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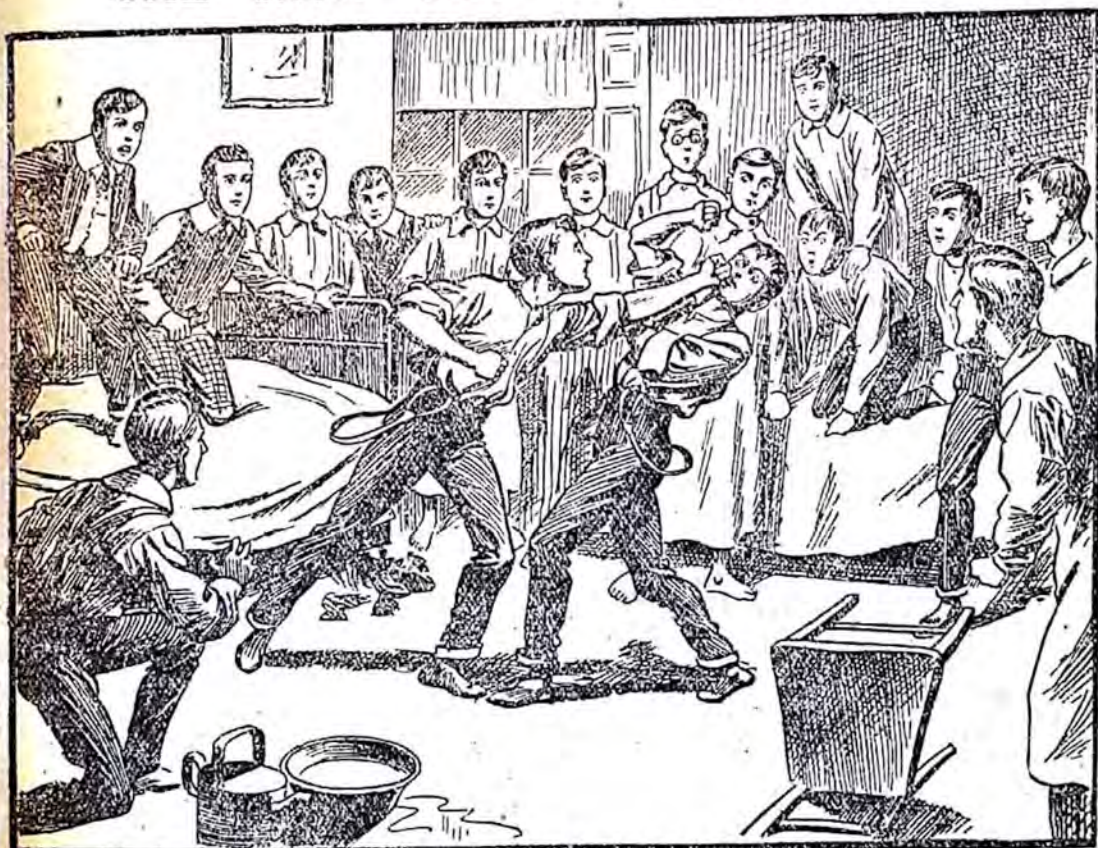


No. 1.

PUBLISHED EVERY TUESDAY.

1d.

THE NEW BOY AT NORTHCOTE.



Again and again the New Boy's fists came home upon his face and chest.

A LONG COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY BY CHARLES HAMILTON.

CHAPTER I.—THE NEW BOY.

"Confound it!" Courtney, of the Sixth, uttered the exclamation, as he stared at the letter in his hand.

Courtney was breakfasting in his study at Northcote School. He was not in a good temper that morning; his pale complexion and heavy eyes showed that he had been up late the

previous night; though Northcote boys who knew Courtney would never have suspected him of burning the midnight oil for the purposes of study.

His bag had laid his table, and then cleared out of the study, knowing well the storm-signals in Courtney's countenance. But the Sixth-former was not alone. He had a friend to

See that your friends know what a splendid paper this is.

breakfast, and the latter looked at him curiously as he exclaimed, in a tone of deep annoyance and ill-humour:

"Confound it! Hang it, I say!"

"Hullo!" said Mulberry. "Anything wrong, Courtney, old chap?"

"Yes, they're sending my cousin, Clive Russell, to Northcote."

Mulberry stared.

"What the dickens is there in that to get your rag out about?"

"You don't understand," said Courtney, gloomily. "This is a letter from my aunt, and she has asked me to take care of the little brute. He's a kid, you know; he'll be stuck in the Fourth Form. She knows something about public schools, and she wants me to take him as my fag."

She says he is coming down to Northcote this afternoon, and as it's a half-holiday at Northcote, she thinks I might meet him at the station, and bring him to Northcote.

"Oh, rot! Let one of the masters meet the kid, and fetch him in, if he isn't old enough to walk to the school by himself. It's no business of yours, and you're engaged to come over to Portdown for the afternoon races with me."

"Now, as it's only five minutes to class, I'll be shifting. Don't forget this afternoon."

"Rather not!"

And George Mulberry, the blackguard of the Sixth Form at Northcote School, left the study. Courtney took up the letter again, and glanced at it with a scowling brow.

It was natural that, having a nephew in a high form at the school, the anxious, doubting woman should appeal to him to make the thorny path of a new boy a little easier.

Without any show of favouritism, which would make the new boy unpopular in his own form, Courtney could do much for Clive Russell if he chose.

"I suppose I must look after the little brute a bit," muttered Courtney. "I can't afford to quarrel with the confounded people. He'll have to keep his place, though, or he'll find himself licked like any other beastly fag. Phipps?"

The senior's fag had come into the study.

"I've got a relation, a beastly little mongrel like yourself, coming down this afternoon," the senior explained. "I want you to go to Northbank Station and meet him, and bring him to the school."

Clive made his way to the Sixth-Form room, and took his seat with the rest of the form.

Dr. Devereux, the Head of Northcote, was taking the Sixth that morning, and he glanced rather curiously at Courtney.

He noted the signs of late hours and want of sleep in Courtney's face, and wondered whether the boy had sat up too late studying.

The Head approved of hard work, but not of over-doing it. He would have been astonished if he had known the real reason for Courtney's late hours; that his last evening had been spent, not in his study, but in the Blue Lion at Northbank.

Clive Russell stepped out of the train at Northbank Station and looked about him.

A handsome fair-haired lad, with a very pleasant expression, was Clive Russell; the kind of boy one would take to at the first glance.

His manner was rather subdued now, as if the parting with his old home still weighed upon his mind, but there was nothing whatever of the "spooney" about him.

A healthy, wholesome British boy, a good cricketer for his age, and fond of fun of a good-natured kind, was he.

He was feeling a little lost now as he stepped from the train.

There was a crowd of country people on the platform, and he looked among them in vain for the form of his cousin.

His mother had told him that Arthur Courtney would be there to meet him, the good woman never doubting for a moment that her nephew would be only too glad to do her that little service.

And Clive fully expected to see his cousin; and for some minutes he looked about the platform in search of him.

But it soon became clear that Courtney was not there, and Clive walked to the exit. He concluded that Arthur was waiting for him outside. He tendered his ticket and passed out, the crowd having gone before, and then looked round him again.

Then he became conscious of having attracted the attention of two boys of about his own age, whom by their caps he guessed to belong to Northcote School.

One was a thin, lanky lad, with a pair of very keen eyes set very close together, who, though Clive did not know it, was

his cousin's fag, Phipps. The other was shorter and stout, and was known in the Lower Fourth as Fatty Stevens.

Phipps looked Clive over as the latter paused in doubt.

"And that's the funny merchant Courtney expects me to take to Northcote, and take charge of for the rest of the afternoon," said Phipps, in tones of the most intense disgust.

Clive caught his cousin's name.

"Do you know my cousin?" he exclaimed, coming towards the two boys. "I expected him here to meet me this afternoon. Do you know where he is?"

"He, he, he!" sniggered Phipps. "He expected a Sissy. Former to come and meet the beastly train. He, he, he!"

"My mother asked him to—"

"Charming innocent old lady, your mother."

Clive flushed indignantly.

"Born yesterday, I suppose," giggled Fatty Stevens.

"Silly old lady—"

"If you speak like that about my mother," began Clive hotly.

The two juniors stared at him.

"Well, what will you do?" demanded both of them, together.

"I'll punch your head," said Clive, drawing a deep breath.

The next moment he staggered back, for Fatty Stevens without waiting for any further declaration of hostilities he launched out with this right, and caught him fairly upon the nose.

Clive, taken entirely by surprise, he staggered against a porter, who gave a growl.

"Ere, houtside," he said, roughly. "Whatcher mean by fighting 'ere in a station, eh? Get houtside, the lot of yer."

And the boys were bundled out.

In the streets Fatty and Phipps turned towards Clive, laughing.

"That was for your cheek," said Fatty, in a tone of explanation. "If I have any more of it, young shaver, I'll give you another in the same place, and—oh, crickey!"

Clive had landed out, and Fatty caught a clenched fist in the chin, and sat down in the gutter with surprising suddenness.

There was a puddle there, and Fatty sat right in it, sending up a splash of dirty water all round him, and Phipps gave a yell. He was standing close to his friend, and he had met the benefit of the splash.

"You clumsy idiot," he howled. "What the dickens do you mean by that?"

"It wasn't my fault," gasped Fatty, as he scrambled to his feet. "It was that young cub, hit me when I wasn't looking."

"You were looking," said Clive, wrathfully, "and besides what did you do to me?"

"Not so much as I'm going to do now," said Fatty Stevens. "I'm going to give you the biggest hiding of your life."

"I'm not afraid of you," said Clive, disdainfully. "Come on, if you like."

And he placed himself in an attitude of defence.

And then Fatty Stevens hesitated a little.

Clive's manner and attitude showed that he knew something about the manly art of self-defence, and that he was by no means the soft spooney the juniors had at first taken him for. Fatty liked an easy victory, but a hard-fought conflict was no much in his line.

"Oh, shut up!" he said, irritably. "You're a new kid and don't know how to behave yourself. Perhaps I'll let you off."

"I don't want to be let off," said Clive.

"Cheeky little beast! You ought to have a niding."

"Then give him one."

"It's too warm to fight. Get off with you."

"Yah!" growled Phipps. "You're afraid of him!"

"Who's afraid?"

"You are. Why don't you go for him?"

"I'll do what I like, Albert Phipps."

"You'll give me a licking, or else take one," said Clive, advancing as his adversary retreated. "You've spoken rudely of my mother, and if you don't take back what you said, I say you're sorry, I'm going to fight you."

"Of course, I didn't mean to speak rudely of a lady," said Fatty, condescendingly. "I take all that back, as a gentleman."

"Very well, then. I don't want to quarrel," said Clive.

"Oh, come along," growled Phipps, "I've got to see you at the school, young shaver."

"Why?"

"Because your cousin sent me?"
 "Isn't he coming himself?"
 "No, he's off for the afternoon with Mulberry."
 "It was very kind of you to come."
 "Oh! I wouldn't have come if I could have got out of it," said Phipps, ungraciously. "I'm Courtney's fag, that's why I'm here, and I'd rather be on the cricket ground."

Clive flushed.
 "I'm sorry you have been bothered on my account," he said. "Courtney shouldn't have sent you against your will. I don't want you with me."

