides joined, for the good of the old college is a Kingswood lad's gravest charge.

But there were a few more minutes to go, and Welby's forwards did their utmost. For quite a long period they kept up a terrific attack, but Hanson and the "Yank" were very safe; in fact, Chris was playing a game almost equal to that of his captain. At first it seemed that Welby's forwards must equalise, but Hanson and Co. just managed to keep them out, and the whistle sounded as Chris neatly spoilt a dangerous rush.

Never was there such enthusiasm at Kingswood before. Even Dr. Lonsdale, lying in his darkened bed-room at the top of the old college, could hear the cheers, and the white-haired old schoolmaster, with the kindly face, smiled. The happiness of his boys was, to a certain extent, his own happiness, and that was why Kingswood would be quite a different sort of Kingswood without the "Doc."

Hanson, the college captain, could hardly contain himself. Two new boys and both "soccer fiends" was something to delight any skipper.

"Good old Yank!" grinned Vic. "You are downright certain of your place—"

"And he's not the only one!" roared Hanson. "Train as much as you like, kids, because if the Kingswood eleven doesn't include the Uniteds, then they will be playing short. Looking for anyone, Connell?"

"Welby, I guess! Want to see him about something important," answered the American lad. "Ah, there he is!" he added, feeling a certain bookmaker's receipt in his pocket. "So long, boys! See you at the coll, partners!" And, without further explanation, he hurried after the senior.

The "Yank" Taking Risks.

Chris managed to catch Welby up just as the senior was leaving the grounds.

"Say, partner," he drawled, "I guess I'd like a jaw with you!"

"What about?" snapped the bully. "It won't be any use your dropping on me for that refereeing work of Croft's. I didn't know anything about it."

"I guess we hooked on to that long ago. Met a bookmaker in Kingswood town the other day. He reckoned he knew me, and insisted that my name was Welby. Said I'd been betting through the squire's coachman, or some other rogue. Then he worked it out that I owed him three-pounds-ten, plus two and a half dollars journey down!"

"What did you do?" demanded Welby, his dark, passionate face becoming deathly white. "Is he coming up to the college? If he does I'm ruined!"

"Waal, I guessed it would work out at something like that, and, although I jibbed at the start, I went slow. Guess his receipt isn't much use to me, Welby, so you can have it."

"What do you mean, Connell?" muttered the senior. "Who paid the money?"

"Reckon I did, and I guess I'd like to speak my mind. Taking it all together, Welby, we two haven't exactly struck it friendly. There have been times when we've struck fairly much the other way, because I never exactly admired you, and I don't think you loved me. Waal, we are by ourselves now, and if it runs to a fight, Christopher K. C. will get mopped. Anyhow, he's going to take his chance. You're a bit of a fool, Welby, I guess—a bit of a fool!"

To violent-tempered Welby, such a remark from a senior would have been bad enough; from a junior, and a junior he had always disliked intensely, it was intolerable. He flung the bookmaker's receipt on the ground.

"Because you have paid this money for me," he snarled furiously, "you think you have the right to say what you like. There's the receipt! You shall have the money as soon as I can get it."

"Thanks!" coolly answered Chris. "Don't want the receipt, I guess, but you can pay me back the dollars if you like; also, you needn't if you don't like. That has nothing to do with the matter. You are a good sport, I guess, and yet you bully if Croft wants you to, and you bet on horses with a coachman. All I said, partner, was that you were a bit of a fool, and, by the Stars and Stripes, I guess I stick to it!"

Welby clenched his fists, and an expression of fury overcast his face, but deep down in his heart he thought more of the "Yank" at that moment than he had ever done since the youngster had been at Kingswood.

Chris met his savage glance quite coolly, although he remembered seeing Welby strike Vic a blow that had sent him from the top of the ruined tower—a blow that might easily have caused death. Still, the young American was not a timid lad.

"As I said before, Welby," he drawled, "you've got it all your own way this journey. Of course, if you hit me I shall hit back, but I don't stand an earthly. Wouldn't put a cent on myself. Going to take it out of me?"

Welby lowered his fists sullenly.

"You've got plenty of pluck!" he snarled. "I—I could half kill you!"

"And I guess you never found a United sneaking. It's a pretty safe tack if you'd like to try it. Going to let me off, partner?"

"You can go!"

"Mind, I don't take back what I said about you being a fool. Guess I'm as strong on that as ever!"

"I tell you you can go!" cried the senior furiously.

"Clear off before I—I—"

Chris stooped down and picked up the bookmaker's receipt.

"Guess you'd better take it," he drawled. "And, say, partner, I don't mind shaking if you don't. Shouldn't think we two would ever exactly chum in, but—waal, there's no need for us to hate, I guess!"

For a moment Welby hesitated, then he took the junior's outstretched hand, and, without a single word, turned on his heel and strode towards the college.

"Good!" muttered Chris. "No need to blab about that little lot, I reckon. He'll do. Christopher K. Connell, my son! Welby'll turn out a white man yet."

