THE GAYTON SCHOLARSHIP

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A School Story

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THE GAYTON SCHOLARSHIP
A SCHOOL STORY

BY

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&c. &c.

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THE GAYTON SCHOLARSHIP.

CHAPTER I.

THE DEANERY CANDIDATES.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Hartland. Isn't Jim ready? All right; I'll wait for him. Do you think Susie would care for these wild flowers and grasses? I picked them this morning. Rover and I have been for a splendid run over the common, nearly as far as the forest."

"Thanks, Dick," said Mrs. Hartland, with a pleased smile; "Susie will be delighted with them. Poor girl! it's little chance she has to see them growing herself. What a pretty white dog-rose!"

"Isn't it a beauty? I thought Susie would like that.—Hullo, Jim!" as his chum appeared from an inner room; "come on, old lazy-bones. I expected to find you in a tremendous hurry this morning.—Good-bye, Mrs. Hartland; I hope Susie will be pleased with the flowers."

Most people liked Dick Boden. He was a comical youngster, fond of all kinds of fun and frolic, and always keeping an eye on the bright side of things. In school he was a regular pickle, and yet his teachers spoke well of him, for there was nothing mean about Dick, and he was as honest as the day.

"Full of animal spirits and a trifle impetuous, but a good little chap at bottom," said Mr. Holmore, the head-master of the Deanery School.

He was a round-faced, curly-haired fellow, with laughing blue eyes, a most engaging smile, and such an innocent expression that a lady artist once painted

his portrait as a study of an angel. This greatly amused the Deaneryites, who promptly dubbed him the Angel.

Of course he was very popular with his school-fellows, but his one particular chum was Jim Hartland, a sailor's son, and one of the head boys in the school.

"Grinding for the exam.?" he asked, as they waved a last adieu to Mrs. Hartland, who stood on the doorstep watching them as they went down the street.

"Hardly," said Jim, "until we know who are to be the candidates."

"Oh, you'll be one for certain, and Perce Braithwaite another."

"And you."

"If Holmore gives me the chance, I'll work like a nigger for the honour of the school. The scholarship wouldn't be any good to me though; it only pays for the fees and books, and you have to stay till you are sixteen. Mother couldn't afford to keep me at school as long as that."

There was at this time great excitement among the boys of the elementary schools in the seaport town of Beauleigh. The governors of Gayton Public School had offered a scholarship, to be competed for by three selected candidates from every school in the town, and the offer had produced a feeling of intense rivalry.

The names of the chosen boys from the Deanery were to be made known that morning, and every one was on the tiptoe of expectation.

"We're late," said Dick, as the two boys turned into the long, straight road leading to the school, "most of the fellows are in the playground. I'll race you to the gate. Ready? One, two, three—off!" and away they sped for a good two hundred yards' run.

Jim was the taller and stronger, but Dick was very nimble, and having got the lead, he kept it. On they went, flushed, panting, and straining every nerve, while a group of boys coming from the opposite direction encouraged them with loud cries.

"Keep it up, Angel!"

"Another spurt, Jim; he's nearly done!"

Dick's legs were getting tottery, and Jim was close on his shoulder, but the open gate was only ten yards off, and the plucky youngster pulled himself together for a last effort.

"Jim's got him!" "No, no; the Angel wins! the Angel wins!"

A yard from the gate they were neck and neck; but then, using up all his remaining strength, Dick flung himself forward—the winner by scarcely half a foot.

Unlucky Dick! In the excitement of the last half-second he had gone like stone from catapult straight against the vest pocket of a portly gentleman who was strolling leisurely across the playground to the gate. Jim's onset completed

the mischief, and the three rolled together on the ground.

The boys in the road, unable to see the catastrophe, ran up with a brisk "hurrah." But suddenly every tongue was still.

If you have ever felt the shock of an earthquake, or been shipwrecked, or in a railway collision, you will have some faint idea of the fright which held the handful of Deanery boys spellbound.

"The inspector!" whispered Tompkins in a tone of awe, and a shiver ran through the little crowd.

Then, as the gentleman and boys rose to their feet, Tompkins, with an imbecile kind of smile, said, "Please, sir, it's only the Angel!"

Only the Angel! Had His Majesty's Inspector been a Deanery boy he would not have required any further information. As it was, the look of surprise in his face deepened.

Now Dick, with all his faults, was a little gentleman. His face was white and his voice husky, but, standing cap in hand, he said bravely, "I am very sorry, sir. We were racing, and Jim Hartland had almost caught me, so I put on a last sprint, and—"

"And won?"

"Yes, sir," answered Dick modestly; "but Jim was close behind."

"Yes," observed the gentleman with a grim smile, "I am painfully aware of the fact. However, there is not much harm done. Ask your master to lend me a brush."

"Isn't he a brick?" said one of the boys as they ran to their places. "He didn't even look angry. Have you hurt your leg, Jim?"

"It's a bit painful—that's all."

"I hope it will be right for the match to-morrow." And then, at sound of the bell, all talking stopped, and the boys marched into the assembly hall.

After prayers, the inspector, looking none the worse for his mishap, came into the room and talked with Mr. Holmore, who then proceeded to make a little speech concerning the Gayton Scholarship.

"You know," he said, "that only one boy can win it, and there will be candidates from nearly every school in the town. We have three good champions, and whether they obtain the great honour for the Deanery or not, I am sure they will do their best. Come to the desk as I call your names. Richard Boden."

There was a hum of pleasure as Dick went up, flushed with joy, yet feeling rather uncomfortable at having to face the inspector a second time that morning.

"Percy Braithwaite."

A well-dressed, spruce-looking boy, known as Dandy Braithwaite, came forward with alacrity and, to the delight of the school, was followed by James Hartland.

"Now, boys," said their master, "I hope your work will show we have made a wise selection. Remember, once your names are given in, we cannot make any alteration." Then turning to the inspector, he added, "These are our candidates, sir."

"Ah," exclaimed that gentleman genially, "I have made the acquaintance of two of them, Mr. Holmore, and I can assure you they are tremendous fellows—at a sprint.—Well, my lads, one thing is certain: this scholarship won't be gained without plenty of hard work. The chosen knights are buckling on their armour in every quarter of the town, and the tournament will be a keen one."

Fortunately, school closed at noon for the day, as the boys were too excited to pay much attention to lessons. They were well satisfied with their master's selection, and many of them at once put down the scholarship as a "good thing" for Jim Hartland.

Some thought Braithwaite might get it, others pinned their faith to Dick Boden, "if the little beggar would work;" and when one wretched urchin hinted that the St. Paul's boys had won a lot of prizes lately, he was promptly "sat on."

"It's bound to come to the Deanery," declared Tompkins, who was himself still struggling with the mysteries of long division. "The only question is, Who's to get it?"

Then the talk turned to the great cricket match fixed for the next day, which was to decide the possession of the challenge shield for the following year. St. Paul's held it, but the Deanery intended having a good try to wrest it from their near and dear rivals.

"Hartland's in fine form," said one. "You should have seen him hit at practice yesterday. If he comes off we ought to stand a chance."

"And the Angel's bowling a treat! I don't think the 'Magpies'" (as the St. Paul's boys were called) "will do much with his curly ones."

"He bowled the inspector out before school, didn't he?"

They were still laughing at the recollection of Dick's mishap when Simpson, the reserve man of the team, came up, trying, but with poor success, to look sorry.

"Heard the news, you fellows?" he asked. "Hartland's cricked his leg and won't be able to play."

The boys gazed at one another blankly, hoping against hope that the news was not true.

"There he is," cried one suddenly; and sure enough there he was, leaning on his chum's arm, and hobbling slowly across the playground.

They crowded around him eagerly, asking more questions than could be answered in a week.

"What's the matter, Jim?"

"Can't you play?"

"Are you hurt?"

"Hurt!" cried Dick scornfully. "Of course not! He is doing this just for fun, you silly duffers."

"It isn't much," exclaimed Jim, "and I'll play to-morrow if I can stand. We'll have that shield yet."

"Anyhow," said Dick, with a laugh, "if Jim can't turn out, we have Simpson to fall back on," at which the Deanery boys shook their heads doubtfully. They had no very high opinion of Simpson's powers.

"I'm awfully sorry," said Dick ruefully, as the two chums went up the road. "There'll be no practice for you this afternoon, at all events."

"No," agreed Jim. "I'd better lie by till the morning. Never mind, old chap; it wasn't your fault; and besides, I shall be all right. Mother will see to that, I'm glad the match is to-morrow. We'll have a good try for the shield, and then peg away for the scholarship."

"Won't the Magpies get their monkey up if we pull off both? What a beastly nuisance! There's Temple coming!"

Temple was the captain of the St. Paul's team—a tall, nice-looking lad, immensely proud of his school, and noted for playing the game like a true sportsman.

"Hullo, Hartland!" he cried; "crippled? I say, that's hard lines on the Deanery. I wonder if the committee would put the game off for a week?"

"No, no," said Jim; "it isn't much. I shall turn up in the morning."

"You're a brick, Temple," exclaimed Dick, "and a jolly good sort, though you are a Magpie. 'Pon my word, I'm half sorry we're going to take that shield from you."

"And you're a little humbug," laughed Temple, giving him a playful dig in the ribs.—"Take care of yourself, Jim. I wouldn't give a toss to beat the Deanery if you're out of the team."

"Proper sort of chap, ain't he?" said Dick, when the Magpie passed on. "Just fancy his proposing that the match should be put off! My stars, there aren't many captains who would do that. How's the leg now?"

"Painful rather, but 'twill be better when I lie down."

Dick helped his chum home; and while Mrs. Hartland doctored the bruised limb, he chatted gaily with Susie, telling her all about the match and the scholarship, and making merry jokes for her to laugh at.

Owing to a weak spine, Susie spent most of her time lying on the sofa; but she was a bright, intelligent girl, very fond of mischievous Dick, and immensely proud of her brother.

She was very glad when her mother said Jim's leg would soon be well, for

this cricket match was to be a great event in her life—a gleam of gold in a gray sky.

Mrs. Hartland had hired an invalid chair, and the two boys had promised to take her to the county ground, where the game was to be played.

"I do hope it will be fine," she exclaimed rather wistfully, for there were few pleasures in her life.

"It's bound to be," cried Dick, with a merry laugh. "The sun will come out on purpose to see you. Now I must be off for the practice. Give Jim plenty of goose-grease, Mrs. Hartland, and make him stay in bed till the last minute.—I'll be round in good time in the morning, Susie.—Ta, ta, Jimmy. This will teach you not to go about knocking inspectors over in the future."

"I like that," said Jim. "Why, you little fraud—"

But Dick had picked up his hat, and was outside the door before he could finish.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHALLENGE SHIELD.

Susie's eyes sparkled and her face beamed with pleasure as she lay in the invalid-chair, with her head propped up by soft, cozy pillows. The boys had found a splendid spot for the carriage, while her mother and Mrs. Boden sat beside her. And to make her happiness complete, Jim had declared that his leg was not in the least bit painful.

"Isn't it prime?" said Dick, who had come over for a last word. "You'd never have guessed we could be such awful swells. There's the mayor in the pavilion, and no end of big-wigs with him."

"Where's Jim?"

"Oh, he's tossing with Temple, and he's lost too; our fellows are coming out to field."

It was an ideal day for cricket. The sun shone brightly, but a cool breeze tempered its heat, making it pleasant for players and spectators alike. The ground was packed with people, who cheered heartily as Jim led his team into the field.

Hundreds of boys were there, some sporting the Magpie colours, others the blue and white favours of the Deanery, while many of the principal men in the town had come with their wives and children to watch the final struggle for the

challenge shield.

Only one innings was to be played by each side, and Dick started the bowling. The opening was sensational: his first ball scattered the batsman's stumps, and in the same over another man was caught and bowled.

Two wickets down and not a run scored! The Deanery boys were wild with delight. They flung their caps in the air, and began debating where it would be best to hang the shield.

Their joy did not last long, however. Temple had gone in, and he was hitting the ball to all parts of the field without giving a chance. In vain Jim changed his bowlers and rearranged his field. Until he had made 69, the doughty batsman defied every attempt to dislodge him. Then, getting hold of a curly one from Dick, he sent it spinning high and hard to the boundary.

The Magpies cheered and clapped their hands; but, as Dick afterwards remarked, they were "a little too previous." Jim was fielding "in the country," and he did not often miss a catch. He had hard work this time though; but he just managed it, and a welcome roar burst from the Deanery boys as he threw the ball into the air.

"Well caught! well caught, Hartland!" they cried, for Temple was their most dangerous opponent, and now that he was gone they felt on better terms with themselves.

Still the score gradually crept up, till, by the time the last man was out, the board showed the respectable total of 157.

Susie had very hazy notions of cricket, and when Dick came over she wanted to know if the Deanery had won the shield.

"Won!" echoed Dick, opening his eyes wide. "Why, the match isn't over. We have to go in yet. There's Jim just walking to the wicket. Did you see that lovely catch he made? Mr. Barrow, a regular cricketing swell—plays for the county, you know—said it was as neat a bit of work as he'd seen on the ground."

Susie still felt very hazy about it, but she understood Jim had done something clever, and that was enough to make her happy.

Meanwhile the excitement over the match grew very keen. The Deanery innings opened well, fifty runs being scored for the loss of two wickets; but after that matters went badly.

One after the other, the batsmen were caught or bowled; and it seemed as if the captain could not get any one to stay with him for long.

When the seventh wicket fell for exactly a hundred, Dick began to whistle comically.

"There's only Archer to depend on now," said he, "and it isn't often he makes more than a dozen."

"Why don't you go in?" asked Susie.

"Oh, I'm last man. I'm no good with the bat. They only play me for bowling. Oh, well done, Archer! That was a pretty cut for two. I hope he'll get set."

"So do I," said the girl, though rather wondering what to 'get set' meant; and then Dick mystified her more than ever by remarking that if Archer got his eye in he might be good for a score.

"It makes all the difference if a fellow has his eye in, you know," he said; and as this appeared reasonable, Susie agreed.

How the Deanery boys shouted when the board showed 120! And what a roar went up from the Magpies as, without another run added, Archer's bails went tumbling to the ground!