"You've got no choice in the matter, so come along."
 "I shall not come with you. You can go back to your friends. I shall go to the school alone," said Clive, firmly.
 "Don't be a silly ass."

Clive turned away without replying.
 He was swung back by a sudden grip on the collar. Phipps had gripped him, and he glowered angrily at the new boy.

"Look here, young shaver, you're coming along with me. I should get into a row with Courtney if I didn't take you in tow, so stop rotting, and come."

"Let go my collar," said Clive, quietly.
 "He, he, he! Perhaps you'll make me if I don't!" sniggered Phipps.

"Yes, I'll make you."
 "Let's see you do it."
 Clive brought up his fist and gave the junior a thump on the chest that forced him to release his hold as he staggered back.

"There you are," said Clive, tranquilly. "I've done it."
 Phipps turned red with rage. The chuckle from Fatty Stevens did not improve his temper. Phipps was considered cock of the walk in the Lower Fourth at Northcote, and to be handled like this by a younger lad, and a new boy, too, was a little too much.

"You young whelp!" he exclaimed, "I'll smash you."
 And he launched himself at the new boy like a thunderbolt. Clive sprang back, and then stood firm, and Phipps, rushing on, found his fists swept up by the new boy's left, and then the new boy's right fist came crashing into his face like a lump of solid iron.

And Albert Phipps went down on the pavement as if he had been shot.

Clive looked across him at the astonished Fatty.
 "Do you want some?" he asked.
 Fatty hurriedly retreated a step or two.
 "No, I don't," he said, quickly. "I'm the most peaceable chap in the world; I don't want to quarrel with anybody; not anybody who can hit like that, anyway," he added, under his breath.

Phipps rose slowly to his feet.
 He was a little dazed by that knock-down blow, and a good deal enraged.

He had never dreamed that the innocent-looking new boy was of such a quality, and the discovery came as a shock to him.

But he was not beaten yet.
 "Haven't you had enough?" asked Clive, as the junior stepped towards him.

"No," said Phipps, emphatically. "I haven't. I'm not going to fight you now, but I'll have it out with you at Northcote, my boy. Now you're coming with me to the school."

"Well, I'm not."
 "Lend me a hand, Fatty. We'll march him along."
 "Right you are, Phippy."

And the two juniors seized Clive, one by each arm, to march him down the road towards the distant school.

"You'd better let me go," said the new boy, quietly.
 "Rats! Bring him along, Fatty."

They dragged Clive a few paces.
 Then the new boy began to struggle.

And to their amazement, the two juniors found that he was very hard to hold, although they were two to one.

And by some trick Phipps wasn't prepared for, Clive's leg twisted round his, and he was overturned, and went down with a bump upon the road, letting go of Clive as he fell.

Clive turned like lightning upon Fatty Stevens, and gripped him.

"Here, let go," gasped Fatty, "I—he—"

He had no time to finish.
 Clive swung him round, and bumped him down upon Phipps, as the latter was in the act of rising.

Phipps went down again, flattened by the weight of the fat boy.

Clive stood with his hands in his pockets, regarding them with a smile.

They scrambled up, gasping and red with rage. But they had had enough just then. They gave Clive black looks, and then, without another word, walked away together towards Northcote. The new boy was left alone, to his own devices.

CHAPTER II.

AT THE BLUE LION!

Clive stood looking about him for some moments after the two Fourth-Formers of Northcote had left him.

His nose was rather painful, where Fatty Stevens' fist had struck it, and he was conscious that it was swelling to an unusual size, and assuming a hue that was distinctly noticeable.

However, he had the comfort of reflecting that he had damaged the enemy more than they had damaged him, so he was not displeased by the result of the encounter which had greeted him as his first welcome to Northcote Collegiate School.

"By James!" said a voice near him, "I never saw anything so neat as that, never in all my born days, I didn't."

Clive turned his head to look at the speaker.

He saw a short, stoutish man with a very red face and little twinkling light eyes, dressed in clothes of a somewhat loud pattern, with a watch-chain as thick as a finger.

This gentleman carried a cane with a gold head, and wore a silk hat at a rakish angle on the side of his head.

Clive was not particularly fascinated by the stout gentleman's personal appearance, especially as an odour of stale spirits and tobacco hung about him, extremely displeasing to a clean, healthy lad.

"Very neat, upon my word," he repeated. "It did me proud to see you handle them two chaps, Master Courtney."

Clive stared at him.

"My name is not Courtney," he said.

"No, isn't it? I heard you say that you was a cousin of my friend, Master Courtney, and I naturally thought that that was your name."

"Oh! I see. No, Courtney is a cousin on my mother's side," explained Clive. "My name is Clive Russell. But is my cousin a friend of yours?"

"Many a pleasant hour have we spent together," remarked the gentleman in checks. "Many and many a one. My name's Joliffe, Master Russell. You may have heard your cousin speak of me."

"No, he has never spoken of you to me, Mr. Joliffe."

"No? Are you going to Northcote?"

"Yes. I expected my cousin to meet me here, but he sent those other chaps instead."

"And they was cheeky, and you gave 'em a hiding," chuckled Mr. Joliffe. "Serve them right, too. You're bound to be cock of the walk over at the school, Master Russell, if you keep your end up like that there."

"Do you think so?" asked Clive, rather flattered.

"Yes, I does," said Mr. Joliffe, emphatically. "I suppose you know it's a half-holiday at the school to-day?"

Clive, of course, didn't know it.

His first instinctive dislike of Mr. Joliffe was melting rapidly away under the influence of that gentleman's extreme affability, and it was very flattering to a boy of his age, too, to be treated with such evident respect by a man old enough to be his father.

"I don't know," he said, thoughtfully. "If my cousin had been here to meet me, I should have gone straight up to the school, but I didn't fancy being marched along between those two bouncers."

"Of course you didn't," exclaimed Mr. Joliffe, heartily.

"A young gentleman like you has an independent spirit; and so he should have. Don't you be bullied, my lad."

"I don't intend to."

"And as you're not in a hurry, it bein' a half-holiday at Northcote, what do you say to coming and having a look at my place?" suggested Mr. Joliffe, taking it for granted that Clive had decided not to go directly up to the school, in his cunning way.

"I'd like to know you better, young gentleman, because I'm a friend of your cousin's."

"You are very kind," said Clive, slowly. "But I think I ought to go to the school."

"Why, when it's a half-holiday?"

This question was not easy to answer. There was really no reason why Clive should not remain out a little longer if he wished, and since Mr. Joliffe was a friend of his cousin's, surely there could be no harm in accepting his invitation, the boy thought.

"Well, I don't know. I suppose I can stay here a bit if I like."

"Of course you can, and very likely you'll meet Master Courtney at my place, and you can go up to the school together," said Mr. Joliffe.

"That will be nice," exclaimed Clive. "You're very kind, Mr. Joliffe."

"Not at all, not at all, any friend of Arthur's is a friend to me," said Mr. Joliffe, very heartily. "So come along, young gentleman. I suppose you like the river?"

"Rather," said Clive, with sparkling eyes. "I don't get much chance of boating at home, though."

"Then you'll like my place. The garden goes down to the river, and I keep a couple of boats, and you'll be always welcome to use them whenever you like."

"It's awfully good of you."

"Not a bit of it. I like to see young people happy. So long as I see young faces round me happy, I think to myself you're some good in the world, after all, Tom Joliffe."

Clive thought Tom Joliffe an extremely fine fellow.

The walk was a short one to Mr. Joliffe's "place," and Clive was a little startled to see that it was a public-house, with the sign of the Blue Lion over it.

He shrank back a little.

Joliffe saw perfectly well what was in his mind, but he went on speaking, without the slightest alteration in voice or expression.

"You won't go in that way, Master Russell. There's a gate through the field by the river, that's the way Master Courtney comes to see me."

Clive hesitated, not knowing what to say.

It seemed snobbish to reject all Mr. Joliffe's kindness because he kept a public-house, and yet some instinct seemed to warn the boy not to enter the Blue Lion or its precincts.

He who hesitates is lost, and Clive hesitated too long.

Mr. Joliffe, apparently not noticing his dubious frame of mind, walked him on to the gate, which opened into the field beside the inn's kitchen-garden.

The sight of the sunny river gleaming on the other side of the field chased the doubts away from Clive's mind. His eyes sparkled.

"I say, what a jolly place?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, ain't it? Good fishing here, too," said Mr. Joliffe.

"Some men would charge for it, but not me; it's free enough to my friends, I say, if to nobody else. You or your cousin are always welcome to come here with a rod, Master Russell."

"How good of you!"

"Not a bit of it!"

Mr. Joliffe opened another gate, into the inn garden, a long, old-fashioned garden full of fruit trees and flowering plants sloping down to the river.

An empty skiff was moored to a stump at the end of the garden, and Clive looked at it with eager eyes.

Mr. Joliffe laughed.

"You'd like to take that boat out, now wouldn't you?" he asked, pleasantly.

"Wouldn't I just!" said Clive.

"Well, so you may, and stay out as long as you like, and when you're tired, come ashore, and have tea with me in the garden here, under the trees. Perhaps your cousin will have got here by then. I expect him this afternoon."

"I say, you are a brick."

And Clive, without waiting a moment, ran down to the boat, and jumped in. He was a keen waterman, and had, as he had confided to Mr. Joliffe, few chances at home of gratifying his liking for the river. This was too good a chance to be lost.

Mr. Joliffe watched him with a peculiar smile as he pushed off the boat from the bank, settled the oars in the rowlocks, and pulled out into the shining river.

There was something in the sight of the honest, innocent lad that Mr. Tom Joliffe seemed to find particularly amusing.

"So that's the kid," so ran Mr. Joliffe's unspoken thoughts.

"That's the kid Arthur Courtney has spoken about. How queer I should have run upon him to-day? Courtney never even told me he was coming to the same school. Didn't

want me to know, of course. I might never have known for this happening to-day."

A rather ugly look came over Mr. Joliffe's face.

"That's the kid," went on Mr. Joliffe's reflections. "Son of Captain Russell, in India, and he'll be rich some day. I think I know where some of the money he asked for. Good. I think I know where some of the money will flow to." Mr. Joliffe laughed aloud, not a musical laugh. "It's the boy's mother Courtney has to for money, more than once, I know, and she's asked it; though I fancy she wouldn't be quite so generous if she knew where it went. He's a deep 'un, is young Master Courtney. I wonder if he'll squeeze anything out of the boy there's any squeezing of that kind to be done, that's what I think."

And the landlord of the Blue Lion went into his back entrance.

Clive, happy with a boat all to himself on the sunny river, was far from thinking of the harm that might come of his innocent visit to the home of Mr. Joliffe.

He could not be expected to guess that Tom Joliffe was the biggest blackguard in the county, and that he lived on plucking pigeons than by his calling as a publican. The Blue Lion was a nest of all the loafers and gamblers for miles round Northbank, but Clive was not to know that.

The place was strictly "taboo" to the boys of Northbank, but that Clive Russell was to learn later. As yet he knew nothing wrong.

When he came to the landing-place at the foot of the garden, Mr. Joliffe was not in sight.

Clive made the boat fast, and stepped ashore.

He walked up the garden towards the inn, along a path thickly lined with shrubberies, wondering whether he could find out where Mr. Joliffe was, in order to say goodbye to that genial gentleman, before he went up to the school.

The sound of voices came to his ears from the trees.

He gave a start as he recognised his cousin's voice.