And as he, too, started on his way to the old school, Mr. Colville-Stanton stepped from behind the row of laurels which had separated him from the lads. Nothing was more abhorrent to him than any such underhand action as eaves-dropping, but he had arrived on the scene suddenly. Unwilling at first, he had heard almost all the conversation, and as he now watched the American lad running across the fields there was something in his face besides the habitual bored expression—something that would have embarrassed Chris, and would have thrilled the lad's father.

The young master stood there for quite a long time, and when at last he did move away his forehead was a little more wrinkled than usual, and his hands considerably deeper in his pockets. But no one ever knew that Mr. Colville-Stanton had been present at that interview.

Croft's Challenge.

As Chris neared the college he heard footsteps behind him. The next moment Croft laid a hand on his shoulder, and the expression on the elder lad's face was one that should not have been there. He was absolutely furious.

Chris grinned.

"Hallo, old son!" he said. "Look upset, partner!" "Did—did you tell Hanson that I was refereeing unfairly?" cried the senior rather wildly. "If you did, I'll—I'll—"

"Then I guess you'd better start right away, becoss I plead guilty, my lud! Reckon I'm sorry I had to make you look such an ass, but it served you right! You couldn't have done a much dirtier trick, I guess, than to keep whistling a

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chap up for fouls when he was playing as clean a game as anyone on the field. Anyway, if there is a dirtier trick, then I guess I don't know him!"

And Croft's face had whitened with passion, and he clenched and unclenched his fists nervously.

Chris met the furious lad's glances with a smile.

"You—you are lying, Connell!" cried the senior hoarsely. "I tell you the whole thing was a planned lie of yours and Stanborough's!"

"Then, I guess, that makes me out a liar, partner?"

"You are! A rotten—"

"Waal," murmured Chris, "should say if that remark had been made by anyone else I'd have wanted an apology. What you say, old son, doesn't count. I guess I'd be obliged if you'd just let me pass. Soccer tags are draughty."

If the young American had carefully worked the whole conversation out, he could not have hit upon remarks that would have riled Croft more than the ones he made. The Upper Fifth lad was in a state of fury that bordered on the dangerous—dangerous to himself and anyone he was likely to meet. He stepped towards the younger lad with clenched fists.

"Stand up to me, Connell!" he cried. "Put your fists up, and I'll thrash you to within an inch of your life!"

"Don't reckon there's anything to fight about, partner. You behaved like a cad on the soccer field, and I got the captain to send you off. Stanton noticed your little game, but he won't say anything. Let sleeping dogs lie, old son! If you start stirring up dirty ponds, there's always a general sort of whiff floating around."

Then Croft's fist shot out, and so sudden and heavy was the blow that Chris was completely lifted off his feet. The next instant he found himself lying flat on the grass, with Croft standing furiously over him. Chris sat up.

"I take it you want to fight, partner!" he said, quite calmly. "Guess I'm sorry if you do, but—waal, it can't be helped."

"Will you meet me?"

"I guess so! Now, if you like—anywhere, and any time, or no time, partner! Guess it don't make a stateful of difference one way or the other to me! Not at all keen, I guess!"

"To-morrow morning, before breakfast. Welby or Smythe will second me."

"And I reckon Stanborough or Hawley won't mind doing the same for me. Say, partner, let's have the thing carried out in proper style. Put on soccer clothes, etc., and have a proper judge, or referee, or whatever you call him!"

"As you like. It makes no difference."

"Waal, if you don't mind, I'd be much obliged if you'd let Smiff second you; then Welby could be the referee. Might ask him, partner, will you? So-long!"

And the young American coolly strolled into the college, although his face was swollen and stiff where Croft's fist had caught him, and a very fair prospect of a downright good thrashing awaited him the day following. But the ordinary worries of existence troubled the Yank but slightly, whilst those of the future not at all. He was of opinion that meeting trouble half-way was a one-sided game with no point in it—quite a "mug's" game, in fact.

A great deal of Croft's fury now gave way to surprise as he stood watching Chris into the college.

"Let Welby referee the fight!" he muttered. "What can the little idiot be thinking of? Why, a word from me, and Welby would—Ah, I must thrash him—thrash him severely, too. Welby shall referee the fight. And—and I'll do it! The little brute may be able to use his fists!"

When Chris gained the college he made his way cautiously to Study No. 13; but, finding neither of the other two Uniteds there, he hastily changed his clothes and made his way to Vic's new study. As he approached the door he heard loud and prolonged shrieks.

Chris stopped, and so did the shrieks. Then there was the sound of low, rumbling laughter. Chris thoughtfully scratched his head.

"That's old Fred!" he muttered, slowly opening the door. "Say, partner, being murdered?"

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed Fred. "It's come!"

"Waal, I'm glad of that. When did it arrive, old son?"

"Just now."

"And what is it?"

"An electric battery. Ho, ho, ho! Jolly strong, too, isn't it, Vic? Catch hold of the handles, Yank!"

"Those things there, I guess. Were they the weapons that made Dick do the yelling I heard?"

"Yes; catch hold."

"No, partner," drawled Chris firmly. "Let Vic have another go. Or, say, Fred, pass the instrument over to me and let me do the shocking biz, and you can have the shocks. Guess I'll not charge a cent, partner."