"A beastly yorker!" exclaimed Dick in a tone of deep disgust. "Well, I must be off. That's Crag going to the wicket now. He'd make a lot of runs, only he's so jolly nervous."

"The poor boy looks very pale," said Mrs. Hartland.

"O my aunt!" shouted Dick in an ecstasy of delight, "he's got a two off his first ball. Well done, Crag!"

The strain was intense now. The spectators watched every ball, and there were loud cries of "Play up, Deanery!" as the score kept creeping up.

Mr. Holmore felt as much excited as any of his boys, and he clapped his hands when 130 appeared on the board.

"Only twenty-eight to win," he said; "but I'm afraid the odds are too great."

"Hartland's good for these," said Mr. Laythorne Jim's class-master; "he is playing magnificently."

"Yes, whether we win or lose, it's a great day for him. Ah, I was afraid of it! Crag's out, and we still want twenty-five. Who is the last in?"

"Boden! I think we can abandon all hope of winning the shield this year."

The Deanery boys looked glum, but the Magpies beamed with satisfaction, for they all knew Dick. Though a good bowler, he had batting notions of his own which generally brought him to grief. He treated all balls alike, banging at each with a mighty swipe till a crash in the timber-yard told him it was time to retire.

"For goodness sake, be careful, Dicky," whispered Jim, as his chum passed him; "block everything, and keep your wicket up for once. I'll do the hitting."

"All right," grinned Dick. "I will, if I can remember."

There was a deep hush as he stood facing the bowler, and the Deanery boys hardly dared to breathe, for they knew too well that their erratic schoolfellow had an unhappy knack of missing his first ball. If Dicky played up to his reputation, all hope of winning the shield was at an end.

A profound sigh of relief broke from the friends of the Deanery, and they looked at one another in astonishment. Dicky had actually blocked the ball! The next was the last of the over, and then Mr. Laythorne beamed as Jim stood at the

wicket.

A little luck and good management enabled Jim to take every ball in the over and to score eight; but the Magpies, still feeling sure of winning the match, whistled cheerfully. Temple would have Dick out in less than no time.

No boy needs to be reminded of the delightful uncertainty of cricket, and here was a splendid example. The Angel stood as if rooted to the ground, and never once attempted one of his mighty but erratic swipes. The cunning bowler tried every variety of dodge to tempt him, but Dicky was not to be coaxed.

The Magpies became impatient, and perhaps a little bit anxious. When Dick pushed the ball away a foot or two they cheered ironically, crying, "Well hit!" "Nearly a boundary!" etc., and advised him in sarcastic tones to run it out.

Dick grinned. He was enjoying himself immensely, and had no objection to any amount of chaff.

As the game proceeded, a magnetic influence seemed to pervade the air. A deep hush fell over the field; the spectators were afraid to turn their eyes from the wicket a second.

Jim had the ball again, and was playing like a professional. Twelve, ten, eight to win! A beautiful drive all along the ground reduced the required number to four, and the Deanery boys burst into a roar of cheering.

Mr. Holmore's eyes brightened, and he turned with a smile to the St. Paul's master, who stood near him.

"Well, Hudson, we shall give you a fright, at least," he remarked.

"It looks as if we shall have to give you the shield," replied Mr. Hudson ruefully.

Another cheer announced that two more runs had been knocked off; and then, from the very last ball of the over, Jim made it a tie.

The excitement was too intense for the Deanery boys even to cheer; they held their breath and waited.

What would Dicky do?

Mr. Laythorne, who was watching through his field-glass, sighed dolefully.

"The strain's too much for him," he said. "He's trembling fearfully. He'll lose his head and throw his wicket away."

Alas! there was a good deal of truth in the young class-master's words. It was not in Dick's nature to stand for long poking quietly at the ball as he had been doing. His fingers tingled as they closed round bat, and he longed to hit out at something.

Temple saw the youngster's state and took his measures accordingly. He placed his men with great care for a catch, and then sent down a tempting slow. Dick blocked it, and a second of the same sort.

Not a bit discouraged, Temple gave him a third; and this time, as the master

had prophesied, Dick lost his head. His friends groaned when they saw his bat go up, and decided it would be only a question of caught or stumped. Dicky afterwards confessed it should have been one or the other.

"I couldn't stand it any longer, and that's the truth," said he. "I forgot all about the shield, and just went for the ball with all my might."

Jim declared his chum shut his eyes before hitting out; but be that as it may, the ball travelled through the air towards the boundary. Travers, the Magpie stationed in that part, ran along the edge of the field in a gallant attempt to bring off a fine catch; but he missed the ball by a hair's-breadth, and the coveted shield passed into the possession of the Deanery for the next twelve months.

"I congratulate you," said the master of St. Paul's, turning to Mr. Holmore. "It has been a splendid fight, and you deserved to win."

The last words were almost drowned in the roar that went up from the field. The Deanery boys swarmed in a mob across to the wicket. Some clutched Jim, others surrounded Dick, and lifting them shoulder-high, carried them off in triumph.

Susie could not leave her chair, so her mother and Mrs. Boden wheeled it over to the edge of the crowd which surrounded the pavilion. Then, to crown her happiness, some warm-hearted boys, whispering, "That's Hartland's crippled sister," cleared a passage, and would not be satisfied till the chair was wheeled right to the front where she could see and hear everything. Susie will never forget that half-hour of her life. The mayor made a pretty speech, and handed the shield to Mr. Holmore amidst an outburst of cheering. Then the Magpies stepped on to the platform to receive the medals which were given to the players on each side; and Jim, carried away by enthusiasm, shouted, "Three cheers for the good old Magpies!" which were given by every one on the ground.

Then it was the turn of the Deanery eleven, and fresh plaudits rang out, especially when Jim went forward. The spectators cheered almost as loudly for Dick; and the ladies said what a pretty, innocent-looking boy he was, with his rosy cheeks and crisp curls.

"Oh, it's splendid! just splendid!" Susie kept saying. In her eyes Jim and his curly-haired chum were real heroes, and she was as proud as if they had performed some glorious action.

It was over at last, and the crowd, still talking over the various events of the day, began to disperse slowly. Everywhere the girl heard her brother's name coupled with Dick's, and her face flushed with real pleasure. Presently she saw the head-master shake Jim's hand and pat Dick on the back; then the two boys left the platform and ran quickly to her side.

"Well, the Deanery's got the shield, thanks to Jim," cried Dick, his eyes sparkling.

"Don't you believe him, Mrs. Boden," said Jim. "He had as much to do with our winning as any one."

"Do let me see your medals," said Susie. "Oh, how nice! You will have to take care of them."

"I'm going to buy a safe and lock mine up in it," said Dick, laughing.—"Now, mother, you go on with Mrs. Hartland. Jim and I will take care of Susie. Hasn't the fresh air done her good? Why, her face is as red as a rose."

CHAPTER III.

A NEWSPAPER PARAGRAPH.

The members of that little party will long remember the walk home from the county ground. It was an ideal summer evening. A few fleecy white clouds flaked the blue of the sky, and the sun's heat was tempered by a gentle breeze blowing up pleasantly from the south. Birds sang in the gardens, and the fragrant odour of flowers filled the air.

Now and again the boys stopped the carriage, so that Susie, looking through the gateways, might see the flowers in all their glory of colour. She did not talk much; she was rather tired by the unusual excitement, and by her long stay in the open air.

Occasionally they passed a group of the Deanery boys, and then there were cries of "Good old Hartland!" "Well done, Angel!" which made Susie prouder than ever.

"I say, Dick," said one urchin, "is it true you've been asked to play for the county?"

The Angel, who loved a joke, laughed back broadly.

"Nothing's been settled yet," said he, "but I may give 'em a hand if they're hard pushed. I can't promise to play regularly, though—at least this season."

"What a pity!" exclaimed the boy; "you would have been such a help."

The town was beginning to fill with the usual Saturday evening crowd when they reached the main street, and the newsboys were lustily shouting, "Evening paper!"

"We must have a paper," said Jim's mother.

"Better wait a bit," observed Dick, with an air of wisdom; "the special edition will be out soon."

Just then Temple, the captain of the Magpies, came along. He was reading a paper, and would have passed our friends had not Dick said, "Hullo, old chap; anything about the match there?"

Temple glanced up hastily, and, with an odd look at Jim, answered slowly,—

"Only the result, and there's no need to tell you that."

"Come on, Dick," said Jim; "he's got the hump."

The Angel was turning round to join his chum when Temple called him back softly.

"Haven't you heard the news?" he asked curiously.

"Haven't heard anything," replied Dick. "We've only just come from the ground. You look as solemn as an owl."

"I am thinking of Hartland."

"Why? He's all right."

Unfolding the paper, Temple pointed with his finger to the space reserved for late news.

Dick read the short paragraph, and immediately his face became clouded.

"Oh, poor old Jim!" he exclaimed. "And fancy, to-day of all the days in the year."

"I'm awfully sorry too," remarked Temple. "Better show him the paper, so that he can tell his mother. Lucky the information came too late to put on the placard."

"They'll have it in big letters on the next lot," replied Dick, slipping the paper inside his flannels.

"Hurry him home as fast as you can," said the other. "Somebody may stop Mrs. Hartland and blurt out the news. There are plenty of fools about."

Dick was off at once, and, overtaking his friends, rather surprised his mother by saying,—

"Step out, mother. You forget it's past tea-time, and Susie here is as hungry as a hunter."

Now, of course Mrs. Boden had no suspicion of the truth, but she guessed from Dick's face that something was wrong, and, being a wise little woman, quickened her pace.

"Fancy Temple taking the hump like that," said Jim as they turned into Cedar Road, where he lived. "Shouldn't have thought he was that sort."

"Oh, it wasn't over the match. But I'll tell you all about it another time." And Dick nodded at the chair, as much as to say, "I don't want Susie to hear."

Jim took the hint, and being rather curious, pushed on quickly to the house. They were all near the little gate when his mother said,—

"How very odd! Mrs. Hunt's blinds are all down, and so are Mrs. Pettifer's. There must be some one dead. I didn't know either of them had any one ill."

"A relative has died suddenly, perhaps," suggested Dick's mother; while the boy, who trembled all over thought Jim would never get the front door open.

At last it swung back, and the two boys lifted the carriage into the passage. Then, between them, they carried Susie into the back room and laid her gently on the couch.

Meanwhile Mrs. Boden had gone on home, leaving word for Dick to follow; so, after wishing Susie and her mother good-bye, he went out, accompanied by Jim.

"Come outside," he whispered, "and pull the door to. There's bad news in the town."

"Bad news!" echoed Jim, wondering why his chum trembled so.

"Yes, that's what upset Temple. It's in the paper; but there's only a line or two, and it mayn't be true."

"But what is it?" asked Jim, and, oddly enough, his voice sank to a whisper, while his face was as white as Dick's.

"It's about the—the *Morning Star*," gasped the boy.

Then Jim understood in a flash what had happened, and why the neighbours had darkened their windows.

"Give me the paper," said he, "and let me see what it says."

The paragraph was very brief, and ran thus:—

"It is reported at Lloyd's that the barque *Morning Star* has been lost in a storm off Cape Horn. Some of the crew, including the chief mate, got ashore; but the captain, Robert Merritt, and the second mate, John Hartland, went down with the ship. The *Morning Star* was owned at Cardiff, and was making for San Francisco with a general cargo."

Jim read the paragraph over several times. The letters seemed blurred and running into one another; only the words, "the second mate, John Hartland, went down with the ship," stood out clear and distinct, as if raised above the surrounding type.

"There may be a chance yet," suggested Dick, who was hurt by the look of pain on his chum's face. "It isn't certain that your father is drowned."

"No," said Jim absently; "it isn't certain."

Then he put the paper into his pocket and turned to go in.

"Shall I tell my mother to come round?" asked Dick.

"Not to-night—thanks. No, we shall be better by ourselves."

Nodding to Dick, he stepped into the passage and closed the door gently. Then he went quietly to the room where his mother had laid tea. There was nothing of value in the house, for the family had been particularly unfortunate during the last few years. In spite of many obstacles Mr. Hartland had worked his way up to the position of mate, but on his first voyage as an officer had met

with an accident which kept him in hospital for months. Then he found it hard to secure another berth, and during the time of his enforced idleness the best of his furniture had been parted with to buy food. Few people knew this, however, as the Hartlands, who were very proud, kept their troubles to themselves.

Mrs. Hartland was a notable housewife, and had a certain amount of taste, which enabled her to make the house look nice. The room which Jim entered was quite attractive. A few nicely-framed black-and-white pictures hung on the walls; long curtains draped the window tastefully; the grate shone by reason of many applications of elbow-polish; everything was beautifully clean. A cloth of snowy whiteness covered the table, and the various articles set out for use showed evidence of capable cleaning.

"Make haste, my boy!" exclaimed his mother cheerfully; "your tea is poured out. Dick and you have had a long gossip."

"Jim's tired, and I don't wonder at it," remarked Susie.

The boy sat down in his usual place and forced himself to eat and drink. His mother, who was proud of the praise he had won, talked about the match.

"There was only one thing wanted to make the day a complete success," said she. "When you were on the platform with all those gentlemen I could not help wishing that your father had been looking on."

Jim put down his cup, so that she should not see how his hand trembled, and bit his lip to keep from crying out. The paper seemed to rustle in his pocket, and he made up his mind to tell her the truth at once.

But how? He could not say, "Father will never know anything about it, because he is lying at the bottom of the sea!" Yet it must be done. His mother must not be left to hear the terrible news from a stranger.

While he still hesitated, Susie, who had sharp ears, exclaimed, "Listen, there's the paper-boy. I can hear him shouting, 'Latest Special!'"

"Run, Jim, quick!" cried his mother, taking a half-penny from her pocket. She was as excited as Susie at the thought of seeing her boy's name in print.

Jim tried to stand, but his limbs tottered, and he sat down again.

In an instant his mother, forgetful of the paper, was by his side. "You have overdone yourself, my boy," she said. "All that running about has been too much for you."

"No," said the boy, and he spoke with difficulty; "I am all right, mother!" and then, with a wild cry, "O mother, mother, how can I tell you? It's about the *Morning Star*, and—and father!"