He had not seen Arthur Courtney since the last winter, but, of course, knew his voice at once. Courtney was speaking rather loudly.

"I've had bad luck, beastly bad luck."

The voice of Joliffe followed.

"Well, if young gentlemen will go to the races—"

He broke off suddenly.

It was the sound of Clive Russell's footsteps on the path in the garden that caused him to cease speaking with his cousin unfinished.

Clive came out into the open a few moments later, and found himself in the presence of a group, who had been talking under the trees.

Mr. Joliffe was there, with Arthur Courtney and George Mulberry, the latter as yet an unknown individual to Clive, though he was to know a good deal about him later.

The three looked uncomfortable at the sight of the boy.

Upon a small table under the tree was a bottle, and two glasses, and it was easy to see that all three had been drinking together.

Courtney uttered an exclamation as he recognised his cousin.

He sprang towards Clive.

"You little fool! What are you doing here?"

CHAPTER III.

A ROUGH RECEPTION!

Clive started back, surprised and hurt by his cousin's words. Courtney seized him by the shoulder and shook him roughly.

"What are you doing here?" he repeated, fiercely. "Answer me at once!"

"I—I came—!" stammered Clive.

"Answer me, you little fool. How dare you come here?"

"I came with Mr. Joliffe."

Courtney shook him again.

"Didn't Phipps meet you at the station as I told him?"

"Yes."

"Then why didn't you go with him to the school?"

"We quarrelled, and—"

"Get along with you. Go up to Northcote at once. Don't hear?"

"All right, Arthur. I didn't mean to make you angry."

"Get along with you. And mind, not a word at the school about seeing me here."

NEXT TUESDAY: A Wonderful Detective Story, "THE CASE THAT MADE PAUL PINKERTON."

"Let him stop if he wants to," interposed Mr. Jolliffe, sulkily. "I don't see why he should be drove away."

"Go, Clive!"

"Have a sip of this before you go, young gentleman," said Jolliffe, taking up the bottle and a glass.

Courtney, with an oath that deeply shocked Clive, tore the bottle from his hand, and hurled it into the shrubbery.

Jolliffe's eyes glittered, but angry as he was, he retreated from the savage look of the Northcote Sixth-former, and contented himself with a muttered oath.

Courtney waved his hand impatiently to Clive, who hurried away, greatly wondering over what he had seen.

It was pretty clear that the relations between Mr. Jolliffe and Courtney were not quite so happy and intimate as the former wished him to believe.

Why was his cousin so angry at meeting him in the garden of the Blue Lion?

If Courtney himself could be there, why should not Clive go there if he chose, especially as Mr. Jolliffe had been so kind to him?

It was not easy to answer these questions, but one fact stood out clearly enough, and that was that Courtney was angry with him for going there, and that the visit to the Blue Lion was to be kept a secret.

Clive left the inn garden, and came out into the village street. A passer-by directed him on the road to the school, and he set out to walk the distance.

He soon came in sight of the tower of Northcote, and stopped at the big bronze gates, and looked in.

A fine sight the old school looked in the summer afternoon.

The mass of buildings, grey with age, the old elms, shading the quadrangle as they had shaded it for two hundred years past, and the red tiles of the roofs glimmering in the sun, made a picture that could not fail to impress the most casual observer.

Clive stood for some moments looking at the school, which was to be his future home, and then walked in at the open gates.

There was a shout from the quadrangle.

"There he is!"

And there was a rush of half-a-dozen juniors towards the new boy.

Clive was on his guard immediately as he recognised Phipps and Fatty Stevens among the youngsters who rushed towards him.

"That's the new kid," said Fatty Stevens. "That's the cheeky little cad, who thinks he's going to come and be cock of the walk in the Lower Fourth."

"That's the cad," repeated Phipps. "Nice-looking specimen, s'nt he, with his nose swelled like a giddy beet-root."

"Hallo," said Clive, coolly. "Hallo, haven't you had enough? Do you want some more?"

Phipps waved his hand to his followers.

"Collar him."

The juniors fastened upon the new boy in a twinkling. Clive had not expected this, and he struggled desperately.

"Here, fair play," he exclaimed. "What's the game? One at a time, and I'll lick any chap here."

Phipps grinned.

"Will you? You've got altogether too many airs for a new kid. We're going to put you through it."

"Let me alone."

"Yes, when we've finished, not before. Got him tight?"

"We've got him, Phipps," chorussed the juniors.

"Don't let the little brute go. Give him socks if he wriggles. These new kids have got to be taught their place," said Phipps. "Bring him along to the gym. We shan't be interrupted there."

"That's the wheeze," exclaimed Fatty Stevens. "We don't want a beastly master or prefect sticking himself into the matter before we've given the new kid his lesson."

"I'll give you a lesson when I can get at you," panted Clive, still struggling, but in vain against the odds. "You're a lot of cowards, so there!"

"Chirp away," chuckled Phipps. "We'll soon take some of the cheek out of you. You little mongrel, do you know that I'm captain of the Lower Fourth?"

"I know I've licked you once, and can do it again," said Clive.

"Lying little beast."

"I say, Phippy," said a red-headed lad, named Jones,

but generally known as Ginger. "Is that true, you know? Has the new kid licked you?"

"It's all his gas," said Phipps, uncomfortably. "Of course he hasn't. Does he look as if he could?"

"Well, you've been doing something to your face, and—"

"I'll do something to your face, if you don't shut up, Ginger."

Clive was hauled into the gym, and there his tormentors had him all to themselves. The buildings were deserted, the whole school being out in the playing-fields.

The new boy wondered what was coming, but he did not lose his nerve. He felt that he was in for some rough handling, but he had plenty of pluck.

"Now," said Phipps. "I fancy that the frog's march round the gym will just about suit the case, and will teach the new kid a lesson in respect to his superiors."

"Jolly good idea," said Fatty Stevens.

He fought fiercely, but in vain.

Round and round the gym he went, and he experienced the horrors of the frog's march for the first time in his life.

Round and round, twice, thrice, and four times, and then the panting juniors halted, and stood the new boy upon his feet again.

Clive was a pretty object to look at now.

His collar was torn out and hanging by a single hole. His jacket was rent down the back, his trousers torn and dusty and his face dirty and perspiring and red as a peony.

He was gasping for breath.

Phipps grinned as he looked at him.

"What price this for a funny merchant?" he exclaimed. "My hat! This is the kind of chap to take a prize in a beauty show and no error."

"Has he had enough?" asked Fatty Stevens, anxiously.

"Let's see. Now, you new kid, think you have learned your lesson?"

"Wait till I get a chance to punch your head," said Clive.

"He hasn't had enough," said Phipps, decidedly. "We've got to take all the cheek out of him before we let him go. It's really for his own good, you know, as he'll never get on in the Lower Fourth if he's too bumptious."

The juniors chuckled over this.

"You've only got to say when you've had enough, Russell," declared Phipps. "Simply say when, you know. You've got to beg pardon all round for being cheeky, that's all, and we'll let you off."

"I'll see you hanged first," said Clive, hotly.

"Not going to do it, eh?"

"Hardly."

"Oh, he hasn't had nearly enough," said Phipps, exasperated. "Come on. Perhaps when he's been round two or three times more he'll have a little less gas. And look here, don't get handling him too gently. A bump or two extra hard will do him lots of good."

The juniors started off again.

Clive was past struggling by this time, but he was as plucky as ever.

Round the gym they went, and as they came opposite the door again a boy came into the building, and stared in blank amazement at what was going on.

"Hallo, hallo," he exclaimed. "What's up?"

"Oh, it's all right, Melton," said Phipps. "It's only a new kid, and we're putting him through it for being cheeky."

Frank Melton stepped in the way of the crowd, looking at Clive.

"Seems to me you've put him through it quite enough," he remarked. "Why, the poor beast's a perfect wreck. Don't you think he's had enough?"

"No, I don't."

"Well, I do, Phipps. You'd better—"

"Shut up. Mind your own business."

"I tell you—"

"Get out of the way."

The juniors pressed on, and Frank Melton was hustled aside. He caught hold of Clive as he passed, and dragged him away from the juniors' grip. So sudden was the action that they let go, and Clive was on his feet again.

Phipps turned upon the interfering Fourth-former wrathfully.

"What are you meddling here for, Melton, confound you?"

"I told you the kid had had enough," said Frank, coolly.

"And I meant what I said. He's had enough, and you're not going to give him any more."

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"Thanks," gasped Clive. "You're a good sort."

Phipps fumed with rage.

He had always considered himself cock of the Fourth Form at Northcote, and had proved his right to the title by more than one fray under the elms behind the boat-house.

But he had never yet come into direct contact with Frank Melton.

Frank was an easy-going lad, somewhat inclined to be idle, and always opposed to exertion of any kind, and so he had allowed Phipps to assume his position without taking the trouble to try conclusions with him.

But Phipps, who had a secret conviction that he would be no match for Frank, if the latter were sufficiently roused from his laziness to exert himself in a fight, had always avoided coming into conflict with him.

Frank looked very easy and careless as he stood there now, with his blue eyes almost sleepy in their expression, but Phipps had seen him hit the punching-ball in the gym, and he didn't want to take the place of that punching-ball if he could help it.

"Look here," he said, hotly. "You've no right to interfere with us, Melton."

"That's all right," said Frank, lazily. "I'll do it without any right, if you like."

"We're going to put that boulder through it."

"Well, you've done so, now be satisfied."

"He's going to have some more."

"Not a bit of it."

"Who says so?"

"I do."

"Go for him, Phippy," urged the followers of the cock of the Lower Fourth. It had often been gravely debated in the Fourth whether Phipps could lick Frank Melton, or vice-versa, and a fight between the two would have been a treat, to all except the two principals. "Go for him Phippy. Give him a hiding."

"Oh, I don't want a row," said Phipps, magnanimously. "If Melton thinks the new kid ought to be coddled, let him coddle him, for all I care."

And Master Phipps put his hands in his pockets and walked away whistling.

This come down of their leader rather took the juniors by surprise, and certainly put an end to the ragging of the new boy.

After looking at each other dubiously for a few moments, the juniors marched off, and Clive Russell was left alone with his new friend.

CHAPTER IV.

CLIVE MAKES A FRIEND.

Clive Russell was too exhausted to do anything for some minutes, but lean against the wall and breathe heavily. The juniors of Northcote School had indeed put him "through it," with a vengeance, and the new boy was utterly played out for the time.

Frank Melton stood watching him with a slightly amused smile.

"Well," he said, at last. "Feel better."

"Yes, thank you," gasped Clive.

"What's your name?"

"Clive Russell."

"Mine's Frank Melton. Of course, you're going into the Lower Fourth. That's my form. How do you like your first taste of Northcote, Russell?"

"Not very much."

"I should suppose not. Phipps and his set are a rough old lot. You do look a giddy scarecrow and no mistake. What did Phipps go for you like that for?"

"They suddenly pounced on me as I came in at the gates," explained Clive. "I met Phipps in Northbank, and we had a row."

"Oh! I see."

"My cousin sent him to meet me at the station," Clive explained.

"Your cousin. Is he at Northcote?"

"Yes, he's in the Sixth; his name's Courtney; Arthur Courtney."

"I've seen him, of course. I can't say I know him, as chaps in the juniors forms don't know seniors in the Sixth," said Frank, laughing.