"I know you won't!" muttered Fred. "The Yank funks! catch hold, Vic!"

"No, no!" hastily groaned Vic. "I don't want to be greedy, because they say electricity is good for one; and, besides, I'd much rather wait until I am strong again. Thought my blessed arms were coming off!"

Fred attempted to persuade his chums, but it was no good. Chris had not tried, and objected to making a start; Vic had tried, and had made his mind up not to try willingly again. Fred said he was a coward, and Vic readily admitted it.

"I know I am," he grinned. "But I don't want to be an armless wonder all the rest of my days. Batteries may have their uses, but what they want are good strong breaks. They are the sort of toys that if you give 'em an inch they nick a mile or two, and go and twist your blessed arms off."

"Rot!" growled Fred. "They are jolly fine things! Wouldn't be without one for the world. Never get tired of this. Here, if you chumps are too big funks to have a go, I'll try a little myself."

"Good!" exclaimed Vic, whose arms still felt as though he were suffering from rheumatism in all his muscles, and diseased bones at every joint. "I'll turn the current on. I'd like to do it awfully!"

Fred glanced at him.

"I think I'll let the Yank do that," he said cautiously.

"Mind, I don't want to hint that you are a vindictive chap, Vic; but—yes, you'd better turn the current on, Yank."

"Right—ho, partner! No chance of my getting a shock, I suppose?"

"No, you chump! All you've got to do is to pull this knob out, and you've got to stop when I say stop. That's the most important point. No gum-tricks!"

"I guess that seems fairly simple, partner. Say when."

"Don't you forget to stop when I tell you!" growled Fred, picking up the two little hollow handles. "Directly I say—Yah! Ho!"

Fred had given his instructions very clearly, but he had forgotten to mention the fact that the battery handle should be drawn out slowly. The result was that Chris pulled it out with a jerk, and, consequently, Fred received a shock that almost gave him a fit.

With a loud shriek he leapt wildly in the air. Then he seemed to be endeavouring to tie himself into different kinds of knots, uttering howls that were positively deafening.

"By the Stars and Stripes," gasped Chris, "what's he doing?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Vic. "I'm happy! Turn it off, Yank. You're electrocuting him!"

"Stop!" yelled Fred. "Yah! Oh! Yah!"

Chris stepped up to the little machine again, but before he could push the handle back in its place again Fred appeared to have received a slightly sharper shock than the others, for he sprang up in the air and fairly doubled up. The consequence was, the battery was whisked off the table, and Fred danced wildly round it, shrieking at the top of his voice.

To look at, the little affair could hardly have been funnier. Vic, having experienced the sensation of "shocks" previously, was reduced to the verge of convulsions. Chris, however was a little concerned.

"Keep still!" he shouted—"keep still, and I'll turn the engine off!"

"Stop! Yah! Oh!" shrieked Fred, who, besides having lost all sensible control of his body, appeared to have parted with all his wits. "Stop it!"

Then Chris pounced on the battery, and an instant later he had rammed home the handle. Fred's relief was terrific.

With a low howl he flung the battery handles down; then rushed wildly at Chris, and smote him in the chest. The Yank gasped a little, then performed a retrograde movement under the table. After that Fred glared at Vic.

"I'm awfully sorry, old chap!" murmured that youngster, hastily shifting away. "Nasty, painful things, shocks. Stir one up so."

"Why didn't you stop the blessed thing?"

"I—I thought you liked it, old man. Remember, you said it was good for the nerves."

"Chump! Crumbs, I ache all over!"

"You're not the only one, partner," drawled a voice from beneath the table—"you are not the only one. There are others, I guess."

"Serve you jolly well right!" muttered Fred. "Come on out, and have your turn!"

"What," gasped Chris, "catch hold of those handles? By the Stars and Stripes, he thinks I'm mad! No, old son—no! A state full of no's, in fact."

"Come on! Don't be such a chump! What's the good of a battery if you don't use it? You two chaps can take it in turns, and see who can stand the most. No larks, I promise!"

(Another long instalment of this popular school story next week.)

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YOUR EDITOR.



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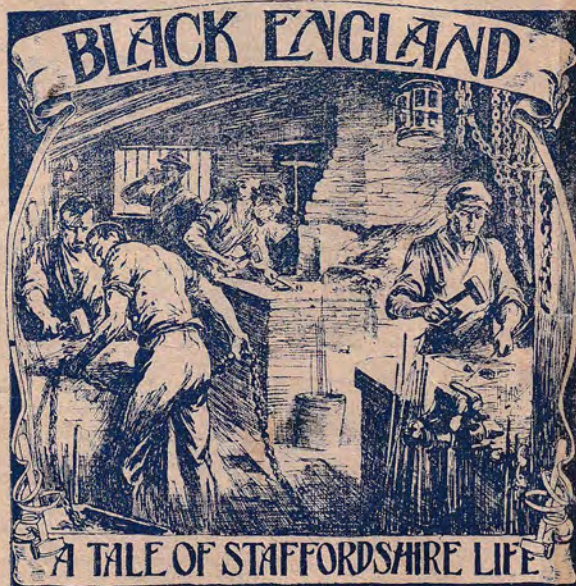
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