Mrs. Hartland did not cry out or make a scene; only her lips twitched painfully, and she laid a hand on the table to steady herself.

"Tell me the worst, Jim," she whispered bravely; and the boy drew the paper from his pocket with trembling fingers.

"Read it," she said simply; and he tried hard, but his voice broke down before the end of the first sentence.

Then she looked at it herself, but the letters seemed only black dots which danced about and intermingled as if trying to hide from her.

"Give it to me, mother," said Susie.

For the moment they had forgotten her, but the sound of her voice sent a fresh arrow of pain through the mother's heart. But Susie was used to sorrow, and drew strength from her very weakness. Steadily she read through the paragraph from beginning to end, while her mother stood, white-faced and tearless, drinking in every word.

"The second mate, John Hartland, went down with the ship!"

To the woman and children in that little room the words formed the whole paragraph.

"Went down with the ship!" A simple phrase enough, and not uncommon, but perhaps it is as well that we do not always realize the misery and sorrow lying behind it.

A deep hush fell as Susie finished reading. The sun had gone down, the evening shadows were gathering fast; soon it would be time to light the lamp, but no one moved.

A loud rat-tat at the door startled them; and Jim, going out, found a messenger boy with a telegram. It was from the owners of the *Morning Star*, but contained no further information than had appeared in the evening paper.

"It is very kind of them," said Mrs. Hartland "but I am glad you told me first, Jim."

"We don't know yet that father is drowned!" exclaimed Susie stoutly. "He might have been picked up by another ship. I have read of such things."

Neither Jim nor his mother answered her; the idea was too wild to be considered seriously.

The boy did not realize all that his father's death meant to him, for he was young, and his experience of life had not been great. But his mother, while grieving bitterly for the dead man who had loved her so devotedly, had to think of the living.

Through the long night hours, while the children forgot their sorrow in sleep, she lay thinking, thinking earnestly about their future. She had planned great things for Jim, had built splendid castles in the air for him; and now, at a blow, they came tumbling about her ears.

"Poor boy!" she said softly to herself; "I fear it will change the whole of his

life."

CHAPTER IV.
FURTHER NEWS OF THE "MORNING STAR."

On the following Monday morning Dick called for his chum as usual, but Jim was in no hurry to start.

"You go on," said he; "I'll come presently."

As a matter of fact he dreaded the meeting with his school-fellows; it would be so different from the scene he had pictured while walking home from the cricket-ground. He had looked forward to a regular triumph, for it must be confessed that Jim was rather vain, though he had the good sense to keep this failing, for the most part, to himself.

"All right!" exclaimed the Angel cheerfully; but he went only a short distance, and waited till his chum came out.

"What a silly chap you are!" said Jim peevishly; "now you'll be late."

"Never mind, my boy; better late than never, as they say in the copy-books. I said that to Laythorne the other day, but he gave me one back. 'Better never late,' said he, as I went to my place."

Prayers were over when they reached the school, but the master made no remark as they passed to their places. He had heard the sad news, and easily understood why the boys were late. At the interval he asked Jim to remain, and told him how sorry he was for his great loss.

"Thank you, sir," said Jim, resolutely keeping the tears from his eyes.

"And, by the way, Hartland," continued the young master kindly, "if there's anything I can do, let me know."

Just then the Head entered the room, and he, too, expressed his sorrow at what had happened, and Jim appreciated the kindness of his masters.

He had dreaded going back to school, but it was not very dreadful after all. Most of the boys looked at him curiously, but only one or two said anything, and then matters resumed their usual course.

At home it was much worse, although Susie, with strange persistence, still cherished the hope that her father had not been drowned.

"We don't know," she argued stoutly—"no one knows. The papers say some of the crew got ashore."

"Don't be stupid," said her brother. "It says plainly enough that father went down with the ship."

"But he might have been picked up afterwards, or got ashore somewhere else."

Even Susie's faith gave way, however, when a fuller account of the wreck came to hand. It was supplied by an A.B. named Davies, who had been picked up by the steamship *Cormorant*.

"It was on a Friday night," the newspaper report of his narrative ran, "and we were there or thereabout up to the latitude of Cape Horn. I had turned in 'all standing,' for the weather was squally, and I didn't expect to get much of a nap. Sure enough I'd hardly got my eyes shut when there came a crash, and some one sang out, 'All hands, ahoy!' We tumbled up the ladder in a hurry, and I tell you there wasn't a man there who didn't think Davy Jones was calling us. It was a night! The rain was coming down full pelt, and you couldn't keep your feet for the wind. Spars snapped like match-boxes, and the barque lay nearly on her beam-ends. It was dark as pitch just then, though it cleared up afterwards. We did what we could to save the ship; but, bless you, we had no more chance than a parcel of babies. She was settling down like a stone, and the old man sung out that we'd better try the boats. I ran to help clear the port quarter boat, and got in, when a heavy sea broke over her, smashing her in two. Down I went a long way, but at last came up to the surface again, and hammered my right hand against something hard. This turned out to be a top-gallant mast, so I took a firm grip. I couldn't see anything of the *Morning Star*, but there seemed to be a lot of rigging about, and I heard some men shouting in the distance. I reckoned afterwards it must have been the first mate and the chaps who got away in the other boat. I hulloed back, but they couldn't hear, and I reckoned I was done. Soon after that came another shout close to me, and I yelled back, 'Ahoy, there! Is that you, Mr. Hartland?'

"'Yes. Who are you?'

"'Davies,' I sings out—'on a mast.'

"'Can you hold on?'

"'Not much longer, I'm afeared.'

"'Keep your spirits up,' says he, cheery like, and then it was all quiet. However, we must have drifted pretty close together, for, directly day broke, there he was, not twenty yards off, with a lifebuoy round him, and clinging to a light spar.

"'How goes it now?' says he; and when I tells him I'm nearly done, he says, 'I've a good mind to keep you company. I've some rope here, and a draw or two round the body will keep you tight.' With that he swims over and lashes me to the mast. Presently he says again, quiet as anything, 'Look here, Davies; it's no go! This won't hold us both; I must take my chance. Good-bye, and if you've the

luck to be picked up, just let 'em know over in England that I stood by the ship till she went down.'

"Them were his last words. He let go, and the last I saw of him he was striking out towards the shore. Of course he never reached it, though he was a strong swimmer, too. After that I lost count of things, and don't know anything more till my eyes opened aboard the *Cormorant*. The lashings saved me, or I should have gone under as sure as fate."

The story of her husband's bravery filled Mrs. Hartland with honest pride; but, unfortunately it extinguished the last spark of hope that, almost unknown, had lurked in the recesses of her mind. However, she faced the matter bravely, and talked over her plans with Jim.

"We shall have to leave this house," she said, "and find a cheaper one. Then I must get some kind of work to do."

"What about Susie?" asked Jim.

"Ah, that's the trouble! I can't very well go out and leave her alone. Perhaps I can get some plain sewing."

"Haven't we any money at all, mother?" the boy asked presently.

"Only what is due from your father's wages, and that won't keep us long."

Susie had gone to bed, and there was no one in the room but mother and son. Mrs. Hartland sat by the window with some needlework in her hand, though it was too dark to sew; Jim stood by the mantelpiece, fumbling nervously with a button on his jacket.

Presently he said bravely, "I must leave school and get a place somewhere. I daresay I can earn something, if only a little."

It cost him an effort to say this without breaking down, for he was very ambitious, and had mapped out a great career for himself. In the first place he had made up his mind to win the Gayton Scholarship, which was to be a stepping-stone to fortune. This was all done with now, for even in the event of being successful he could not accept the scholarship.

Mrs. Hartland guessed a part of his thoughts, and, calling him to her side, said,—

"We'll talk about that another time, Jim. There's no need to give up your school at present; I wouldn't like you to do that. I daresay we shall be able to rub along somehow till the next examination."

"But there's no good in trying for the 'Gayton.'"

"Not for yourself, but it would be an honour for your school if you won it. You would leave a good name behind you also."

So, after some further talk, it was decided that Jim should stay on at school; and the next week the family moved to a little house in a much poorer quarter of the town.

Of course Dick went to help, and his bright smile and cheerful humour did much to cheer them.

"Isn't it a poky place?" said Jim, pausing in the work of putting up his sister's bedstead.

"Well, you can't call it exactly a palace," replied Dick, "but it might be worse, you know. O my aunt!" And the Angel finished with a vigorous howl.

"What's the matter?"

"I nipped my hand under that iron bar." And he sucked the tips of his fingers as if they were sticks of sugar-candy. "Just see if you can twist this nut round; I can't move it."

The two friends worked away with a will, making up in zeal what they lacked in experience, and very soon had the room looking quite cozy and comfortable. Then they went downstairs; and before night, as Dick's mother, who had come over to help, put it, "things were beginning to look a bit straight."

Susie, of course, could do nothing herself; but she played the part of superintendent, and ordered the boys about, especially Dick, who good-humouredly obeyed all her commands. He looked on it all as great fun, and announced his intention of worrying his mother until they had a move on their own account.

Mrs. Hartland had faced her trouble bravely, but before long Jim recognized that things were much worse than he had guessed. Beyond his father's wages and the donation of a few pounds from the "Shipwrecked Mariners' Society," they had absolutely no money, and there seemed little prospect of his mother being able to earn sufficient to keep them. Already they had to deny themselves everything in the shape of luxury, and even Susie had to go without various little delicacies which they had been in the habit of providing for her.

"I ought to give up school and go to work," he said; but to this his mother was strongly opposed.

"If you leave school now you can only be an errand boy," she said; "and without education, you will have no chance of doing anything in the world."

Now I have no desire to put James Hartland forward as an uncommonly good boy, because, as you will find for yourselves, he was nothing of the sort; but in this particular case he certainly deserved some credit.

One evening he arrived home very late, which was such an unusual thing that his mother wondered what had kept him.

"Awfully sorry, mother," he cried, looking at the clock; "but I've been up in the town on business."

"For the master?"

"No," replied the boy, with rather a forced smile; "on my own account. I've got a place. Don't be vexed. I shan't have to leave school; it's only mornings and evenings."

"What have you to do?"

"To take the papers to Mr. Broad's customers; and if I help on Saturdays too, he'll give me five shillings a week. What do you think of that? Isn't it splendid?"

"But you will have no time to study for the 'Gayton.'"

"I must work harder at school, and put in an hour extra in the morning. I'll manage, never fear, and the money will just pay the rent. Wasn't it lucky I saw the card in the window? Of course I shan't be able to play in the rest of the cricket matches, but they can easily get some one to take my place."

He spoke cheerfully, but his mother knew what a sacrifice he had made, and hoped, for his sake, that good might come of it.

"Jim," said Susie, plucking his sleeve nervously, "will you have to call out 'Paper!' like the boys who come round here at night?"

"No, you little goose," he laughed—"only to leave them at the different houses. And now, let me finish my tea. I must have a good grind at geography this evening."

CHAPTER V.

JIM STARTS WORK.

It wanted ten minutes to nine, and the Deanery boys were pouring into the playground, ready to assemble for morning school. Percy Braithwaite stood just inside the gate talking to a little group of his chums. He was a good-looking, fair-skinned boy, with sharp, keen eyes. Somehow he was not a favourite with the majority, but as his father kept him well supplied with pocket-money, he generally had a certain following which petted and made much of him.

"I had a jolly lark this morning," he was saying. "What d'you think Jimmy Hartland's doing? You'd never guess! He's selling papers. He brought ours round just now, and I answered the door. You'd have died to see him: he went as red as a turkey-cock.

"'Hullo!' said I—'a fresh paper-boy? You're very late. This won't do, you know. Tell your master if you can't come earlier than this we shall have to make a change.'"

"Did you really say that?" asked Simpson, who was sucking one of Braithwaite's bull's-eyes. "He would be wild. The beggar's as proud as Lucifer."

"I don't see why he shouldn't sell papers," said Alec Macdonald. "There's

nothing to be ashamed of in that."

"Perhaps not for fellows of his class," said Braithwaite, with a superior air, "but fancy a paper-boy trying for the 'Gayton'! Why, if he got it, all the school would cut him dead. I call it a great piece of cheek."

"Here he comes with the Angel," whispered Simpson, who had finished his bull's-eye, and was hoping to get another before the bell rang. "I say, let's have a lark!" And raising his voice, he cried, "Hevenin' Noos! Hextry Speshul! Paper, sir?"

The others burst into a roar of laughter; and Braithwaite, who thought it an excellent joke, laughed the loudest of all.

The Angel, scenting mischief, laid hold of his chum's arm, saying,—

"Don't take any notice, Jim; it's only the 'Dandy' and his gang."

This was an unfortunate remark, as it would have been safer just then to wave a red flag before a bull than to mention Braithwaite's name to Jim. He was hot and tired and cross, angry with himself and the world in general, and with Braithwaite in particular. The incident of the morning had upset him, and this mocking laughter was, as Dick afterwards said, "the last straw that broke the camel's back."

"Want a hextry, sir? Take the last one!"

Simpson was fairly earning another bull's-eye.

Jim's face was white with passion as he strode over to the group, in the midst of which Braithwaite stood laughing. Blinded by anger, he did not stay to ask questions, but crying, "You beastly cad!" let out straight from the shoulder.

The Angel, though rather alarmed, could not resist the chance of a joke.

"That's a drop of *hextry speshul* claret!" he sang out, as the blood spurted from Braithwaite's nose.

Instantly there arose a babel of voices.

"Give him one back, Dandy!"

"Off with your coat; I'll hold it!"

"Who has a spare handkerchief?"

I trust my readers are not thirsting for a description of a fight, because in that case they will be disappointed. In the midst of the hubbub the bell sounded, and the boys went to their places, Simpson leading his friend along, and making a great show of the blood-stained handkerchief.

The injured boy, who was in the same class as Jim and Dick, at once attracted the attention of Mr. Laythorne, who asked what had happened.

"If you please, sir," said Braithwaite, "I was standing just inside the gate when Hartland came along and hit me on the nose."

"Is this correct, Hartland?"

"He called me names, so I hit him, sir," answered Jim sulkily. "And I'll hit

him again, too, if he cheeks me."

"I am sorry to hear you talk in that way," said the young master calmly. "Go to your place now, and stay behind during the interval.—Boden, take that boy to the lavatory."