"No, I suppose not. He's a fine fellow, isn't he?"

"Yes, I daresay he is."

There was a hesitation in the junior's manner which did not fail to impress Clive. He wondered whether Courtney was such a popular favourite at the school, after all, as he imagined him to be.

Clive followed his new friend out of the gym.

"Come on, let's go this way, through the cloisters, and can cut up to the Lower Fourth dormitory without meeting anybody, if we have luck. Have your things got to the station yet?"

"No, my box was left at the station to be sent on. I don't know whether it's arrived yet," said Clive. "Can I find anywhere?"

"Better not; you can't go around inquiring in that way."

"I forgot that. But I can't wear these clothes till they have something done to them, can I?" said Clive, dubiously.

"That's all right; I'll lend you a suit of mine; we're men of a size," said Frank, glancing at Clive.

"You are very good."

"This way; up this staircase; this is the back way, if you understand. Never used except by the servants, and by chaps who want to go in and out and dodge the masters."

"Why should they want to do that?" asked Clive, surprised.

Frank Melton laughed.

"Well, you are an innocent. I suppose you know there's a certain locking up time, and that chaps are not allowed out of the precincts of the school after it."

"Yes, I've heard of that."

"Some chaps break bounds, you see, and then they have to be awfully careful that the masters don't spot them," explained Frank. "Sometimes they do it only for fun, but sometimes its to do things they'd get expelled for if the masters knew."

Clive stared.

"What do they do, then?"

"Oh! some of them go down to the Blue Lion in Northbank, and play cards there with a blackguard named Joliffe and his set," said Frank, carelessly.

Clive started violently.

"Joliffe! The Blue Lion!"

"Yes. You don't mean to say that you know the man said Frank, eyeing him curiously.

"He seemed to me a very nice man."

"I daresay he seemed so to a good many chaps who were sorry afterwards that they ever met the rascal," said Frank coolly. "You are a mug and no mistake, if you'll excuse me for saying so, Russell."

"But I went with him to the Blue Lion," blurted out Clive. "He let me take his boat on the river, and it was ripping."

"You'd better not confide that to anybody else in Northcote," said Frank, drily. "Here's the Fourth Form door. Come in."

Clive followed him into the great room, with its seemingly endless row of white beds, and the high windows glowing with the red of the sunset.

Frank poured water into a basin on one of the washstands and threw a sponge into it, and then went into a locker.

"But I say," said Clive, anxiously. "About Joliffe. My cousin—"

He broke off abruptly.

Courtney's angry injunction to say nothing at Northcote about meeting him at the Blue Lion rushed into his mind.

Was it possible that Courtney expected that to be kept secret because Joliffe was a blackguard, and he dared not let his connection with him become known?

Was this the cousin he had always looked up to and respected, the big Sixth-Former of Northcote to whom his mother had committed him with such unsuspecting confidence?

Frank looked at him curiously again.

"What's that about your cousin?"

"Oh! nothing," stammered Clive, turning very red, as he plunged his face into the basin to escape further questioning.

"Oh, all right! I'm not in the least curious, and I daresay I know more on that subject than you do," said the other with a laugh. "Buck up and get cleaned. Here are the towels. I think you'll find them a passable fit."

Clive, with his brain almost in a whirl from the new discovery he had made, washed away as much as he could of the signs of his rough experience in the gym.

There were a good many bruises about him, and he was aching in every limb, but the good wash in cold water made him feel immensely fresher and more fit.

Then he donned the Eton suit Frank had taken out of

locker and unfolded ready for him. The fit was not exact, but a schoolboy is not generally very particular on that point, and as Frank had said, it was passable.

"You look all right," said Frank, surveying him, with a nod of approval. "You'd better take your clothes to the house-dame to-morrow and ask her if she'll mend them. She's a good old soul and she'll do it like a bird if you ask her nicely."

"Thanks, awfully."

"It's getting near tea-time," went on Frank. "Would you like me to show you over Northcote a bit before the bell rings?"

"I should, very much."

"Then come along."

They quitted the dormitory and went downstairs.

In the hall they found Phipps, Fatty Stevens, and some others of the juniors who had taken part in the regging in the gymnasium, but beyond a few hostile looks they took no notice of Clive or his friend.

In the summer sunset the two boys strolled out, and Frank with the partially bored air of an experienced guide, showed Clive the various points of interest about the good old school; and they were many.

"We're rather proud of the gymnasium," he remarked. "It's always shown to the visitors, but I daresay you've seen enough of that already."

Clive laughed.

"Yes, I think I have. What is that old building over the there?"

"That's the Abbey—or rather what's left of it. It's completely ruined, since Cromwell's time: they say he battered it down with his cannon, because some Royalist bounder held it out against the Parliament. It's a jolly old place, full of nooks and crannies, and we explore it sometimes on a half-holiday. It's real fun, because we have to dodge the masters. They think it dangerous for kids to go among these tottering old ruins and I daresay they're right. It makes no difference to us."

"You would be punished if you were caught there, I suppose?"

"Rather! but we take jolly good care not to be caught you see."

"Clang! clang!"

"Hallo, there's a bell," said Clive, looking round.

"It's the tea bell."

Mr. Glynn, the master of the Fourth, presided at the table. He was a little bald man, with a red nose and a quick temper. He generally looked at the boys as if he expected to catch them in the act of doing something forbidden, and seemed very disappointed when he didn't catch them.

Phipps and Fatty Stevens were seated opposite to Frank and Clive, on the other side of the long, narrow table.

The new boy was just raising the cup to his lips when a sardine dropped right into it, jerked across the table by the skilful Phipps.

The sudden splash of his tea went over Clive's mouth, and he uttered an exclamation quite involuntarily, and the sharp movement of his hand upset half the tea over his trousers—or, rather, Frank's.

Mr. Glynn's cold steely eye was instantly upon him.

"I am sorry, sir, but—"

"Stand up!"

Clive, with a very red face, stood up.

"Now," said Mr. Glynn, "you will kindly explain, Russell, why you have chosen to break the seemly silence which should accompany a meal, and why you have spilt your tea in the manner of an utter savage and barbarian."

"I couldn't help it, sir."

"Indeed? Are you in the habit of depositing half your tea upon your—er—nether garments?" asked Mr. Glynn, sarcastically.

"Nunno, sir."

"Then why have you done it upon this occasion?"

Mr. Glynn had a great turn for sarcasm, and he often made his boys writhe beneath the lash of his tongue: a lash that sometimes cut harder than that of a whip.

He waited with ceremonious politeness for Clive's reply.

The new boy did not speak.

"You will take your tea and plate," said Mr. Glynn, "and stand against the wall there, and finish your tea all by yourself."

Clive had no choice but to obey.

He took his tea-cup in his right hand, and his bread-and-butter in his left, and stepped away from the table. Frank Melton gave him a sympathetic glance, and many of the boys grinned. Most of them, however, felt a real admiration for

Clive's grit in not explaining the truth of the matter to the irate master.

Clive stood up against the wall, a short distance from the table, his face the colour of a penny.

Fellows at the other tables, of course, turned their heads to look at him, and he was soon the attraction for all eyes.

His only comfort was that his cousin was not in the hall.

His eyes had gone at once to the Sixth Form table, and noted the fact that Arthur Courtney was absent.

It would have been too painful and humiliating for Courtney to see him in this position.

Evidently Courtney had been delayed at the Blue Lion, and would not turn up at Northcote for tea. Clive congratulated himself on that, but his position was sufficiently trying.

His face looked as if all the blood in his body had been pumped into it, as he stood there, and he felt as if every mouthful would choke him.

And then suddenly his heart gave a painful throb.

Arthur Courtney had walked in at the open door, and was crossing towards the Sixth Form table.

Arthur Courtney soon saw that his form-fellows were glancing with smiles towards the Fourth Form table, and he turned his head with a puzzled look to see what it was that attracted the amused attention of the seniors.

A dark look came over his face as he saw Clive standing against the wall, looking the picture of self-conscious misery.

Clive's eyes met his cousin's with a beseeching look.

Courtney turned his head away, and finished his meal with his eyes upon his plate, never vouchsafing another glance towards the unfortunate lad who would have given anything in the world for a single look of sympathy or at least forgiveness from the Sixth-former.

CHAPTER V.

THE COUSINS.

"Come into my study."

Courtney spoke sharply and unkindly, and Clive Russell winced.

His ordeal was ended at last.

The meal was over, and the boys were leaving the dining-hall, and Clive was at last allowed to quit his ridiculous position against the wall.

He was going out with the Fourth Form when Courtney tapped him on the shoulder and spoke to him. Clive looked up timidly.

"I will come, Arthur."

Courtney snapped his teeth.

"Don't call me Arthur here, you young ass."

Clive shrunk back.

In silence, with throbbing heart and quivering lip, he followed the sturdy figure of the Sixth-former along the dusky corridors.

Was this the cousin he had always admired—the big, athletic schoolboy who had been the hero of his boyish imagination?

Courtney did not speak a word until they had reached that apartment, and then he opened the door and went in, leaving Clive to follow. Then he shut the door and stood for a minute looking at the boy.

"A nice little ass you've made of yourself," he said at last.

Clive's lip quivered.

"I'm sorry, Arthur—but—but it wasn't my fault, it wasn't really."

"Not your fault you were stuck up against the wall like a baby," exclaimed his cousin, scornfully. "Whose fault was it, then?"

"But it wasn't my fault. Another fellow throw a sardine into my tea, and it startled me, and that was how it was," said Clive, eagerly.

"Why didn't you tell Mr. Glynn so?"

"I—I thought it wasn't cricket to give a fellow away."

Courtney's face relaxed a little.

"Well, I'm glad to see that you've got some sense," he exclaimed. "If you had told tales, your life wouldn't have been worth living among the juniors. I can tell you."

"Then, you see, it wasn't my fault, was it, Arthur?"

"I suppose it was Phipps who threw the sardine into your tea?"

"Yes."

"I can promise you that he'll make your life a burden unless you thrash him, for I know Phipps," said Courtney.

"If you think you have a chance of licking him, Clive, you had better take the first opportunity of challenging him, and meeting him in a fair stand-up fight."

"I will. I don't mind a bit."

"Well, you've got pluck, anyway," said Courtney, half grudgingly. "That is, of course, if your bite's as bad as your bark."

"I'll fight Phipps to night," he exclaimed.

"Well, you'll have a chance, I expect, for he's pretty certain to go for you in the dormitory after lights out."

"Let him," said Clive, looking decidedly warlike.

Courtney's manner changed. He sat down on the table, with his legs dangling, and his back to the light, so that his face was in the shadow, while Clive's was turned full towards the gas. He looked at the boy keenly.

"But that wasn't what I wanted to speak to you about, Clive," he said, abruptly. "You remember you met me this afternoon?"

"Yes, at the Blue Lion," said the boy, innocently.

"Sh! Shut up, you little fool! Suppose somebody heard you?"

Clive was silent.

"We Northcote fellows are supposed not to go there, you see," went on Courtney, more quietly. "It's out of bounds."

"Why do you go then?" asked Clive, naturally.

"What the dickens has that got to do with you?" broke out Courtney, angrily.

"I—I—didn't mean to offend you, Arthur."

"Well, don't ask impertinent questions. Not that I need make any mystery about it, as you know so much," said Courtney ungraciously. "You ought never to have gone to the Blue Lion. Why didn't you come straight to the school with Phipps?"

"I quarrelled with him."

"Well, anyway there was no need for you to go to that place, of all places in the world."

"I—I didn't know it was wrong," faltered Clive.

He did not say that if Courtney had met him at the station, as he ought to have done, it would never have happened.

"It was the rottenest thing that could have happened," muttered Courtney, savagely.

"Mr. Joliffe said he was your friend, and that you might be there, and—"

"The lying hound! I dropped in quite by chance."

"If he's a lying hound, you surely ought not to know him, Arthur."

"That's no business of yours. There are all sorts of things a youngster like you cannot understand," said Courtney, impatiently. "I suppose you can keep a secret?"

"Oh! yes, I won't tell anybody I saw you there, if that is what you mean."

"Look here, if it got out, it would get me into serious trouble; I might even be expelled from the school," said Courtney, with a gloomy look.

"I won't say a word."

"And mind you're not going to the Blue Lion any more. You can fag for me, that won't be much trouble, and I'll help you with your lessons," said the senior. "If you like the idea—"

"I shall be awfully glad, Arthur."

"All right, then: I'll tell Phipps, and he'll show you what you have to do. Only don't call me Arthur any more. It's all right at home, but a fag can't call a Sixth-former by his Christian name. Call me Courtney."

"I'll remember—Arthur—I mean, Courtney."

"Mind you do. Now you can scuttle. Here's Mulberry, and I want to talk to him."

Mulberry had just come into the study. He looked curiously at Clive, and then glanced over at Courtney with a questioning look.

"Hullo! Here's the young shaver, then?"

"Yes, George. I'm going to make him my fag."

"Ah, best way to keep his tongue quiet, of course, and—"

"Shut up!" growled Courtney. "You can cut, kid."

Clive left the study.

His cheerfulness at being taken on as Courtney's fag was considerably damped by the remark of George Mulberry.

Had Arthur Courtney only taken him so that he could more easily keep an eye upon him, and see that he did not chatter about what he had seen at the Blue Lion?

It was an unpleasant thought.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WAY OF THE TRANSGRESSOR!

"Well?" said Mulberry, taking out a cigarette, and lighting it at Courtney's gas. "Is the kid going to hold his tongue?"

"Yes," growled Courtney.

"You're persuaded him?"

"He didn't need persuading. He won't say a word, now that he knows I don't want him to."

"Really, a useful sort of kid," said Mulberry, with a nod.

"Have a fag?"

"No, not now."

The other stared.

"Going to give up smoking?"

"Oh, hang it, I don't want to be always with a beastly cigarette between my teeth."

Mulberry laughed, and blew out a little cloud of smoke.

"I can see what's the matter with you, Arthur?"

"Well, what is the matter?" growled Courtney.

"The dear kid has been preaching to you."

Arthur Courtney flushed angrily.

"Don't be a silly ass, George."

Mulberry grinned at his evident annoyance.

"All the same, ass or no ass, I've hit it," he said. "The dear good little boy has been working off on you some of his mamma's sermons second-hand."

"Oh, shut up!" said Courtney, irritably. "There's worry enough without you starting as a funny man, I think."

"What's worrying you now?" asked Mulberry, quite good-humouredly. He was always good humoured, was George Mulberry. It did not pay to quarrel with anybody, especially Arthur Courtney. And George Mulberry always had his eye on the main chance.

"What's worrying me? I've lost every blighted shilling I possess on those beastly races this afternoon," snarled Courtney.

Mulberry shrugged his shoulders.

"You shouldn't have bet on the gee-gees, then."

"Well, that's good from you, when you were persuading me all the time to make a plunge."

"You needn't have taken my advice. But what's the trouble. Suppose you are broke? Write to your aunt for some tin."

"How can I have the nerve, when only last week she sent me a fiver?"

"Well, you're taking care of her darling boy for her, bringing him up in the way he should go, and bestowing upon him the inestimable benefit of making your tea and toasting your cheese, and eating the fag-ends of your cake," said Mulberry. "She can't stand you less than another fiver for that."

"I haven't the confounded cheek."

"Well, you are a silly ass to miss such a chance. Why, I'd make five times as much out of that giddy aunt as you do. Write to her, and tell her how delighted you are to have the little beast—I mean the dear child—at Northcote, and pile it on strong about the way you'll look after him."

"And wind up with a request for money?" said Courtney, with a sneer. "Well, that would sound nice, wouldn't it? Why, even a simple old soul like Mrs. Russell would see through that in no time. If you've got no better advice than that—"

"But I have," said Mulberry, coolly. "You have not let me finish. Wind up the letter without asking for anything for yourself, like the generous chap you are. But you can say that the kids here have studies to themselves, and that they're so rottenly furnished that you wouldn't use one for a dog's kennel—and that's the solid truth, Arthur—and then you can go on to say that if she'd like to spend a little tin in fixing Clive up comfortably, you'd lay it out to the best advantage."

"Well, what would be the good of that? You don't propose that I should steal any of the money she sent, do you?"

Mulberry waved his hand pacifically.

"Steal! What a shocking word! The old lady would stand a tanner, I should say, to see her darling boy fixed up like a giddy little prince."

"Very likely she would, but I'm not going to—"

"Wait a bit. You ought to be compensated for your trouble. You'll spend about three pounds on the study, and turn it into what will look like a giddy Paradise to a Fourth Form kid. The rest you can invest for him."

"Invest? How do you mean?"

"Well, borrow, and let him have it back, somehow or other, when luck turns your way on the gee-gees," explained Mulberry.

Courtney looked decidedly uncomfortable and dubious.
"It's all very well, putting it that way!" he exclaimed.
"But in plain English, it's a beastly swindle, and that's the proper word for it."

George Mulberry shrugged his shoulders in a careless way.
"Well, I was only giving you a little advice in a friendly way, and you needn't jump down my throat," he replied.
"There's no need for you to set on my advice if you don't want to. You know best how you are fixed."

"I am in a rotten beastly hole," growled Courtney.
"Why, you've been broke before, and lived to tell the tale."

"But I owe Joliffe thirty pounds, and—I've offended him," Courtney snapped.

George Mulberry gave a prolonged, expressive whistle.
"Well, I must say that that wasn't the most sensible thing you could have done, under the circumstances," he remarked.
"Rather unfortunate for you."

"Do you mean that?"

"Certainly. We have enough to do in this world, looking after ourselves, without taking charge of other people," said Mulberry, coolly.

"Well, I can't quite see it in that light. I'm not goody-goody, Heaven knows, but I draw a line at throwing an innocent kid into the hands of a rotten shark like Joliffe."

"All the better for him, and all the worse for you. What's the upshot?"

"Joliffe lost his temper, and demanded his money."

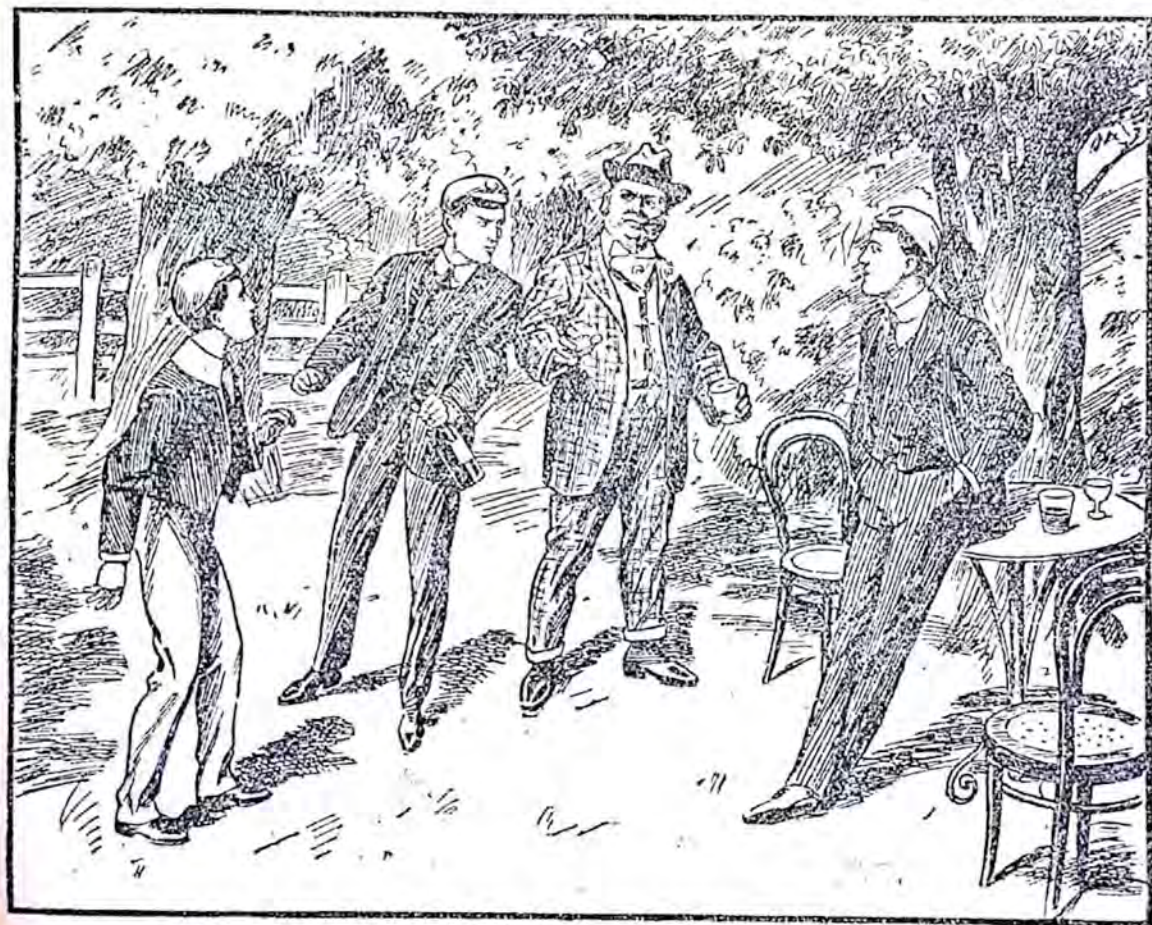
Rap!

It was a knock at the door of the study.

In a flash Mulberry's cigarette was out of his mouth, and it was hidden in the hollow of his hand as the door opened.

There was always danger that it might be a master, though he expected that it was only some fellow who wanted to speak to Arthur Courtney.

He looked guiltily towards the door as it opened, and



Courtney, with an oath, tore the bottle from his hand, and hurled it into the shrubbery.

"It couldn't be helped. The brute had got his eye on my young cousin—you remember you saw him there to-day. Well, I sent him off, sharp."

"Yes, I know you did, and I thought Joliffe seemed the least bit wild when I left," grinned Mulberry. "So you had a row about that?"

"He said I must not interfere, and I told him I'd see him hanged before he should have that kid at the Blue Lion and teach him blackguardly tricks," said Courtney, hotly.

"Well, as a conscientious chap, you deserve a prize; but I don't think I should have talked like that to a man I owed thirty pounds to," said Mulberry, with a laugh.

"I couldn't stand by and see him play such a game, with my own cousin, too, and a mere kid."

"I don't see that it was any business of yours,—Arthur but, of course, you know best."

flushed uncomfortably as he saw Mr. Glynn, the master of the Fourth Form at Northcote.