"Yes, sir," responded the Angel cheerfully, taking Braithwaite, not too tenderly, by the arm.

Everything went wrong that morning with Jim. He made the most stupid mistakes in class, and behaved so badly that Mr. Laythorne felt sorely tempted to send him to the head-master. He was kept in during the interval, and again at noon, and accordingly looked on himself as a martyr. When he at last got out, the playground was empty except for Dick, who would never have dreamed of going without his chum.

"Get your face straight, old man," cried he; "it's as long as a fiddle. I wish I had a looking-glass, so that you could see yourself. Think of the milkmen down your way! You'll turn all their milk sour!"

Jim stalked across the playground without deigning to reply.

"Whew!" whistled the Angel; "you ought to be marked *dangerous*, like a magazine. No wonder Laythorne was afraid to keep you inside any longer. But I say, Jim, that was a lovely tap you gave Braithwaite. He asked me if I thought his nose was broken."

"I'll break his head next time!" said Jim savagely.

The Angel clapped him on the back.

"There's nothing like making a good job of a thing while you're at it," he said. "Going up the lane? All right. I'll call for you after dinner. And take that frown off your face, or you'll frighten Susie into a fit."

Mrs. Hartland saw there was something the matter with the boy, but happily she did not worry him about it, and by the time Dick called he was almost himself again.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you, mother," he said as he was going out, "you needn't wait tea for me. I'm going to have mine at the shop. It will save time, Mr. Broad says."

"Have you to work all the evening, Jim?" asked Dick as they went down the street.

"No, I shall be home by eight."

"That doesn't leave you much time."

"Oh, I shall manage. Laythorne is taking all the subjects at school, and I can get in at least two hours extra every day."

As it happened, Jim found in a short time that he was reckoning without his book.

At the close of afternoon school Jim stepped up to the master's desk.

"Do you wish to speak to me?" asked Mr. Laythorne, looking rather surprised.

"Yes, sir," replied Jim bravely. "I want to beg your pardon for my rudeness this morning. Things seemed to go quite wrong somehow, and I was in a bad temper."

"It's very manly to come forward of your own account like this," said Mr. Laythorne pleasantly, "and it does you credit. But you must learn to govern your temper, Hartland, or it will bring you into mischief. How are you getting on for the 'Gayton'? Don't forget that if I can help you in any way I shall be pleased to do so."

"Thank you, sir," replied Jim brightly. "I am hoping to make a good fight for it."

He left the room in good spirits, stopped a minute or two in the playground to chat with Dick, and then ran off to town.

"'Twill be a scramble," he thought to himself, "but I'll pull through. I can put in from half-past eight till ten at night, and from five till half-past six in the morning, besides an hour at dinner-time. That ought to be enough, and five shillings a week will be very useful to mother."

"Pretty punctual, my boy," said the stationer as Jim entered the shop. "I like to see that. Your tea's ready in the kitchen. When you've finished I've something here for you to do."

"Yes, sir," said Jim.

Eager to do his best, and being a smart, intelligent boy, he created a favourable impression at once. Mr. Broad was delighted with him; and that night after closing time, he told his wife that the new boy was a treasure.

"You had better wait a bit before you judge," she replied. "Don't forget that new brooms sweep clean."

Mr. Broad laughed, admitted there was a great deal of truth in the proverb, but all the same maintained his opinion.

Meanwhile Jim had gone home, eaten his supper, and settled down to work. To win this Gayton Scholarship was his one idea, and if he failed it would not be for want of trying. He had heard of the sneer about a paper-boy going in for the "Gayton," and it nettled him.

"I'll beat Perce Braithwaite, anyhow!" he said to himself.

This was the spur that goaded him on, and all that week he devoted every minute of his spare time to study.

"Don't bury yourself too deep," advised the Angel, who, on the Friday evening, walked a part of the way with him, "or we mayn't be able to dig you up again."

"Oh, I'm all right," laughed Jim. "I shall cut you out, Dicky, my boy. I've

made a big move this week."

"Glad to hear it," said the Angel cheerfully. "It's the history that bothers me most. I get mixed with the dates and things. I don't think history ought to count: it's mostly rubbish, anyway. Who wants to know about the old kings, and when they lived, and when they died, and who their grandfathers were?"

"Or the Provisions of Oxford," added Jim slyly; at which his churn roared with laughter, though the joke was against himself.

Not long before, Mr. Laythorne had asked his class to name the "Provisions of Oxford," whereupon the Angel, though rather astonished at such a simple question, replied blandly, "The chief provisions of Oxford, like those of other English towns, are bread, meat, all kinds of vegetables, poultry, fish—" And he only pulled up when the suppressed titter of his classmates broke into uncontrollable laughter.

"Laythorne told the Head of that," said Dick, when he had recovered his breath, "and it went the round of the masters. They chaffed me about it at the cricket match; but I don't call it a fair question. I hope I shan't come a cropper like that at the 'Gayton.' Well, I'm off. See you Sunday." And leaving his chum at the shop door, he went away whistling.

That night when Jim was leaving, Mr. Broad said, "I shall want you to do a double round in the morning, and to stay till ten o'clock in the evening."

"Yes, sir," said the boy, though he was sorry at having to lose his own time.

"But you won't be wanted in the middle of the day," continued his master. "As soon as you have finished in the morning you can go till tea-time."

"Oh," said Jim, brightening, "that will be capital," and at once resolved to use the extra time for study. He felt very tired on the Saturday night, but his heart was light and his face smiling when he got home. As a great treat Susie had been allowed to stay up, and Mrs. Hartland had prepared a tasty if cheap supper.

"This is prime!" exclaimed Jim, sniffing at the savoury odour, "and I'm as hungry as a hunter. But, first of all, you had better take my wages, mother." And he put down a tiny pile of silver on the table with the air of a millionaire.

"There's too much here by sixpence," said Mrs. Hartland, counting the coins. "Your master has made a mistake."

"It's all right, mother," replied Jim proudly; "he gave me an extra sixpence for doing my work so well."

"O Jim!" cried Susie, "isn't it splendid? Fancy earning all that money!"

"It will come in handy," said he, "and in a few months I shall be able to earn more. But while we're chattering the supper's getting cold. Sit down mother. You look tired to death."

"Mother's been sewing all day, and the fine work hurts her eyes," observed

Susie.

"I'm not as young as I was," remarked their mother, trying to laugh, "and my eyes feel the strain more."

"When I'm a bit older you won't need to work at all," said Jim, who meant what he said. "I'll earn enough for us all."

They lingered a long while over the simple meal, and then Jim helped his mother to carry Susie to her bedroom.

"I shan't call you early in the morning," said Mrs. Hartland, as Jim kissed her good-night; "I think you've earned a rest."

"I wish that horrid exam. was over!" cried Susie; "then you'd have more time to yourself."

CHAPTER VI.

THE EXAMINATION.

It really seemed as if fate was dead against Jim Hartland's winning the Gayton Scholarship For some time his mother, though saying nothing to the children, had not felt well. The shock of her husband's death, and the consequent change in circumstances, had done much to depress her, and the hard struggle to earn a scanty living had made her worse. She had done her best to keep up as long as possible; but on the Monday morning she was too ill even to get Jim's breakfast.

"Never mind, mother," said he cheerfully; "you stay in bed. I'll see to things. The lessons must go for a bit."

Being a handy sort of fellow, he made breakfast, carried some up to his mother and Susie, straightened things a bit downstairs, and then ran off to his work.

There still remained three weeks till the day of the examination; but, unfortunately for Jim, his mother's illness lasted two-thirds of that time. Mrs. Boden went in as often as she could, and a kindly neighbour did several odd jobs; but there were so many things to be done that Jim found all his time occupied.

"I should chuck the 'Gayton' if I were you," said the Angel one morning. "It will be no good to you if you win it, and with all these upsets you can't expect to be at your best."

"The fellows would think I was afraid of being beaten."

"What's the odds? Who cares what they think? There's no sense in work-

ing yourself half to death for nothing."

"Not a bit; but I'm going in all the same."

"Well, you are a stubborn beggar, and no mistake," said his chum, who usually spoke his mind.

The examination was to be held in one of the rooms at the Gayton School, and on the Monday morning the candidates assembled in the big playground.

Jim, who had been granted leave for the day by Mr. Broad, went down with Dick and Tom Moon, who was one of the Magpies. He was feeling wretchedly ill; his head ached, and his brains were all at sixes and sevens. He had worked like a horse all the week to make up for lost time, and was paying the penalty. He had lost all sense of proportion, and it seemed to him that life would be worth nothing if he failed to win this scholarship.

"Hullo!" cried Dick suddenly; "there's Dandy Braithwaite!—Morning, Dandy! Why, you look as pleased as if you'd won the scholarship already!"

"I'm going to have a good shot at it, anyhow."

"Bravo, my boy!—Hullo, Temple! You here?"

"Why not?" asked Temple in surprise.

"I thought you'd more sense, 'pon my word! Now what is the use of you fellows wasting your time when there are three of the Deaneryites in the running?"

The boys who knew the Angel's little ways greeted his remark with good-humoured laughter; the others thought he was a conceited donkey, and some said as much.

"Much plague in India just now, Dicky?" asked Temple mischievously.

"Wait till I've seen the geography questions."

"What's the joke?" asked Tom Moon.

"Haven't you heard of the Angel's little dodge? Why, they fairly screamed over it at the Deanery."

"Look here, Moon," said Dick, without a twinkle in his big blue eyes; "it was a beastly shame, and they treated me most unfairly. We had to write an account of a trip up the Ganges and a visit to Benares. Well, you know there was a horrible plague at Benares just then, and I couldn't afford to risk my valuable life in the town, so I skipped it, stating my reasons. And what do you think they said?"

"Can't guess."

"Why, that 'twas a fake, because I didn't know anything about the blessed old town." And he looked so solemn that Moon was half inclined to think he had been badly treated.

"Did you really put that down?" asked one of the boys in the group.

"Of course I did!" answered Dicky, in a tone of surprise. "They couldn't

expect me to go to a plague-spot like that!"

"Didn't I hear some yarn, too, about a dead passenger?" asked Temple.

"Very likely," said the Angel calmly; "that was another misfortune. You see, we had to describe a voyage from London to Odessa, and a very nice little trip, too. Well, my passenger started in a yacht, and had a jolly good time, jotting down his descriptions every night. At last he got into the Adriatic, and the poor fellow fell overboard. The skipper fished him out, but he was quite dead; and so, of course, the trip ended. Now, what do you think the inspector had the conscience to ask me? 'Boden,' said he, 'couldn't you remember any more of the coast-line?' Just as if I'd play a trick like that!"

"Don't cry, Dicky!" observed Temple. "The inspector didn't know you as well as we do, or there would have been no need to ask such a question"—an oracular speech with rather a doubtful meaning.

Jim did not join in the chaff—in fact, he scarcely heard it. His whole mind was absorbed in the forthcoming examination, and he waited impatiently for the door to be opened. When Temple and several of the others spoke to him he answered briefly, and then relapsed into silence.

"What's the matter with him, Dicky?" whispered the popular captain of the Magpies, as they entered the building.

"Too much work. He's been overdoing it, and I shouldn't wonder if he breaks down. He's slaved like a nigger since the news of his father's loss came."

"Poor old chap!" said Temple. "It was hard lines, and no mistake."

The boys passed along a broad corridor, mounted a staircase, and entered a large room. Above the door was a card bearing the words, "Candidates for the Gayton Scholarship."

"Move quietly, please," said a spectacled gentleman standing at a desk. "Each boy will find his name on the desk at which he is to sit."

They were arranged in alphabetic order, and Dick found himself just behind Braithwaite. Jim was in the middle of the room, and Temple at the end. In a short time they were all seated, and the examiner read the rules and regulations. Then his colleague went round with the questions to be answered during the morning, and presently the only sound to be heard was the scratching of busy pens.

After a rapid glance at the paper, Dick settled to work with a pleasant smile; the questions were just to his liking, and he felt sure of doing well in the morning at least. Braithwaite, too, seemed satisfied, while Temple used his pen as if he were master of the situation.

The one boy in the room who appeared ill at ease was Jim Hartland. His face was hot and flushed; there were drumming noises in his ears; letters and figures, all jumbled together, danced wildly before his eyes. At the end of the first half-hour his paper was still blank. Long afterwards, in talking about the

examination, he told me that, but for the examiner, he does not think he should have written a single word.

That gentleman, seeing something was amiss, went over, and laying one hand on the boy's shoulder, said kindly, "Are you ill, my lad?"

The sympathetic tone seemed to break the spell, and looking up, Jim answered, "My head aches a bit, sir, but it's getting better now. I think I can make a start."

"That's right, my boy. Time's flying; but you must do your best."

"Yes, sir," said Jim gratefully, and by a great effort he managed to concentrate his attention on the questions. Once started, he worked feverishly to make up for the lost half-hour; but at one o'clock he had to hand in his papers without having gone over them a second time.

Fortunately the interval was too short for comparing notes. There was scarcely time for more than a rush home, a hurried meal, and a run back to be ready for the opening of the doors.

At the gate Jim overtook Braithwaite, who, much to his surprise, said in quite a friendly way, "Done pretty well, Hartland?"

"Pretty well, thanks; how did you get on?"

"Prime! The questions were just made for me."

Just then the Angel came along.

"I say, Dandy," he cried, "how came you to be doing Euclid this morning?"

"Euclid? I wasn't!"

"What were you drawing, then?"

"Why, a map of the United States!"

"Oh!" The blue eyes opened wide with assumed wonder. "I thought 'twas a figure in Euclid."

"Don't be such a fool!" said Braithwaite testily, while the others laughed.

"Wasn't the arithmetic beastly stiff?" grumbled Tom Moon. "Did anybody do that thing about the two trains passing each other?"

"Oh, that was easy enough!" laughed Temple. "It worked out to thirty-seven seconds and a half."

"I got that," said Braithwaite.

"So did I," cried Dick, throwing up his hat. "Well done, Boden, my boy; you'll pull this scholarship off yet!"

Jim said nothing, but his skin burned like fire as he remembered that his answer was more than an hour and twenty minutes.

Just then the doors were opened and the boys trooped into their places. While waiting for the papers to be given out he recalled the sum in question, and soon found what a ridiculous mess he had made of it.

"It's no use," he thought to himself bitterly; "as likely as not I've made as

big a hash of the rest."

Once he thought of pleading illness and giving up the struggle. The excuse would not have been without a backing of truth; but, after all, Jim was no coward, and he thrust the idea aside.

"No," muttered he, "I'll see the thing through."

The first subject in the afternoon was history, for which he had always a liking; and when the paper was finished he felt that he had at last done himself justice. Encouraged by this success, he worked away at the others, feeling more and more cheerful at the end of each subject.

"Well," said the examiner, when he came to collect the papers, "are you satisfied?"

"With this afternoon's work, sir," said Jim; "but I'm afraid I lost my chance this morning."

"Oh, you mustn't worry about that. 'Never despair!'—that's the motto, you know!" And the gentleman gave him a good-natured smile as he passed to the next desk.

Outside, the boys clustered together, comparing notes and talking over their doings. Some smiled complacently, others looked rather miserable as they discovered their mistakes.

"The algebra paper was a teaser," remarked Temple, "and as for the last equation, I couldn't do it at all.'

"I don't believe it comes out," said Braithwaite, while Dick admitted with a grin that he had left it untouched.

"Did you have a shot at it, Hartland?" asked Temple.

"Yes," said Jim; "it seemed easy enough, unless I misunderstood it." And with paper and pencil he proceeded to work it out.

"O my aunt!" cried Dick, who was very fond of bringing that worthy person into his conversation "I believe you've got it, Jimmy!"

"Yes," said Temple, "it certainly looks right. That will give you a lift, Hartland; it counts twenty marks."

"Well," replied Jim, thinking of the morning's work, "I shall need them all."

Presently the groups began to break up, and the boys to disperse. Jim still seemed very gloomy, and even his lively little chum found it difficult to bring a smile to his face.

"You haven't to go to the shop, have you?" he asked.

"Not to-night."

"That's jolly; we'll have a good game down at the Old Fort. It's ages since you were down, and the fellows will be glad to see you. Say you'll come, just to please me."

After a good deal of hesitation Jim promised, and the Angel went off

whistling merrily. He little guessed what a terrible tragedy he was thus, in an indirect way, helping to bring about.

CHAPTER VII.
"IT'S ALL MY FAULT"

The port of Beauleigh has a fine harbour and splendid docks generally crowded with shipping. To the west of the harbour lies a sandy bay, while still farther west the coast becomes rugged and dangerous. When the tide is out, the rocks form a favourite playground for the boys of the neighbourhood, as also, at the time of our story, did the Old Fort. This is a ruined tower standing well out in the bay, and approached at low water by a stone bridge built up from the bottom of the sea. The width of this bridge is about sufficient to allow of two persons walking abreast, and here and there pieces have been knocked off by the action of the waves. At high tide it is covered to a height of several feet. The tower itself is so old that its origin was a matter for dispute among many learned men. Some said it had been built as a lighthouse; others that it was a real fort; while a third party declared that its original purpose was to serve as a prison for the king's enemies. The Beauleigh boys, without deciding on these abstruse matters, unanimously voted that it was a jolly place for a good game.

Not having any business there, they found it the more attractive, especially as there was a real element of danger in playing there at dusk. The notice-board marked "Dangerous" and the warning to trespassers added spice to their enjoyment. Now and again it was proposed by the townspeople to demolish the tower, as it no longer served any useful purpose; but somehow nothing was done.

Despite the danger, accidents rarely happened; the last one, in fact, was beyond the memory of even the oldest inhabitant.

Before joining the ranks of the workers Jim had played many a game both on the rocks and at the Fort, and his companions were glad to have him back.

"Here's Jim Hartland coming down with the Angel!" cried one.

Mrs. Hartland, thinking a good game would "blow the cobwebs," had urged him to go with Dick. He had been gloomy enough on the way down, but he brightened up at the boys' welcome, and threw himself heartily into the games. Whether he had done well or badly, the examination was over, and he might as well enjoy his brief holiday.

First they had their favourite military game. For this they divided into two parties—one, under Dick, defending the Fort; the second, led by Jim, trying to force an entrance. The besieged warriors performed prodigies of valour; but the enemy were too strong, and after a desperate fight succeeded in storming the outworks and putting the garrison to the sword. Then the Angel, scorning to surrender, seized his battered flag, and with a shout of defiance, leaped from the battlements, taking particular care, however, to come down where the sand was nice and soft.

After this some one proposed a game of "I spy!" among the rocks, to which the others readily agreed.

As they were scampering along Dick cried out, "Hullo! there's Braithwaite!—Come on, Dandy, and have a game! 'Twill do you good after all that dry stuff at Gayton to-day!"

"All right," replied Braithwaite, who did not often join in these rough sports; "where are you going?"

"Up to the rocks. Come along; we'll give the rest a breather!" And off he went, light of foot and heart and, I am afraid, somewhat light of head. Indeed it was partly owing to one of his mischievous pranks that the incident which I am about to relate occurred.

After playing a considerable time on the rocks, they went back across the bay. It was getting dusk now, and the tide, though still some distance out, was flowing shoreward. Some of the boys, wishing their companions good-night, started for home; five or six gathered at the stone bridge for a chat.

Then it was that Dick Boden made his unfortunate proposal.

"I've thought of a ripping game," said he. "See this knife? I'll hide it somewhere in the Old Fort, and you can try to find it."

"It will soon be dark," objected Braithwaite.

"Not too dark to see the knife, for a bit."

"The tide's coming in too, and you know how fast it comes in just here."

"Oh, go on, Dick!" cried Jim scornfully; "don't take any notice of him: he's always showing the white feather!"

Braithwaite flushed. "You think you're very brave, Jim Hartland," he said, "but you're no braver than any one else. I'm not afraid of going to the Fort."

"Oh, not a bit!" sneered Jim; "you'd walk across to France if the sea was all dry land. Make haste, Dick; we'll come on slowly. Call out when you're ready."

Dick, who was now half-way across, soon disappeared in the ruin, and presently they heard him shouting, "Come on!"

Perhaps the catastrophe might not have occurred even then; but, unfortunately, Jim, who was eager to be first, put out his hand to push Braithwaite aside; whereupon the latter, evidently thinking this a challenge, ran forward. Jim fol-

lowed with young Moon, and two others brought up the rear.

"Bravo, Dandy!" cried Dick, who was waiting for them. "Now then, spread yourselves out, my amateur detectives, and search for the lost property. Well done, Dandy; you're hot on the scent. O Tommy Moon, O Tommy Moon, I'm sure you'll find it very soon."

Whether Braithwaite remembered the danger I cannot tell, but the others forgot everything in hunting for the knife and listening to Dick's nonsense. Laughing and joking, he led them on, keeping their noses to the grindstone, as it were, though without result.

"I don't believe he's hidden it at all!" grumbled Tom Moon at last, stretching his cramped legs.

"You young fraud!" cried Jim suddenly; "I believe the knife's in your pocket."

"I told you 'twas a ripping game!" chuckled the Angel, preparing to run. "Whoop!" And he was off like a shot.

"After him!" cried Jim. Then from those nearest the bridge came a shout of "Make haste! Quick! quick! The water's in!"

A sudden gust of wind blew Jim's cap into the dry well of the Fort, and a considerable time passed before he could scramble out; then, for a moment, he stood helpless and amazed.

The sky was dark and overcast with black clouds scudding in from the sea; the tide had half filled the bay; the waves were washing the bridge and increasing in violence every second. Dick and the others were racing along the slippery path, and had by this time almost gained safety.

"Thank goodness they're safe!" said he. "Shall I risk it? I think not. I'll climb to the top of the tower till the tide goes down, or perhaps a boatman will take me off."

He was turning to go back when a yell from the shore attracted his attention, and looking along the bridge again, he exclaimed, "Good gracious! what's that fool of a Braithwaite doing? He'll be washed off for certain.—Hi, Braithwaite, Braithwaite! come back! D'you hear? Come back! You'll be all right here in the Fort."

The boy in the middle of the pathway moved neither backward nor forward. It was poor Braithwaite, who, though far from being a coward, was overwhelmed by the startling suddenness of the danger. He could not swim, and the possibility of being drowned unnerved him. Instead of following the others, he had stopped short on the bridge, too dazed to move, though the peril increased every moment.

Even now, with care and a little luck, he might have got safely through, but he did not try. In vain the boys on shore shouted; in vain Jim yelled from the fort; he seemed not to hear.

"He'll be drowned," groaned Jim—"he's bound to be. And," with a sudden

rush of memory, "it's all my fault. If I hadn't chaffed him, he would have been at home now."

Raising his voice, he once more shouted, "Braithwaite, Braithwaite, come back; it's quite safe here!" But it appeared as if the unhappy boy had lost all power to move.

It was not only useless, it might be fatal, to wait longer. Taking out his pocket-knife, Jim cut the laces of his boots, slipped them off, and put them in a safe place. Then he laid his coat and waistcoat by them, muttering, "Better go light, in case of accident."

"Keep your footing, Braithwaite!" he yelled; "I'm coming."

Full of their play, the boys had not noticed the signs of the coming storm. It was sweeping in now. The sky had darkened. Across the bay the great white sea-horses were leaping madly at the jagged rocks. The boys on shore had disappeared, but Jim knew the Angel would not desert him.

Cautiously but swiftly he trod the path, over which the waves were breaking with increased violence, leaping and dancing as if in glee. Suddenly a clap of thunder pealed right overhead, and for an instant the town was lit up by a vivid illumination. Jim staggered on, barely able to keep his footing now, for the wash of the waves reached his waist, and the path was deeply submerged. He began to fear that, encumbered by Braithwaite, he would never reach either shore or fort, but he did not quite despair.

"Keep a firm hold, Braithwaite," he cried; "I'm coming!"

From first to last the incident lasted but a short time, though to Jim it seemed a century. He thought or his mother, scarcely recovered from her illness, and of his helpless sister; but most of all he thought that, but for his folly, poor Braithwaite would not now be in danger. Again and again he said to himself, "It's all my fault."

Once more he shouted, "Keep up, Dandy!" but in reply there came a piercing cry—a cry so full of agony that Jim has never forgotten and is never likely to forget it. That which he dreaded from the first had happened. Unable to preserve his footing any longer, Braithwaite had been swept into the water.

Heedless of his own danger, Jim pushed on rapidly, when another scream reached him, and through the gathering dusk he caught sight for a moment of the boy's head above the waves. He was taking a terrible risk, but he could not see him drown; so with a cheery shout he sprang into the sea, and with swift, powerful strokes swam to the aid of his drowning companion.

"Don't struggle, Dandy, and don't catch hold of me," he cried; but the advice was futile. Braithwaite was sinking a second time, and not realizing what he was doing, he clutched his rescuer tightly around the throat.

Jim fought desperately to release himself, and at length succeeded in un-

locking the clinging arms. Then, dragging the almost lifeless boy, he rose to the surface, but not before swallowing a large quantity of salt water.

By this time Braithwaite's struggles had ceased, and supporting him with one hand, Jim turned over on his back. Twice he called loudly for help, but no voice replied; on shouting a third time he fancied he heard an encouraging shout in reply.

Alone he would have felt little alarm, but this dead weight tired him. He made scanty progress, and before long felt that he must go down. Still, he never once thought of deserting Dandy; he would save him, or perish in the attempt.

The waves were rolling fiercely, his breast was sore as if beaten with heavy hammers, he gasped for breath, and the salt water poured into his open mouth.

"Help!" he cried, "help!" And surely that was Dicky's voice he heard in answer.

He strained his ears to listen, and the sound came again. He recognized the words now—"Jim! Jim! where are you?"—and put all his remaining strength into one last cry of despair.

Help must come quickly, or it would be too late. His strength was failing, his mind wandering.

"It's all my fault, Dandy," he murmured, "but I'll do my best. I'll stick to you. Look at the star! It's getting bigger and brighter. It's coming this way. Look! it's dancing up and down!" And he broke into loud laughter.

He had ceased swimming now, and was merely keeping himself and his silent companion afloat, almost without knowing that he did so.

CHAPTER VIII.

"DID I SAVE HIM?"

When Dick Boden ran from the Fort and raised the alarm, he waited till his companions made their appearance; then, expecting they would all follow, he dashed off across the stone bridge. In his opinion, as he afterwards said, the worst that could happen for any one was a few hours' imprisonment in the old tower.

No one looked behind till reaching the shore, and then Tom Moon noticed that Braithwaite had stopped.

"Unless he hurries up, he'll get a jolly good wetting," said Dick, and they

all began to shout.

"What a muff the fellow is!" said Moon. "Why doesn't he come? There's Jimmy Hartland just come out; he'll bustle him along."

"Dick," suddenly said one of the other boys in a grave tone, "he'll be drowned, I'm sure." His name was Spencer, and his father being a fisherman, he was well acquainted with the bay.

"Look!" he continued; "just look how high the water is getting! Jim will have to stay in the Fort."

As soon as Dick grasped the danger he sent a boy for help, and with Moon and Spencer ran down the beach.

"Here you are!" he cried, stopping at the boat nearest the incoming tide. "Unfasten her, Spencer.—Light the lantern, Tommy; here's a match. Are the oars there? Right you are!—Now—one, two, three, and all together, boys. Push her along! Now she's riding! In with you!—Give me an oar, Spencer.—You steer, Tommy—straight for Braithwaite."

"No, no," said Spencer hastily; "steer for that rock with the whitewashed top; then swing her round, and we'll pick him up coming back. We should never reach there in a straight course."

"All right!" exclaimed Dick cheerfully; "you boss the show. I don't mind as long as he's saved."

The boys bent their backs with a will: but the boat was heavy, the tide strong, and, as the Angel admitted, the rowing was hardly up to regatta mark. Still they were making progress when Moon called out, "There's Hartland going for him!—Well done, Jim!—Pull, you fellows!"

They tugged away desperately, but suddenly a piercing shriek startled them, and they knew that Braithwaite was fighting for life in the water.

Dick groaned, and pulled till it seemed as if his arms must come out.