He slyly dropped the cigarette to the floor, and set his foot on it, instantly extinguishing it.

Unfortunately for him, he could not extinguish the smell of tobacco, which was very perceptible in the apartment, and he shivered as he saw Mr. Glynn sniffing.

"I came here," said the master, in his most unpleasant tones, "to speak to you, Courtney. I must say that I have met with a shock and a surprise."

"Indeed, sir," said Courtney, uncomfortably.

"Yes, indeed," said Mr. Glynn, with emphasis. "I am sorry to see a strict rule of the college broken by a Sixth-former, who is naturally expected to set an example of proper conduct to the Lower Forms at Northcote."

Courtney turned red!

"I am not conscious of having broken any rule of the college, sir."

"There is a distinct smell of tobacco in this study, Courtney."

The owner of the study was silent.

"Have you not been smoking, Courtney?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Glynn turned to George Mulberry, who was shifting from one foot to another, trying to look at his ease, but failing dismally in the attempt.

"Mulberry, am I to understand that it is you who have been smoking?"

"I, sir? Certainly not, sir."

"You deny having done so?"

"Why, of course, sir. It's against the rules of the college, sir," said Mulberry, with an expression of great innocence.

"Then whence comes this smell of tobacco in your room, Courtney?"

"I—I haven't noticed it myself, sir," said Courtney, stammeringly.

"Indeed! Your nostrils must be strangely dull, and you must be blind if you cannot see the haze here over your table," said the master of the Fourth. "I should be sorry to think that either of you is deliberately lying to me. Has anyone else been in this room smoking lately?"

"It's quite possible, sir," said Mulberry, eagerly. "We've only been here a few minutes. I think it's quite likely, for now you speak of it, I do notice a little niff a good deal like tobacco in the room. Don't you, Courtney?"

Arthur Courtney sniffed vigorously.

"Yes, now that you call my attention to it, there seems a sort of smell of tobacco," he said, with a nod. "I didn't notice it before."

The master looked very doubtfully from one to the other.

"Very well, I must take your word," he said. "I came to speak to you, Courtney."

"I am quite at your service, sir."

"You had a cousin come to Northcote to-day?"

"Yes, sir, Clive Russell."

"Yes, that is the name. You met him at the station, I believe."

"No, sir, not exactly. I was intending to do so, but I was unfortunately prevented, and I sent my fag, Phipps, instead."

"Ah, that accounts for his arrival not having been reported to me as it should have been. I consider you guilty of neglect of duty towards your cousin and towards me."

"I am sorry, sir," said Courtney, hanging his head, and inwardly furious, both against Mr. Glynn and against poor Clive.

"Yes, I hope you are sorry, Courtney. Where is your cousin now?"

"He was with me a short time ago, sir. Shall I fetch him?"

"You need not trouble. Mulberry, you will please go and look for Clive Russell, and tell him to report himself at my room for examination."

Mulberry turned very red, and did not stir from where he stood.

As a matter of fact, he dared not. For he was standing in full view of Mr. Glynn, and the light fell there upon the carpet, and if he moved he would have to reveal the cigarette he had placed his foot upon, to the shocked gaze of the master.

"Well, why don't you go?" snapped Mr. Glynn.

"I—I—I begged your pardon," stammered Mulberry.

"I—I—I came here to get Courtney to help me with a mathematical problem, and—and—and—"

"Indeed! and you do not wish to take the trouble of doing as I requested you?"

"If—if—if you will excuse me, sir—"

"I will not excuse you. Go at once."

"If—if—if you please, sir—"

"I fail to understand you, Mulberry. What are you shuffling your feet in that absurd manner for?" demanded Mr. Glynn.

Mulberry, thus caught in the act, stood still. He had been trying to wriggle the tell-tale cigarette under the table, but nothing could escape the eagle eye of the Fourth Form master.

"Now, Mulberry, go at once, and say no more about it. Do you hear me?"

George Mulberry looked sulky.

"You have no right to order me, Mr. Glynn," he said.

"You are not my form-master."

Mr. Glynn flushed red.

As a matter of fact, he was exceeding his authority in giving peremptory orders to a Sixth-Form boy, and he knew it, but he had never dreamed of resistance like this.

"Indeed!" he snapped. "Then you refuse?"

"I would rather not go."

"Very well, Mulberry. I shall bear in mind your refusal," said Mr. Glynn, setting his lips.

"I am sorry, sir, but—"

"You need say no more," said the master of the Fourth Form icily. "You have said quite enough, Mulberry."

Mr. Glynn fixed his eyes upon Courtney, taking no notice of the red and uncomfortable Mulberry, as if the latter had suddenly ceased to exist.

"The Head has asked me to see to this, Courtney," he said, snappishly. "It was extremely neglectful of you to fail to meet your cousin at the station, or to make any proper arrangement for him to be met."

"I sent my fag, sir. I thought—"

"You need make no more excuses. I have no more to say. If I were your form-master, I should have a great deal to say. But, as Mulberry, has so kindly and tactfully pointed out, I have no authority over the Sixth. I am done."

Mr. Glynn, in a very bad temper, walked to the door, passed out, and closed it behind him with a snap, very like a slam.

"Well, you've got us both into his black books now, and he's a spiteful beast," said Courtney, gloomily.

Mulberry assumed an air of bravado.

"Oh, who cares for old Glynn, the silly old fossil!" he exclaimed. "I—oh, crumbs!"

He broke off in utter dismay.

For Mr. Glynn had suddenly reopened the door, and was looking into the study with a countenance simply criminal with rage.

"Mulberry! So that is how you speak of me behind my back!"

"I—I—I—" Mulberry was about the most accomplished prevaricator in the school, but even he could not invent a lie that would serve his turn just then.

"Enough! No excuses. I shall report your words to the Head."

"Oh, sir—I—I—"

The door slammed shut.

"Well, I'm blowed," ejaculated Mulberry. He stopped and picked up the fag-end of the cigarette, and threw it out of the window. "Here's a pretty kettle of fish. Who would have guessed that he was just going to open the door again?"

Courtney grinned rather maliciously.

"Well, you said you didn't care for the old fossil," he remarked. "I don't know what you want to worry yourself about, then."

"Oh, shut up," was Mulberry's reply to that, and he swung himself out of the study in a bad temper.

He was certain of a big imposition now, if nothing worse. But Courtney had little sympathy for him. He was too full of his own troubles: the troubles that were brought upon himself, it is true, by his own folly and misconduct, but which were really all the harder to bear on that account.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIGHT IN THE DORMITORY.

There was a determined expression upon Clive Russell's face that evening when he went up to the dormitory with the boys of the Fourth Form.

Clive had been examined in the Head's study, and assigned to the Fourth, much to the satisfaction of Frank Melton, his new friend. He went up to bed with his form, and, as we have hinted, he was in a determined mood.

He was thinking of his pledge to Arthur Courtney.

His cousin had advised him to lick Phipps if he could, as otherwise the bully of the Fourth Form would never leave him alone.

And Clive had said that he would do it, and he meant to keep his word.

He didn't intend to pick a quarrel with Phipps, but the first time the bully started on him, Clive was ready to give back more than he received.

As it happened, Phipps regarded this as an excellent opportunity of putting the new boy at Northcote "through it" a little more, so Clive was not likely to have long to wait.

The boys were allowed ten minutes in which to undress and get into bed, and any who were not between the sheets when

the prefect returned to put the light out were likely to catch it hot.

But as soon as the Fourth were left alone in the dormitory, Phipps showed that his immediate thoughts were not of going to bed.

He whispered to Fatty Stevens and Ginger Jones, and the three advanced towards Clive, who was quietly removing his jacket.

Clive looked at them calmly.

"Hallo, what do you want?" he asked.

Phipps grinned.

"You don't know the manners and customs of a public school," he said, scornfully. "You've got to go through it before you are a member of the form, isn't that so, Fatty?"

"Rather," said Fatty, who was always Phipps' faithful echo. "Rather, Albert, old man. He's got to be initiated, of course!"

"That's it," said Ginger. "You see the idea, you new kid?"

"Yes," said Clive, with a nod. "I see the idea. What's the little game? I suppose you've got some sort of a programme marked out?"

"Yes," assented Albert Phipps. "We're going to toss you in a blanket first."

"Are you?"

"Yes," said Phipps, threateningly. "We are. Ain't we, chaps?"

"Rather!" said Fatty and Ginger, together.

"Anything else?" asked Clive, with an air of docility that deceived the others.

"Yes," said Phipps, encouraged. "We're going to make you run the gauntlet after that."

"Then you'll be satisfied, I suppose?"

"Perhaps. Perhaps not. If you make any fuss about it you'll get it worse."

"I don't want to buck against any manners and customs, as you put it, that you have here," said Clive. "But I think I shall object to that programme. I say, Melton."

Frank, who was undressing by his bed, looked across to him. "Is it a custom to toss new boys in a blanket in this dormitory?"

"Yes, if they'll stand it."

"And to make them run the gauntlet?"

"If they're silly asses enough to do it, yes."

"Well," said Clive, turning to Phipps and his friends again.

"I'm not going to put up with anything of the kind."

"It'll be all the worse for you if you give us any trouble."

"I'll risk that, I think."

"Look here, Russell—"

"Shan't! You should wear a mask or something if you want me to look at you. You can't expect me to look at a face like that."

A snigger went through the dormitory, and Phipps turned red with rage.

"Look here," he shouted, furiously. "I've had more'n enough of your cheek, you new rotter."

Phipps made a sign to his friends, and the three of them sprang upon Clive.

They intended to bear him to the floor and sit upon him, but somehow it did not work out quite like that.

For Clive's left came out like a shot, and caught Phipps under the chin, and he went backwards across a bed as if a battering-ram had struck him.

And then Clive's right landed on Fatty Steven's nose, and Fatty Stevens sat down on the floor with a bump that shook up every bone in his body.

But Ginger Jones caught Clive round the neck and dragged him over.

It was only for a moment, however.

Clive's elbow came into Ginger's ribs, and Ginger released his hold and reeled away, and then another of Clive's left-handers took him under the chin, and he sat down on top of Fatty Stevens.

Clive, a little flushed, but otherwise quite calm, looked at his fallen foes and waited for them to come on again.

"Bravo!" shouted Frank Melton, clapping his hands.

"Two to one on the new kid."

Most of the Fourth Form at Northcote were by no means sorry to see the bully of the form handled so easily by the new boy.

Many of them had suffered from Phipps' bullying in the day of his power, for Albert Phipps was a bully from head to heel, and had fallen into a habit of cuffing smaller boys that was extremely painful to the youngsters so treated.

To see him laid on his back, with his two friends by his side, was a sight as pleasant as it was novel to the boys of the Fourth.

But Phipps was up again in a few moments.

He wished secretly that he had let Clive Russell alone, but the cheers of the Fourth-formers told him that his prestige was at stake.

They were quite ready to welcome a new cock of the walk in the Fourth, and if he allowed his fall to pass unavenged, his reign was over for ever.

"That was—was a fluke," he gasped. "I wasn't looking for that. I'll—I'll dust up the floor with you, you young rat."

"All right," said Clive. "You can start in the dusting business as soon as you like. You will find me at home, kid."

The door of the dormitory opened, and Green the prefect looked in.

"Hallo, not in bed yet? Do you want me to come to you?"