"They'll both be lost!" he cried, knowing well that Jim would not hesitate a second in jumping to the rescue.

"There are some men on the shore," said Spencer; "they're getting out another boat."

"Too late!" muttered Dick gloomily. "Listen! There's Jim calling for help. Shout back. Now again, and all together."

The sweat poured down their faces, their muscles ached terribly, their throats were dry and parched, but they pulled on without a second's pause.

Again the cry for help rang out, this time much nearer, and soon they discerned a dark object in the water.

"Keep her steady!" roared Spencer. "Grab the other fellow, Dick!" And he himself caught Jim, and pulled him up so that he partly rested on the gunwale.

The whole manoeuvre was full of danger, but they were taking risks that

night. By degrees, Spencer, who was fortunately strong as a horse, managed to pull Jim into the boat, and then helped to drag in Braithwaite, who displayed no sign of life.

"Let's put our coats over them, and that dry sail in the corner," said Dick. "Now, a pull for the shore. Keep her head straight, Tommy!"

News of the desperate situation of the boys had spread rapidly. Numbers of people had assembled on the shore, and cheer after cheer greeted the plucky rescuers as they beached and made fast the boat.

Two or three doctors were among the spectators. Some thoughtful soul had hastily made and sent down a can of hot coffee, while a man from the York Hotel arrived soon afterwards with warm blankets.

"Are they alive?" was the question on the lips of every one, as the doctors ran down to the boat, and a few policemen kept the crowd back.

Dick had already unfastened his friend's braces, and taken off his shirt, in order to expose his chest fully, while Spencer and Tom Moon were doing the same for Braithwaite.

"That's right, my boy," said one of the doctors to Dick. "Now, help me to turn him face downwards. Place one of his arms under the forehead, so, and hold it there while I wipe his mouth."

Dick was half wild with grief; but he did as he was told, though feeling sure in his mind that Jim was dead.

Assisted by another man, the doctor presently turned the body gently on one side, and then back again sharply, Dick supporting the head meanwhile. This movement was repeated many times, and at last the doctor exclaimed with a look of satisfaction, "We've got him; he's beginning to breathe. Slip the trousers off and cover him with a blanket. Now rub his limbs upward, under the blanket. You've saved him, my boy!"

"Is he alive, sir?" asked Dick, hardly able to believe the truth.

"Alive? Yes; he'll be as right as ninepence in a few hours."

As soon as Jim began to breathe he was carried to a hotel close by, where the landlady busied herself to procure hot flannels and hot water-bottles. Then she brought a bottle of old wine, and gave Jim some in a teaspoon, under the doctor's orders.

"Now," said that gentleman, "there's nothing but a few hours' sleep required. Let this youngster stay in the room. I'm going to see how the other poor boy's getting on."

So Dick sat beside the bed on which his friend lay, and wondered what was happening on the beach. After a time Jim stirred uneasily, opened his eyes, and recognized his chum.

"Dick!" he whispered faintly.

"Don't try to talk, old chap. It's all right. Go to sleep."

There was an uneasy look in Jim's eyes, and his forehead puckered up as if he were in thought. Then he said in a whisper, "Did I save him?"

Jim had asked a question difficult to answer, but his chum thought it best to soothe him.

"Yes," said he; "you kept him afloat till the boat came up. Now go to sleep—there's a good chap—or I shan't be allowed to stay with you."

Jim's lips moved as if in speech, but no words passed them, and in a short time he was fast asleep, with a peaceful smile on his face.

Meantime, news of the accident had reached Mrs. Hartland, who, getting a neighbour to stay with Susie, hurried to the hotel, where she was permitted to go into the boy's room to satisfy herself that he was really alive.

"I'm going to stay with him," said Dick, following her to the door, "and the doctor says there's no need at all to worry. Does Susie know?"

"Yes; I couldn't keep it from her. How did it happen?"

Dick told the story briefly, and then, promising to bring Jim home in the morning, he returned to the room. An hour later the doctor came to have another look at his patient, who was still sleeping nicely.

"Hum!" said he, rubbing his hands, "one's better than none, though it is a pity the other slipped past us."

"Is Braithwaite dead, sir?" asked Dick, sinking his voice to a whisper lest Jim should hear him.

"Yes, my boy, I'm sorry to say he is. We've tried hard to restore breathing, but it's no good. How came he to get into the water?"

Dick told him.

"And this lad jumped in to save him? Well, that was very plucky, but none of you had any business there at all."

"No, sir," replied Dick humbly, "but I only thought to have a joke."

"Well, well, I don't suppose you're more to blame than the rest!" exclaimed the doctor; and then, after making a note of Jim's name and address, he said he would call at his house in a day or two.

That was a wretched night for Dick. The kind-hearted landlady brought him in a good supper, and a servant made him a comfortable bed on the floor, but he could not sleep.

"Poor old Dandy!" he murmured again and again, "but for me he would be alive now."

Early in the morning Jim wakened, and in an instant Dick was by his side.

"Feel better, old boy?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm all right. Where's Braithwaite? What's the matter? Why are you looking like that? Is he—*dead*?"

"Yes," said Dick, and no one would have known it was the Angel speaking.

"Then I've killed him! He only went because I called him a coward."

"'Twas as much my fault as yours," said Dick. "I started it. Poor old Dandy!"

Jim did not speak again; and even when, later in the day, he went home, his mother could hardly get a word from him; but at the inquest he told the story without hiding anything, and took all the blame on his own shoulders.

"Braithwaite wouldn't have gone," he said; "only I laughed at him for being afraid."

The whole incident was so plain that the jury at once brought in a verdict of "accidental death," adding a rider that, in their opinion, the Old Fort and the bridge should be destroyed.

The event, of course, caused a tremendous sensation in the town. Many people spoke harshly of Jim, but all admired his courage both in attempting to save the drowning boy and in frankly telling the truth afterwards.

"The lad has grit," remarked the doctor who had brought him round. "I hope he won't take it too much to heart."

He was a Scotsman named Stewart, a pleasant, cheery fellow, well known in Beauleigh both for his ability and kindliness.

"I've a good mind to call and have a look at him," said he. "What's his address?" pulling out his notebook. "Hum! Brook Street! Not very much burdened with this world's goods, I expect."

That same evening Mrs. Hartland was startled by a loud rat-tat, and going to the door, found the doctor there.

"Good-evening!" said he briskly; "are you Mrs. Hartland? I am the doctor who attended your boy, and I've come to have a look at him. No, no; don't make a fuss. I'll come straight through, if you don't mind." And closing the door, he followed Mrs. Hartland into the sitting-room.

"Well, young shaver," said he, patting Jim on the back, "how do you feel now?—better? That was a very plucky thing you did.—You ought to be proud of him, ma'am; he deserves the Society's medal. And who is this young lady?" stooping to touch Susie's hair. "Can't get up? Dear me! that is sad. Any one attending her?"

"Not now, sir. You see, the doctors—"

"Quite so; I understand. Now, suppose I have a look at her in the morning—eh? I've had some experience in these cases. I shan't call professionally—just as a friend of this young gentleman's, you know."

"O sir, how can I thank you?" exclaimed Mrs. Hartland gratefully.

"No need of thanks to any one yet, ma'am; but if I can do the dear child any good, she can thank her brother, because, but for him, I should not be here to-night. Eh, Pussy?" And he pulled Susie's ear playfully.

"Jim tried to save the other boy," said Susie with tears in her eyes.

"Yes, I know, and nearly lost his own life. He was very silly in the first place, but turned out a real hero after all.—Now, Jim, brighten up and look cheerful. You've had a hard lesson; show the world you've learned something from it. What's done can't be undone, and moping won't make things a bit better. Well, I must go.—Good-night, Pussy. Shall we say ten o'clock in the morning? That will suit me nicely." And with a bright smile all round, and a last word of encouragement to Jim, he took his leave.

"O mother," cried Susie, "isn't he a nice man?"

"He is, my dear, and wonderfully clever too, I've heard," replied Mrs. Hartland. "Oh, what a good thing it will be if he can make you stronger!"

They talked about it till bedtime, but Jim was very quiet. He was still thinking of the boy who had gone so suddenly to his death.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RESULT OF THE EXAMINATION.

There was a subdued air about Mr. Laythorne's class the next morning, and the boys could not keep their eyes from the desk which Percy Braithwaite had occupied. He had not been very popular, but the startling tragedy had gripped their minds, making them feel really sorry for the loss of their schoolmate.

As to Jim Hartland, opinion was divided. Some of the boys rather pitied him, others looked on him as a hero, while a few blamed him outright for being the cause of Braithwaite's death.

"He should have known better," said one. "It might have been all very well for him and the Angel, but 'twas a fool's game to let Dandy into. I don't suppose he had ever gone to the Fort before, even in daylight."

"They must have been blind not to have seen the tide coming in," exclaimed another. "And fancy Dick Boden, the little idiot, letting 'em grub about there, while he had the knife in his pocket all the time!"

"Oh, that's just like one of the Angel's tricks! But he's a good-hearted little chap, and this business has cut him up dreadfully."

Somehow, in the eyes of his schoolfellows, Dick rarely did wrong; and even those who looked askance at Jim were unwilling to say anything against his popular chum.

All this chatter took place in the playground before either of the two boys arrived, for Dick was rather late, while Jim did not get in till after prayers. He winced, too, on seeing the vacant desk, but fortunately his mind was somewhat preoccupied by wondering what Dr. Stewart would be able to do for Susie.

The morning seemed terribly long, but he stumbled through his lessons without actual failure, and as soon as school was dismissed, started for home at full speed. Panting and blowing, he got to the door just as the doctor was leaving.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Dr. Stewart kindly; "there's no need to ask how you are. Well, I've seen your sister. Mother will tell you all about it." And stepping into his gig, he drove off.

Mrs. Hartland's first words brought the blood to the boy's face.

"O Jim," she cried, "he thinks there's a chance for Susie. He won't promise, of course, but he is quite hopeful about it. He has been here nearly two hours, though knowing perfectly well that I can't pay him. And what do you think he has offered to do?"

"I can't guess," replied the boy.

"To get her into the private hospital for children. He's going to send a nurse and a proper invalid-chair in the morning, and attend to her himself, just as if he were charging a big fee."

"He's a real old brick!" exclaimed Jim enthusiastically.

"And he thinks—though, of course, I haven't told Susie—that at the end of six months she may be able to *walk*! He says there was a girl suffering just like Susie in a Scotch hospital, and she was cured. But there is only a chance, of course."

"What does Susie say about going?"

"Well, the poor child is rather timid and nervous but she is quite willing. It's wonderful how she has taken to the doctor."

Before getting his dinner, Jim ran up to his sister, who was in bed, and feeling rather weary after the medical examination.

"Has mother told you?" she asked, smiling bravely.

"Yes. Isn't it glorious? You don't mind going, do you? I shall come to see you on Sundays. And oh, suppose—suppose you should be able to walk some day!"

There was a suspicion of tears in her eyes as she answered, "Don't talk about that, Jim—not yet. I try not to think of it, because it may never happen."

"I believe it will, though," declared Jim stoutly. "The doctor would not say there was a chance unless he felt pretty sure of it."

"Did he say that?" asked the girl eagerly.

"Yes; only you must keep up your spirits and go on hoping all the time. Now I must run off, or I shall be late for school."

At the door she called him back, saying, "I should like to see Dick before I go."

"So you shall. I'll tell him presently, and he'll come in this evening. Old Dick will be as happy as a sand-boy when he hears the news."

As it happened, Jim had no chance to speak to his chum till after school, when, as usual, Dick went a part of the way to the shop with him.

"I'll go in directly after tea," he said, his eyes sparkling. "Poor little midge! 'twill be dreary enough in the hospital; but, I say, fancy her walking! Even if she has to use a crutch it will be something. Well, I'll turn off here and run straight home. Good-night, in case I'm gone when you get back."

True to his word, Dr. Stewart sent a nurse with the famous chair the next morning, and also looked in himself to superintend the removal of his little patient.

"There," said he, "now you're comfortable—eh? Oh yes; mother's coming too. Why, it's quite a royal procession. And on Sunday we shall have our big brother to see how we're getting on—eh, my lassie?"

Brook Street showed unwonted excitement over the child's removal, and discussed it volubly and freely, agreeing on the whole with the crushing remark of Mrs. Archer, whose chief occupation in life was discussing the affairs of her neighbours.

"As much fuss," said she scornfully, "as if she was a real lady! An' her brother goin' round with papers! It's a wonder they don't have a carriage with houtriders and postillions, like the King!"

Meanwhile Susie was taken to the hospital and carried into a room containing four beds. Over one hung a card with "Susie Hartland" written on it, and the child smiled with pleasure on seeing the snowy sheets and soft white pillows and pretty counterpane. Then, when she was cozily tucked up, her mother sat and talked to her cheerfully, and a nurse brought games and picture-books with which she could amuse herself later on.

She cried a little when the time came for parting with her mother, but the nurse was so kind and gentle that she soon dried her tears.

Mrs. Hartland felt the separation too, especially in the evening, when she sat alone with her work. Although an invalid, Susie was always bright and cheerful, and her good spirits had done much to lessen her mother's grief.

The excitement attending his sister's going away had buoyed Jim up, and kept him from moping, but now he began to brood over the unlucky accident at the Old Fort. Although a strong, healthy boy, he was extremely sensitive, and conjured up all sorts things that existed only in his imagination. School no longer had any attraction for him; he cut himself adrift from his old companions, even endeavouring to shake Dick off, but the Angel stuck to him resolutely.

"You're a silly duffer, Jim," said he, with charming frankness. "What's the use of moping about like a barn owl? You did your best to save Braithwaite, and you can't bring him back to life, anyhow. I'm as sorry as you, but pulling a long face won't do any good."

"Every one's down on me," answered Jim sulkily. "Laythorne hardly speaks, and the fellows look as if I had committed a murder; and it's just the same in the town. I'm sick of it. I wish I'd been drowned myself."

"Pooh!" said Dick; "you're talking rubbish. I'm ashamed of you, Jim, 'pon my word. I thought you had more grit. I'm sure no one could have been kinder than Laythorne; and as for the fellows—why, half of them think you're a greater hero than Nelson. You should hear 'em talk!"