"It's all the new kid's fault," growled Phipps. "He must start quarrelling."

"Now then, Russell—"

"It's not true," exclaimed Frank Melton, indignantly.

"It's Phipps who started it. Don't tell such howling crammers, Phipps. Why can't you try to be a decent chap. You never know what you can do till you try."

Phipps seized his pillow to hurl at Frank, in his exasperation. Clive stepped quickly forward and put his foot out, and Phipps staggered over it as he hurled the pillow. Clive intended to save Frank from the missile, and he did; but his action had another and quite unexpected result. For the pillow's aim was changed as Phipps reeled, and it flew from his hands in the wrong direction, and smote Green the prefect full in the face.

Green gave a roar like a maddened bull.

He wasn't hurt much, though the shock had sent him backwards and cracked his head on the door. But he was furious. His dignity as a prefect was insulted.

A prefect was a high and mighty creature, to be approached by mere juniors in a humble and revering spirit, and to be knocked over by a pillow from a Fourth-former was a terrific outrage, amounting to sacrilege in a prefect's eyes.

Green did not stop to argue or to ask questions. He simply made a rush for Phipps.

Phipps saw him coming, and bolted. A bed was in his way and he sprang over it. The prefect behind caught him by the ankle, and he plumped down upon the bed on his face.

A better position could not have been desired for Green's purpose.

His right hand rose and fell rhythmically, and each time it fell, a sounding slap came upon Phipps, on the most exposed part of him.

Phipps roared and wriggled, but he could not escape. Slap! slap! slap!

Smack! smack! smack!

The prefect did not leave off till his palm tingled and his arm ached.

Then he released the wriggling, squirming Phipps.

"There!" he said, pantingly. "Perhaps that will teach you not to chuck pillows at a prefect's head again, my lad."

"I didn't," howled Phipps. "I was chucking it at Melton."

Green gave a chuckle.

"Then I advise you to take better aim next time, or leave it till there wasn't a prefect in the line of fire, in case of accidents."

He frowned at the boys, who were convulsed with laughter.

"Go into bed, or I'll warn you."

The prefect was evidently in no mood to be trifled with, and the Fourth Form lost no time in obeying.

They tumbled quickly into bed, undressed or half-dressed, and Green turned out the light and slammed the door of the dormitory.

"Make a ring, you chaps," said Frank. "Are you going to have rounds? I'll keep time, if you like. What do you say to two-minute rounds?"

"Rot!" said Phipps. "We're going ahead, and fight till we give in, one of us."

And the fight commenced.

Phipps was certainly bigger than Clive, older, and longer in the reach, and he had always flattered himself that he knew something about boxing.

Besides that he had been through a good many fistful encounters since he had come to Northcote a long time ago, and so he had the advantage of long experience upon his side.

He ought, therefore, to have been able to handle the new boy at Northcote quite easily.

But somehow it didn't turn out as it should have done.

Phipp's attack was fierce and sustained, but he could not, in the first place get through Clive Russell's guard.

That seemed to be perfect, and Phipps exerted himself against it in vain.

Try as he would to reach the cool, smiling face of the new boy, always his blows were brushed aside or knocked up, and the smile broadened upon Clive's features.

Phipp's temper, naturally enough in the circumstances, went from bad to worse, and he began to hit out wildly and furiously.

Then came the new boy's chance.

He made a feint, and Phipps fell blindly into the trap, and hit out, leaving his face fully exposed to attack.

His blow was brushed away like a fly.

And Clive's left came out like lightning, and landed full upon Phipp's nose, and Phipps gave a fearful yell and rolled over on his back.

The bump with which he went down seemed to shake the dormitory.

"My hat!" gasped Frank Melton. "What a stunner!"

And the juniors looked at Clive Russell in something like amazement.

They could not see where the force of that terrific blow had come from, in the medium sized and slim form of the new boy.

Phipps was a full minute getting upon his feet again.

A thin red stream ran from his nose, which was bulbous and red, and the shock had brought the water with a rush to his eyes.

He was slightly unsteady upon his "pins" as he faced the new boy again.

The smile was still upon Clive's face.

He felt that he was master of the situation now, and that it was only a question of time before the victory fell to him.

Phipps realised it too, though he was too furious to admit it to himself, and he recommenced the fight with the fury of important rage.

He attacked Clive so savagely that the new boy was forced to recede a little, still, however, keeping up a perfect guard.

Against his careful and skilled defence Phipps exhausted himself in vain.

And as he paused, out of breath and panting, fatigued with effort and fury, Clive suddenly took the offensive again.

He came on quickly, driving Phipps before him, and the defence of the bully of the Fourth was now extremely feeble and inadequate.

Had the fight been divided into rounds, he could have recruited this exhausted strength by a much-needed rest, but by his own choice he had sealed his doom.

Clive's attack was resolute and unsparing.

Phipps' failing guard could not save him.

Again and again the new boy's fists came home upon his face and chest, with crashing blows that left a mark wherever they fell.

Phipps staggered blindly, and at last went down with a crash. He lay there blinking in the candle-light, and showing no desire to get upon his feet again.

There was a pause.

Clive stood ready to renew the fight. He was a little fatigued but quite fit. But Phipps lay there blinking, and did not move.

"Time!" exclaimed Frank Melton. "Are you finished, Phipps?"

Phipps grunted.

"I say, buck up, Phippy," said Fatty Stevens. "You can't let the new kid lick you, you know."

Frank grinned.

"He can't stop him, you mean, Fatty?"

And Ginger Jones chimed in,

"Buck up, Phippy. Buck up, old man, and go for him."

"Go for him yourself," snapped Phipps.

"You don't mean to say you're done?"

"Yes, I do."

"Have another try, you'll lick him if you try."

"Oh, shut up!" said Phipps, rather ungratefully, in reply to this friendly counsel.

"I'm satisfied if you are, Phipps," said Clive, as the defeated bully rose slowly to his feet. "We've had it out, fair and square, and I don't see that either of us need bear any malice."

Phipps gave an unintelligible growl.

"That's right," exclaimed Frank Melton. "Shake hands, both of you, and say no more about it."

"I'm quite willing," said Clive, holding out his hand in his candid way.

Phipps put his hands in his pockets.

"Don't be a pig, Phippy," advised Frank Melton. "Why don't you shake hands like a little man, and pretend that you're not a pig, for once?"

"You shut up, Melton."

"You won't take my hand, Phipps?" said Clive, slowly.

"No, I won't."

It dropped to Clive's side again. He gave a slight shrug of the shoulders.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I daresay you'll think better of it in the morning."

"I hate you," said Phipps, between his teeth. "I hate you."

"Shame!" cried Frank. "You needn't shake hands, if you don't want to, but you needn't be a rotten blackguard either, Phipps."

Clive's eyes flashed.

"Well, if you choose to bear malice, Phipps, I can't help it," he said, quietly. "I've fought you fairly, on your own terms, and I didn't want to fight at all; I'd never have had a word with you if you had left me alone. You tried to bully me, and I wouldn't stand it. That's the long and the short of it. Now you're licked you bear malice. It's a sad game. I hope you'll think better of it, that's all."

"Don't waste words on him," said Frank, as Phipps still stood with a sullen scowl on his face, and his hands in his pockets. "The brute will bear malice; it's his nature to. Leave him to his sulks."

"I won't shake hands with you, Russell," said Phipps. "I'll make you sorry for this, some day, and somehow. That's all I've got to say."

"And quite enough, too," said Frank, scornfully.

"I don't think you'll be able to hurt me, Phipps," said Clive. "If you force me to say it, you've only got what you've been asking for, and what you thoroughly deserve, and if you bother me again, you'll get some more."

And he turned away.

Phipps went silently to bed, and in a few minutes the whole of the Fourth Form were between the sheets, and in a few more minutes they were sleeping the sleep of the just.

CHAPTER VIII.

COURTNEY'S TROUBLE.

The next morning Clive Russell found his position at Northcote somewhat changed, and it was decidedly for the better.

Phipps had been cock of the Form, and he had been dead against Clive, with the result that a good many of the Fourth Form had been dead against him, too.

But now Albert Phipps had fallen from his high estate.

He was cock of the form no longer, and the new boy, if he had chosen, could have taken his place, and cuffed and bullied as Albert Phipps had done.

He had defended himself, and shown that he could not be bullied or put upon with impunity, and he was satisfied.

His sudden popularity in the form was very gratifying to him, too, for he was of a cordial and sociable disposition, and liked to see friendly faces about him.

There were plenty of willing friends to instruct him in his new duties as a fag, without his having to ask help of his predecessor in that honourable office. He was only too anxious to make himself useful to Courtney.

He knew that his cousin was not pleased at his coming to Northcote, and the knowledge hurt him. But he did not resent it. He felt that a relative in a lower form might be a tie and a drag on a Sixth-former. And he was only anxious to remove Courtney's unfavourable impression, and make him glad instead of sorry that he was at Northcote.

Clive made the tea and Courtney opened a letter with a shaking hand, and began to read it eagerly.

Then he uttered an exclamation that startled Clive.

Clive gave a jump, the tea-pot went to the floor with a crash, and smashed into twenty pieces.

Courtney's brow was black with rage.

He sprang up as the tea-pot smashed on the floor.

"You clumsy little fool!" he shouted. "Look what you've done."

"I—I'm awfully sorry, Arthur—I mean Courtney," stammered Clive. "You—you startled me."

Courtney looked as if he would strike him.

"You—you—why did you ever come to Northcote? Why did you ever come here to be a worry and a burden to me?"

Clive turned pale.

There was anger, almost hatred, in his cousin's face, as he spat out the savage words.

It seemed impossible that the trifling accident of the broken tea-pot could have excited the senior to such a passion.

Clive's glance went involuntarily to the letter.

It was clutched in Courtney's hand with a convulsive grip. Was it possible that there was anything about him in that letter?

If so, what? But if not, why had Courtney flown into this sudden fury with him?

The boy was amazed and dismayed.

He could only stare at his cousin open-eyed and open-mouthed.

"You—your wretched little rat! Get out of my study."

"I—I'm sorry—I—"

"Get out," roared Courtney.

Clive went to the door.

"Find George Mulberry and send him here."

"Mulberry, if you please—"

"Hallo, young shaver, what do you want?"

"If you please, my cousin—I mean Courtney—wants to speak to you."

"All right."

And Mulberry walked away. He looked into Arthur Courtney's study, and found the Sixthformer sitting bolt upright in his chair, a letter gripped in his hand, and an almost desperate expression upon his face.

"Hello, what's the matter?" said Mulberry.

"Read that."

Courtney flung the letter at Mulberry. It fell to the floor, and Mulberry coolly stooped and picked it up.

It was very brief, but it was very much to the point.

"Dear Courtney.—I am hard up, and want the thirty quid you owe me very badly. You didn't send it to me last night. Can you pay? If you can't, let me know when to expect the money, and send your cousin with the note. If you don't send him, I shall know that you want to quarrel with me, and you know what I shall do.—Thomas Jolliffe."

"Phew!" said Mulberry. "He means business, I'm afraid, Courtney."

"You can see the brute's game?"

"Yes, I think so. He's wild at your whisking your cousin off like that, and he's determined to make the young gentleman's acquaintance," grinned Mulberry.

"Do you still seriously advise me to save my own skin by giving up that poor young devil, Clive, to a fellow of Tom Jolliffe's stamp?"