"I've a good mind to get a berth on board ship," said Jim gloomily.

"What? and leave your mother and sister? Well you're a bigger coward than I ever took you for, Jim Hartland!"

This was the first unpleasantness that had occurred between the two chums; but Dick was in dead earnest and did not mince his words. Better balanced than Jim, he took a more sensible view of things. He admitted they had acted foolishly, and without thought; but they had done their best, Jim especially, to remedy the mistake. They bitterly regretted not being able to rescue their companion, but to Dick's mind this was no reason why they should spoil their own lives.

It is likely enough that Jim would have come round to this view, but for an unexpected event which revived the interest in Braithwaite's death.

One evening he had gone as usual into the shop directly after tea. Mr. Broad was absent when the papers arrived, so that Jim, after arranging the bundle, had a few minutes to spare.

Opening one of the papers, he saw in big type—"The Gayton Scholarship." His heart beat fast, and for a second or two he dared not look farther. Then with feverish anxiety he read the paragraph at a glance, and stood leaning over the counter like one dazed. Was it possible? Could it be really true? Surely there must be some mistake! Half mechanically his eves wandered over the words again, but with the same result.

This is the announcement as it appeared in *The Beauleigh Evening News*:—

"THE GAYTON SCHOLARSHIP.—The result of the examination for the Gayton Scholarship is now to hand. Forty-five candidates, the cream of the elementary schools, were examined, and we give below the names of the six highest, with the number of marks obtained by each out of a possible thousand:—

CANDIDATE.	SCHOOL.	MARKS.
Braithwaite, Percy	Deanery	871
Temple, Hugh	St. Paul's	868
Carter, Robert	Bath Street Board	839
Boden, Richard	Deanery	810
Jones, Samuel	Royal British	750
Morris, William Charles	Somerton Board	716

The honour of winning the scholarship thus goes to the Deanery School; but, unhappily, the successful candidate cannot take advantage of his victory. Our readers will, no doubt, remember the sad accident which recently occurred at the Old Fort, in which Percy Braithwaite lost his life. Great sympathy is felt for the sorrowing parents. It is sad to think of the early termination to what evidently might have been a distinguished career. The scholarship will therefore be awarded to the candidate next on the list, Hugh Temple of St. Paul's, who, it will be noticed, is only three marks behind the leader."

At first, Jim could think of nothing but the blow to his own pride. Most of the Deanery boys fully expected him to win the scholarship; they had coupled his name with it as far back as the cricket match for the Challenge Shield; they had looked up to him as their champion. And now the list was out, and he was not even in the first six!

I am sorry to admit it, but the truth must be told. Jim fairly broke down. He was angry, mortified, and ashamed. He felt the blow with bitter humiliation, and while doing his round that evening he had not the courage to look any one in the face. It seemed as if all the town must be jeering at him as a dead failure.

He could have yielded pride of place to Temple, but to be beaten by Braithwaite, and even by the light-hearted Angel! This was where the sting lay, because, knowing the extent of their abilities, he felt that he was far superior to them.

Of course, he had had hard lines in his father's death, in the necessity for finding work, and again in his mother's illness; but he could not tell all the world that. The Deanery fellows bothered little about his misfortunes; in their eyes the thing would be simple enough: he had failed even to get into the first six, and there was an end of it.

When he got home that night, he said nothing of the news; so that his

mother, who rarely bought a paper, did not know that the list was out.

"She will know soon enough," he thought bitterly, "and on Sunday I shall have to tell Susie."

CHAPTER X.
GOING DOWN HILL.

Nowhere was the result of the examination received with greater surprise than at the Deanery School. It is safe to say that every boy looked twice at the published list before admitting Jim Hartland's name was not there.

On the following morning the boys of the upper classes, gathering together in the playground, discussed the matter excitedly.

"It's just what I've always said," exclaimed Simpson; "the chap's no better than the rest of us. Just because he can play cricket a bit, we put him on the top of a monument, and now, down he comes—flop!"

"Well, you needn't be afraid of tumbling," laughed little Macdonald, "because you'll never be put on the top of anything. You're always having a dig at Hartland, because he wouldn't have you in the cricket eleven."

"Well said, Alec!" cried the Angel. "That's the truth. Now look at me. I came out fourth."

"So you did!"

"Good old Angel!"

"You'll be first another time!"

"Oh, what rot!" exclaimed Dick. "Can't you let a fellow speak? What I want to say is that Jim Hartland's twice as good as me."

"He didn't make much show, anyhow," growled Simpson.

"No, he didn't. And why? Because, when his father was drowned, he went to work to help his mother. If it hadn't been for that, he'd have won the 'Gayton' easily."

"Well, he lost it!" growled Simpson; "and through him the Deanery lost it, too!"

"How's that?"

"How's that! Why, wasn't it through his bounce that Dandy Braithwaite got drowned?"

"Don't listen to him, Angel," said Macdonald, for Dick had doubled up his

fists, and his eyes were flashing fire.

"Pooh!" said Simpson. "I don't care; everybody knows it's true."

"He owned as much as that himself," chimed in Archer, who owed Jim a grudge.

"Perhaps you think he wanted Braithwaite to get drowned," exclaimed Dick sarcastically, "and that he and I put up the little job between us?"

"I'm not saying anything against you," replied Simpson; "but I do say it's Hartland's fault we lost the 'Gayton,' and you can take it how you like."

This was the view held by many of the Deanery boys, who were very sore that the scholarship had gone to St. Paul's. Thus the subject of the tragedy was brought to the front again, and during the interval at morning school Jim could not help overhearing some of the remarks. Angry and miserable, he went to a corner of the playground, where Dick followed him.

"Look here, Jim," said the Angel cheerily; "don't mope about the 'Gayton.' We've all seen the list, of course, and I'm awfully sorry you aren't in it. It's too ridiculous putting me above you. I know that, and so do the others. It's like turning you out of the eleven to put Simpson in; but buck up, old chap—you'll soon get over it."

"I wasn't thinking about you, Dicky," replied his chum. "I'm jolly glad you're high up."

"What are you looking so miserable about, then?"

"Oh, hang it all!" cried Jim excitedly; "can't you hear what the fellows are saying? They look at me as black as thunder!"

"Let 'em," rejoined the Angel serenely; "that won't hurt you."

"Oh," said Jim, jerking himself away savagely, "it's easy for you to talk! I wish the place was at the bottom of the sea!"

"I don't!" replied Dick. "My mac's worn out, and I shan't get another this side of Christmas. Here's Macdonald coming; don't eat him."

"I say, Hartland," began Alec, who was as red as a turkey-cock, "I'm awfully sorry you didn't get the 'Gayton.' I know from what the Angel has said that you've had jolly hard lines."

"Thanks!" growled Jim. "But I wonder you aren't afraid to be seen speaking to me."

"I wish you didn't feel so cut up about it," returned Macdonald, ignoring Jim's surliness. "You're looking at it through magnifying glasses."

Unfortunately Jim did feel *cut up*, and by continual brooding made himself more and more miserable. From this time, I fear, he began to go slowly down hill, and the only gleam of good feeling he displayed was with regard to his mother and Susie.

"I'm very sorry, my boy," said his mother, when he told her; "and yet I shall

never think of this scholarship without feeling proud of you. I know you had a good chance of winning it, and threw it away for the sake of helping me."

"No, no, mother," cried the boy cheerfully; "you mustn't look at it that way. I mightn't have won the scholarship at all; and anyhow, I couldn't have accepted it."

On Sunday, when at the hospital, he talked to Susie much in the same way, making light of his disappointment so successfully that the girl was quite deceived.

At school, however, he was very different, becoming surly and morose, and making enemies of the boys who would willingly have remained his friends.

Mr. Broad, too, noticed his altered manner; but knowing the circumstances, he said nothing, thinking the trouble would soon blow over; besides, Jim did not neglect his work. He was always punctual, and had such a quick grasp of his duties that he saved his employer a great deal of labour.

His usefulness in the shop led Mr. Broad to engage the services of a smaller boy for the evening round, while Jim was promoted to the dignity of serving behind the counter. This made him later at night, but he generally found an opportunity of doing his lessons before going home. His wages were raised to six shillings a week, and there was some talk of his going into the business altogether when he left school.

"Keep steady, my boy," said his employer, "learn all you can here, and there is no reason why you should not get on well."

Unfortunately Jim had drifted away from his schoolmates, seeing little even of Dick. To a certain extent this was inevitable, but Dick soon discovered that his old chum was beginning to lose pleasure in his company.

The truth was that Jim had picked up some new friends, with whom he knew quite well that Dick would have nothing to do. He himself was a little ashamed of them, but he eased his conscience by saying he must have some one to talk to. One night on leaving the shop he found the Angel outside.

"Hullo, Dick," he said; "anything wrong?"

"Oh no. I had an hour to spare, so I thought I'd come and meet you—that's all. We haven't seen much of each other lately."

"That isn't my fault."

"No; I'm not blaming you. I was awfully disappointed last night, though."

Jim's face became red.

"How is that?" he asked.

"Oh, I came round last night just in time to see you going off with Curly Peters and his chum."

"Why shouldn't I? What's the matter with Curly?"

"Oh, nothing!" replied Dick airily—"only he's a foul-mouthed little black-

guard. Perhaps you'll take him with you on Sunday to see Susie?"

That shot struck home, and Jim winced, but he answered sneeringly,—

"You'll be getting another nickname soon: they'll be calling you the Saint."

"They might do worse," replied Dick cheerfully. "Anyhow, I'd make a cleaner saint than Curly."

"That's right!" exclaimed Jim, trying to work himself into a passion; "you're like all the rest. Just because the chap's poor and has no friends you're down on him. I've been through it myself."

The Angel laughed genially.

"There's something in that," he agreed. "You see, we Baxter's Court millionaires"—Dick lived in a tiny house in Baxter's Court—"don't care much to mix up with poor people. But Curly has a few extra points in his favour. He's dirty, he loafs about the town cadging for coppers instead of going to work, he thinks it big to swear, and I don't know that he's over honest."

"Well, he hasn't asked for your company," said Jim sullenly.

"No," replied the Angel with a smile; "perhaps that's why I'm prejudiced against him. And now let's talk about something else. How's Susie?"

"Better," said Jim, his face brightening. "The doctor says he is more than satisfied."

Let me hasten to place something to the credit side of Jim's account. Whatever evil habits he might have fallen into, he was a good brother. At every opportunity he visited the hospital to cheer his sister. With her he was always kind and bright and cheerful. For her sake he denied himself many little pleasures, saving up his odd coppers in order to buy some little present that would please and delight her.

As for Susie, she thought there was no one like her brother; to her he was the one hero in the world, followed, though at a long distance, by Dick.

On the subject of Susie, therefore, the boys could talk without restraint; but when that was exhausted they became silent, both vaguely realizing that, in some strange way, a barrier was rising up between them, and that the good old times were gradually disappearing.

Both were sorry; yet the mischief appeared unavoidable. Dick tried hard to restore matters to their former footing. He was really fond of Jim, and could not see him drift without an effort to check him. Frequently he waited outside the shop till his chum left, thinking to entice him away from his fresh associates.

One night as they walked away together Curly Peters came towards them.

"You aren't going to stop, are you?" asked Dick anxiously.

"Why not? D'you think he'll give us the plague?"

"Oh, well," said Dick, "I'm off. I'd be ashamed to be seen speaking to him."

Now this was an unfortunate remark, as it reminded Jim of an incident

which occurred only the previous evening. Mr. Broad, coming into the shop unexpectedly, had seen Peters slinking out.

"What did that customer want, Hartland?" he asked sharply.

Jim felt cornered for a moment, but replied steadily,—

"He wanted to know if there was a chance of getting a paper job."

This was a lie; but I warned you Jim had sadly deteriorated, and he dared not tell his master that the boy was his friend.

Thinking of this, he turned on Dick savagely, saying,—

"He's good enough for me if he isn't for you."

"All right," exclaimed Dick; "every one to his taste. Some people I know have a lot of taste—all bad. Good-night, old man. Hope you'll have a bath when you get home."

"My stars!" cried Curly, as Dick went off; "ain't we getting proud? Washing and charing must be goin' up. It ought to make you feel taller, Jimmy, talking to a toff like that."

"Keep your chaff to yourself," said Jim crossly. "Dick Boden's a heap better than you or me."

Curly opened his eyes wide, but being a wise youth in his generation, and having a particular object in view, he let the subject drop.

"You couldn't lend me another sixpence, Jimmy, I suppose?" he said after a time.

"No," said Jim shortly, "I couldn't; and what's more, I'd like the last one back."

"You shall have it in a few days, but I've been awfully unlucky lately. I'll pay you back, never fear. I wouldn't like you to have to borrow from the old man's till; it's dangerous."

"Borrow from the till? What do you mean?"

"Nothin'; only I once knew a feller who did that. When he wanted any money he used to take it from the till, and pay it back Saturday nights."

"Why, he was just a common thief!" exclaimed Jim scornfully. "I'd rather starve than do that."

"Of course you would," said Curly approvingly, "and so would I. Let us be honest if we are poor; that's my motto. But it's hard when a chap's starvin', you know. Where are you goin'?"

"Home," said Jim. "I'm tired."

"All right. I'll pay you that tanner soon. Wouldn't it be a lark to march into the shop and ask the boss for my friend, Jim Hartland?"

"I don't think you'd better," said Jim. "He mightn't like it."

"What did he say last night, then?"

"Oh, well, you see," replied Jim hesitatingly, "I didn't tell him. And I say,

Curly, you'd better give me the sixpence in the street."

"All right," replied Curly; "I'll remember." Then himself he added, "Well, he is a blessed mug, and mistake. One of the regular old-fashioned sort."

CHAPTER XI.
IS JIM A THIEF?

Three weeks after the conversation recorded in our last chapter, Mr. Broad wished Jim good-night, closed the shop door, and returned to his desk. As a rule he was a cheery, good-humoured man, easy-going, and with an eye for the bright side of things.

On this particular evening he appeared moody and unsettled, and quite unable to look through the pile of books which lay on the desk. Presently, leaving his chair, he walked up and down the shop.