"I've already said so."

"Then I've only a word to say to you, George Mulberry. Get out of my study!"

Courtney watched his crewhile chum with savagely gleaming eyes as he went to the door, opened it, and passed out into the corridor.

The door closed: George Mulberry's footsteps died away down the passage.

Arthur Courtney was alone!

Alone, with the letter staring him in the face; alone, with his conscience, to wrestle between good and evil, and to make a decision which might wreck or save his whole career. It was the old struggle, old as the world itself, with darkness on one side and light on the other; the angel of evil battling with the good angel for a soul to be lost or saved!

Courtney's head fell upon his hands, and he groaned aloud.

CHAPTER IX.

CLIVE GETS AT THE TRUTH!

Clive Russell wandered into the quadrangle, after he had delivered his message to George Mulberry, in a miserable and depressed mood.

Unfeeling as Courtney had, for the most part, shown himself towards his cousin, the regard Clive had always felt for him was not easily killed.

Arthur Courtney, the big handsome public schoolboy, the fearless footballer and the splendid cricketer, had been his hero always, and on holidays he had listened with bated breath to Arthur's stories of life at the great school of Northcote.

An idol, however unworthy, is not easily shattered. Clive was grieved and hurt, but he was not exactly offended, and he certainly felt no resentment towards his cousin.

He felt that Courtney was in some trouble; some serious trouble, in connection with the letter that had arrived.

That was the cause of his flying into such a sudden tantrum

of rage, which had been wreaked upon the nearest object, the luckless Clive.

But what was this mysterious trouble?

The junior wandered disconsolately in the quadrangle, thinking over the problem, his hands in his pockets, his face dark and preoccupied.

The sun was going down behind the tower of Northcote, and dusk was spreading over the old quadrangle, and the ancient elms that had shadowed it for centuries.

The lads were coming in from the cricket field, hot and dusty and merry, but Clive did not feel inclined to join them.

He wanted to be alone, with his gloomy thoughts, to think what could be the matter with Courtney, and try to devise some means of helping him.

He started as a sudden slap fell upon his shoulder.

"Hallo, Melton! You startled me."

"What on earth's the matter with you, Russell?"

"I was going to start you in the cricket practice. It's too late now."

"I'm really sorry; I'm a silly ass to forget."

"You are," said Frank. "I don't mind though. I can see you've got something on your mind, Russell. If I can help you, you've only got to speak. Is anything wrong?"

Clive was silent.

He felt strongly inclined to take Frank into his confidence and ask his advice, as one who knew more about Northcote and its ways than himself. He felt instinctively that he could trust Frank Melton.

Frank misunderstood his hesitation.

"Never mind, I don't want to be curious," he said. "I only asked because I thought I might be of some use to you. Say no more about it."

"Oh, not at all," exclaimed Clive, eagerly. "I'm awfully bothered, and I think that perhaps you might be able to help me, Melton."

"I'll do anything I can, as I said. 'What's the row?'"

"Nothing to do with myself, you understand?"

"Surely you're not bothering your head over somebody else's troubles?" exclaimed Frank Melton, staring at his friend in amazement.

"Yes, I am. There's nothing surprising in that, is there?"

"Well, yes, a chap generally has his hands full to look out for himself, especially a new boy at a big public-school, but still, it's to your credit. You'll soon get out of the habit," said Frank, cheerfully. "But go ahead, kid."

"It's about my cousin," he said. "Of course, you'll keep it dark that I've said anything to you, Melton. Courtney would be wild."

Frank Melton was silent for a full minute, thinking.

He was not at all surprised to hear that Arthur Courtney was in trouble, for he more than suspected him of being one of the upper form boys of Northcote who left the school at nights to visit the betting set at the Blue Lion in Northbank village.

"I am sure it was the letter that disturbed him."

"Well, my dear chap, you're making a lot of mystery about a matter that's as plain as a pikestaff," said Frank, laughing. Clive was silent, in deep reflection.

Was it possible that his cousin's strange conduct had so simple an explanation?

"I don't think you can be right, Melton."

"And why not?"

"Because if Courtney were in want of money, he's only got to write to my mother, and she'd send him some."

"You are thinking of a couple of pounds, I suppose."

"Well, she would send him a fiver if he asked for it."

"He might owe five or six times as much as that."

Clive jumped.

"What do you mean, Melton? How could a schoolboy possibly owe so much money? What could he have bought?"

"Experience, my son," grinned Frank. "Experience."

"Look here, this isn't a matter to joke about."

"Certainly not, and I wasn't joking, but I couldn't help smiling at your innocence. I don't suppose that giddy innocence will last long at Northcote, Russell, but I'm not going to be the one to burst it up. Take my word for it, without going deeper into the matter, that Courtney very likely owes some bounder a sum of money he can't possibly pay, and which he wouldn't dare to ask your mater for."

"It seems impossible," said Clive, slowly.

"On the other hand, it's quite possible, and very likely; and in my humble opinion, it looks a dead cert."

"Poor old Arthur! It must be a frightful worry for him."

Frank Melton yawned.

"His own fault, I expect. No good telling you that, though, as he is your paddy here. I see you want to be strong, so I'll take myself off. Of course I'll keep mum."

And Frank countered away with his hands in his pockets, whistling carelessly.

Clive remained alone, in deep and painful thought.

Was Frank Mulberry's explanation the true one?

He wondered—and as he wondered, his steps took him half unconsciously in the direction of Arthur Courtney's study.

CHAPTER X.

NARRATIVE.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?"

Arthur Courtney paced the study ahead.

He sat in his study, his arms thrown along the table, and his face resting upon his arms, in a mood of utter dejection and despair.

"What shall I do? Thirty pounds! And I haven't thirty shillings!"

He did not notice a timid tap at his door.

"Thirty pounds!"

The door opened, and Clive Russell stepped into the study.

He looked at Courtney with a startled face.

"Thirty pounds!" growled the Blithedale again.

Thirty pounds—what? What—oh, what shall I do?"

"Arthur!"

Courtney gave a sudden start, and raised his head.

In a moment his face grew black with rage as he realized that his young cousin must have seen him in that attitude of abandonment and despair, and must have overheard his muttered words of misery.

He rose abruptly to his feet.

"What do you want here?"

"I want to speak to you, Arthur—Courtney."

"You spying little fiend, get out."

"Arthur!"

Courtney advanced towards him furiously.

Clive stood his ground, and his gaze met his cousin's calmly.

"Arthur, listen to me just a moment. I can help you."

Courtney started, and passed in spite of himself.

"What do you mean, you little fool?" he said, harshly.

Clive did not flinch.

"I can help you out of the troubles if you will let me."

"What troubles?"

"I heard what you said. You owe somebody thirty pounds," said Clive, boldly.

"Well, suppose I do, what business is that of yours?" said Courtney, savagely.

"I want to help you, Arthur."

"Billy little fool! What can you do?"

"I can lend you the money."

Courtney stared at him blankly.

"What are you babbling about? It's thirty pounds."

"I can lend it you, if you like," said Clive, gaining courage.

"Where is a kid your age to get thirty pounds from? Do you mean that you will write to your mother for it? She would never send you such a sum. She would think you were mad if you asked for anything like it?"

"I wasn't thinking of writing to mother," said Clive.

"I have the money, all my own. You know I was always saving up money, Arthur."

Courtney laughed a little.

"Yes, you were always different from me in that respect, Clive. I was in—careless. But you don't mean to say that—"

Clive nodded eagerly.

"Yes, Arthur. I've saved up tips and presents to buy a motor-bike, and I have nearly fifty pounds. It's in banknotes, in a secret drawer in my trunk."

"And you offer me thirty pounds out of it?"

"Yes, yes, Arthur."

"Suppose I can't pay you back?"

"Then—I don't mind."

"What about the motor-bike?"

"I—I don't want it very much, Arthur—I don't really," said the junior, eagerly. "Please, please let me help you?"

Courtney was silent for a minute.

When he spoke again his voice was strangely altered.

"Give me your hat, young one. You're a better fellow than I ever was, or shall ever be."

"Oh, no, Arthur, I—"

"I ought to know," said Courtney, grimly. "You know how to keep a secret, Clive?"

Clive nodded.

"Well, I'll give you one. If I didn't pay this money I should be expelled from Northcott, and I should be out."

Clive bowed aside.

"So I'll accept your offer, Clive. You're a little better."

"I'll pay you back, every penny, see if I don't. Every penny."

Clive, and even so I possibly can find, and I'll be there."

He gave Clive a kindly grip of the hand.

"You're sure you don't mind parting with the money?"

"Not a bit, Arthur."

"Then get it, and I'll get the matter off my chest."

Clive hurried away. Courtney walked up and down the study, his face full of anxious worry, his eyes shining.

"The business was good," he muttered again.

"Yes," he muttered. "Even if that infernal scoundrel Clive is a little tricky. I'll make it up to him somehow."

Clive entered the study.

He had a little bundle of banknotes in his pocket, and he was

and creep "happy."

Courtney picked them up.

"I won't forget this, Clive. Give me my hat."

He thrust the notes into his pocket and hurried out of the study.

Clive watched him as far as the gates of Northcott when he took the road to the village.

Was he going to the Blithedale?

Clive wondered.

But he was content to know nothing about that. He was quite content with the knowledge that he had saved himself from ruin.

George Mulberry met his widowed friend as he came in the

visit to the village. He gazed in amazement at Courtney's

face, which was more happy and contented than it had been

for weeks.

"Hello, Courtney?" he exclaimed. "Have you had a

windfall? Where have you been?"

Courtney stopped.

"I've been to the Blue Lion," he said, quietly.

"To see Jolliffe?"

"Yes."

"And has he let you off?"

"He had no choice, as I have paid him in full."

Mulberry gave a jump.

"You have paid him?"

"Every shilling."

"Then—then you were not broke."

"I was stony broke when I told you I was."

"Then where have you suddenly picked up thirty pounds?"

exclaimed Mulberry. "Are you robbing, or have you won it?"

"It's no business of yours, but I don't mind telling you."

My cousin Clive had the money saved up, and he lent it to me."

"More fool he."

"Do you think so?" laughed Courtney.

"Yes. He'll never see a penny of it again."

"On the contrary, I shall pay him back every penny."

"Yes, I fancy I can see you doing it," sneered Mulberry.

"You probably won't see me do it, but I shall do it all the same," said Courtney, cheerfully. "Got anything more to say?"

"Yes, I say, Courtney," said Mulberry, with a sudden

conciliation in his manner. "You'll be coming down to the

Lion to-night, won't you?"

Courtney laughed.

"Hardly."

"There's some fellows coming, and there'll be a little game,

and I shouldn't wonder if your luck turned at last."

"Once bit, twice shy, Mulberry. I'm done with the Blue

Lion, and Tom Jolliffe, for ever, and with you too, for that

matter."

And Arthur Courtney walked away, leaving George Mulberry

gritting his teeth, and realizing very keenly that his

victim had at last escaped him.

Courtney met Clive as he went in, and patted him on the

shoulder.

"It's all right, Clivey," he said. "And I shan't forget."

And he passed on, leaving Clive Russell the happiest boy in

the old school.

And here—only for a time, we hope—we say farewell to

THE NEW BOY AT NORTHCOTT.

THE END.

NEXT TUESDAY: A Wonderful Detective Story "THE CASE THAT MADE PAUL PINKERTON."