"I can't believe it," he said half aloud. "I don't wish to believe it. The boy has always seemed as honest as the day. I must have made a mistake." And his face brightened. Then it clouded again, and he went on, "Why should I beat about the bush instead of going straight to the point? I know I am not mistaken. Some one stole a florin from the till last night, and Hartland must have been the thief."

For some time past Mr. Broad had had a vague suspicion that he was being robbed—not on a large scale, and not regularly; but now and again he fancied a piece of silver or a few coppers disappeared.

The incident which converted his suspicion into certainty was this. On the previous night he had left the shop with a friend. Before going, he placed a florin, the price of an article just sold, in the till. On his return the florin was gone, and, according to Jim's own words, no customer had entered the shop.

It was very perplexing, but Mr. Broad did not like to tax the boy with theft, and rather foolishly made no further remark. It was just possible, he told himself, that he only *intended* to put the florin in the till, but had really slipped it into his pocket. One thing he knew—that after going out he had changed a florin in the town.

However, the subject worried him a good deal, especially as, on sober reflection, he felt convinced that the coin had been left in the shop.

"I hate to do it," he muttered, "but it will be better even for the boy's own sake. A sharp fright may do him good and teach him a useful lesson. If he isn't

found out now he is pretty certain to go from bad to worse. It's an awful pity, too. He's a smart lad, and ought to do well; but I shall never feel able to trust him again, and I shan't feel justified in recommending him to any one else."

The shopkeeper kept his suspicions to himself, saying nothing even to his wife. He had watched Jim closely, however, while affecting to be busy in another part of the shop. Nothing resulted from this amateur detective work, but Mr. Broad noticed that several times during the evening Jim cast glances toward the door.

This certainly seemed rather odd, but it was no proof of guilt; and the stationer concluded his best plan was to lay a trap for Jim, and then go off the premises, leaving him a clear field.

The opportunity came the next day when most of the shops closed early. Mr. Broad was compelled to keep open because of the evening papers; but as soon as they were dispatched, the gas was lowered, and there was nothing to do beyond waiting for the errand-boy's return. As a rule the master did this himself, and Jim had an hour or two off.

On this particular evening, however, Mr. Broad said, "Hartland, I am going out, so you must stay till I return."

"Very good, sir," replied Jim, who really thought it was very bad, for he had promised to meet Curly Peters at the bottom of the street.

Mr. Broad went round the shop, turned down the lights, except the one over the desk, and went out, saying,—

"If I am not here by half-past nine, turn the gas off at the meter, lock the door, and bring the keys to my house. Most likely though I shall be back."

"Yes, sir," said Jim, who earnestly hoped he would.

"Upon my word," muttered Mr. Broad to himself, as he stepped into the street, "this business is horrible. I feel almost as if I were committing some terrible crime. But, after all, it will be a warning to him. Some men would have him packed off to jail, and then he could never hold his head up again."

He pulled out his watch and looked at the time.

"I'll just run down and have a gossip at the club," said he. "I feel as nervous as if I had robbed the till myself.—-Bless my soul, boy, why don't you look where you are going?"

"Awfully sorry, sir," said the boy, who was no other than our lively friend, Dick Boden. "I hope you aren't hurt?"

"No; but you startled me. You might have been a policeman, you know, or—or—Dear me, my nerves are in an extraordinary state!"

"Funny old gent," thought Dick; and then, stealing a second look at him, he said to himself, "Why, it's Mr. Broad. It's no use waiting for Jim, then. He has to mind the shop."

Remembering that it was early closing day, he had run up directly his lessons were finished, thinking he might catch Jim and induce him to go for a good game. He went very rarely now, but he had not quite abandoned the hope of rescuing Jim from the clutches of his new friends, who, according to some of the boys, were doing him more harm than good. Indeed, there were some curious tales floating about which made Dick extremely anxious on his friend's account.

"I've half a mind to call at the shop and ask him when he'll be off duty," he thought. "Perhaps his master will be coming back in a few minutes."

He still stood hesitating on the pavement, when he suddenly caught sight of a little by-play which turned his thoughts in another direction.

"I wonder," he muttered, "what game those chaps are up to. No good, I'll be bound."

A few paces off he saw Curly Peters and his mate gazing after the worthy stationer, and presently they began talking together very earnestly. Dick could not hear what passed, but he felt sure they were discussing some scheme with which Mr. Broad was connected.

Now, as a rule, the Angel took little interest in his neighbours' doings, but on this occasion he could not help watching closely.

"I mustn't let them see me, though," he muttered, and crossed to the other side of the road.

At last the two boys finished their conversation; and then, while Curly lounged about the pavement, his companion, whose name was Bryant, ran after Mr. Broad.

"Hum!" said Dick; "that's a queer start. I should like to watch this little game, yet I don't want to lose sight of Curly."

The whole affair was most perplexing; but in a few minutes Bryant returned, laughing and evidently well pleased. He said something to his companion, who nodded approvingly, and then strolled up the street.

"Going to call on Jim, I'll bet sixpence!" said Dick, who, by the way, never bet sixpence or any other sum of money in his life. "What an idiot he is not to drop 'em. Not much use in my going on, I suppose."

He has told me since that he had actually turned to go home, when a queer thing happened. The two boys had reached the shop, when Bryant slipped into a doorway adjoining the stationer's, and stood close against the wall as if not wishing to be seen. In this he was greatly helped by the fact of the building being in darkness.

Without any definite object Dick did the same thing on his side of the street.

"This is getting quite exciting," said Dick to himself. "Why did he slip in there, I wonder? Doesn't he want Jim to see him? But if not, why not? It doesn't seem very clear."

As soon as Bryant had disappeared, Curly sauntered carelessly past the shop window and back again. Then he looked up and down the street, which was now nearly empty, and, appearing satisfied, approached the door.

Dick judged that he whistled softly and received no answer. In a minute or two he whistled again, when the door was opened partly, and he appeared to be talking to some one inside.

"That must be Jim," thought Dick. "I suppose they are making some arrangement; but it's odd the other fellow doesn't show himself."

Presently Curly took what appeared to be a scrap of newspaper from his pocket, and in order to see it better, Jim came right outside. Then, almost imperceptibly, Curly began to edge away till he manoeuvred Jim from the doorway to the front of the shop. The movement was so natural and performed so dexterously that even the suspicious Dick thought nothing of it.

But the instant the coast was clear, a dark figure glided swiftly through the open door and disappeared in the shop. Dick rubbed his eyes and looked at Jim. His head was bent over the paper, and, whether by accident or design, Curly kept him engaged in animated conversation.

What was to be done? Should he rush over and give the alarm? For once in his life he could not decide what to do, and while he hesitated the opportunity was lost.

Jim was still talking earnestly when the dark figure reappeared in the doorway, stole away with cat-like stealth by the side of the wall, and vanished. The next moment some one coughed loudly; Jim looked up with a start, returned the paper to Curly, and, with a parting word, went back to the shop door. A dozen yards away Bryant waited for his companion. There was not sufficient light for Dick to see what took place, but in a minute or two Curly ran back quickly to where Jim was still standing.

This time Curly did not speak so quietly, and so Dick was able to hear brief snatches of the conversation, such as, "Awfully sorry—wouldn't do you—now we're square, aren't we?"

"Yes," replied Jim, slipping something into his pocket, "and it comes in very handy just now."

"All right," said Curly, walking away; and raising his voice, he added, "You'll be sure to come, won't you? We'll have a rattling good time. So long."

Dick was on the horns of a dilemma. He felt eager to tell his chum what he had seen, yet he had a vague idea that he ought to keep an eye on the other two.

"I'll follow them up," he said, "and then come back to meet Jim. Unless I've been dreaming with my eyes open, there's something very rotten in the state of Denmark."

Meanwhile, Jim remained at the door till the errand-boy returned, then he

went in and sat down at the desk. He had finished his lessons, and was in the midst of a very exciting story, but somehow he did not find much pleasure in it.

As a matter of fact he was getting very tired of Curly Peters and Company. He knew quite well they were doing him no food. On more than one occasion they had forced him to lie to his employer and to do other things of which he was heartily ashamed.

"I've a good mind to cut the whole concern," said he, "make a clean breast of it to the gov'nor, and ask him to give me a fresh start. I really believe he would do it."

Then he turned to his book again, but it was useless trying to follow the fortunes of the hero; he was thinking all the time what a fool he had been in preferring Curly Peters to Dick Boden.

"The Angel's a little brick," he said to himself. "He's stuck to me like a leech, though I've snubbed him awfully. Never mind, Dicky; I'll make up for it, if you'll let me."

Presently he closed the book, got down from the desk, and went to the door, muttering, "I wish the gov'nor would make haste."

He little guessed the shame and agony which Mr. Broad's return would cause him.

CHAPTER XII.

WHERE IS THE MISSING MONEY?

"Hullo, Hartland! tired of waiting?"

"Rather, sir. I thought I would come outside for a breath of fresh air."

"Ah! Everything all right?"

"Yes, sir."

"Any one been here?"

"Only Johnson."

Johnson was the boy who did the evening round.

"Just so.—Come inside, Farrant, will you?—Turn up the gas, Hartland. I want you to stay a few minutes longer."

"Yes, sir," replied Jim, who was getting his hat.

He thought his employer's manner a trifle strange, and rather wondered why Mr. Farrant, who was a frequent visitor, remained standing just inside the

door. However, he turned the gas on full and waited.

"Sure no one has been here?" repeated the stationer.

"Quite sure, sir," answered Jim, who thought it was a very odd question.

"Then you haven't sold anything, or given change?"

"No," said Jim, who was beginning to feel a trifle uneasy, though he scarcely knew why.

"Hum," said his master; "that's satisfactory in one sense, at least. It leaves no room for mistakes." And going round the counter he opened the till.

One glance was sufficient, and in a loud voice he added, "Lock the door, Farrant, and bring me the key.—Hartland, come here."

"If he's guilty, he's a good actor," thought Mr. Farrant, who was watching the puzzled look on the boy's face.

"Count the money in the till, Hartland—it won't take a century to do," said Mr. Broad, who intended to be sarcastic.

"Fourpence ha'penny, sir," said Jim promptly.

Without a word the stationer drew a notebook from his pocket, opened it, and laid it on the table. On the top of the page was a circle with a star in the centre, drawn in ink. Underneath was written, "One florin, 1884. One shilling, 1885. One sixpence, 1861. Sevenpence ha'penny in coppers. Silver all marked as above."

"That," said Mr. Broad, speaking very slowly and gravely, "is the amount of money in the till when I left the shop. Here"—pointing to the few coppers—"is fourpence ha'penny. Where is the rest?"

Jim's face became white as death, and he trembled violently. Beads of perspiration stood on his forehead, a film gathered before his eyes, his throat was parched, and he could not utter a word.

"Come," repeated his master sternly; "I must have an answer to my question. Where is the missing money?"

"I don't know, sir," answered Jim huskily.

"That's rubbish. No one but you has been in the shop."

"Only Johnson."

"Was he near the till?"

"That is a foolish question," thought Mr. Farrant. "Of course he'll shift the blame to the errand-boy. Broad has given him a fine chance to wriggle out of it."

The same idea flashed through Jim's mind, but he rejected it scornfully.

"No," said he, with the utmost deliberation, "he did not go near the counter. I took the bag from him myself, and he went out again."

"Then, if you didn't steal the money, where is it?" asked the stationer testily. He was really a kind-hearted man, and the miserable business upset him terribly.

"Come, my boy," said Mr. Farrant; "this is a sad case, but you will do no

good by denying your guilt. Better make a clean breast of it, and trust to your master's leniency."

Now if I have drawn anything like an accurate picture of James Hartland, you will not be surprised that this well-meant suggestion made him very angry. The blood rushed to his face, his eyes glowed, and, as Dicky would have said, "the monkey was up" with a vengeance.

"I don't know that it is any business of yours," he exclaimed. "I'm responsible to my master, and not to you," which was very rude, and very ill-advised.

"Oh, all right," said Mr. Farrant; "go your own way. You'll feel a trifle less high and mighty when you've been in prison a week or two."

"It will be an awful disgrace, Hartland. You'll be ruined for life," observed Mr. Broad. "Come, my boy, tell me the truth; I have no wish to be severe with you. Where is the money?"

"I haven't seen it," answered Jim sullenly.

"This isn't the first time, you know," continued his master. "I have missed money before when you were left in charge, but I did not like to be positive. Unfortunately for you, there can be no question about it this time. If you will confess, I will forgive you, for your mother's sake; if not, I must ask my friend to fetch a policeman."

The boy shuddered at this threat. He had a strong imagination, and he instantly conjured up the whole pitiful scene. He saw himself marched to the station, and brought up next morning before the magistrates. He pictured the grief and horror in his mother's face, and thought of Susie when she should hear of what had happened.

Mr. Broad understood what was passing through his mind, and said in an encouraging tone,—

"Come; which is it to be?"

"I really can't confess anything," cried Jim hopelessly. "I have not been near the till."

"Wouldn't it be as well to search him?" suggested Mr. Farrant. "Of course he may have got rid of it; but, on the other hand, it may be in his pockets—that is," he added blandly, "assuming he is guilty of the theft."

"That seems to be a very good idea," said the stationer.—"I suppose, Hartland, you have no objection to turning out your pockets? Of course if you are innocent there can't be any objection."

"No, sir," answered Jim eagerly. "You can search me as much as you like. Shall I take my coat off?"

"Yes," said his master, "do."

They found nothing beyond a handkerchief and a few odds and ends such as every schoolboy loves to carry; and a search of the trousers pockets only revealed

a knife, a piece of tarred string, a wire puzzle, and a halfpenny, which might or might not have been taken from the till.

"Have you anything in your waistcoat pockets?" asked Mr. Broad.

"No," answered Jim promptly; "there's nothing—" He stopped suddenly, and his face turned very red.

"Well?" observed his master, and the boy felt how stern the voice had become.

"I forgot," he said; "there's a sixpenny piece, but it is my own."

Mr. Farrant smiled slightly, as the stationer, producing the coin, laid it on the counter.

"I notice that it is dated 1861," remarked he, "but that may be only a coincidence." Then he turned the coin over, and pointing to a spot at the back of the Queen's head, added sorrowfully, "This, however, is hardly a coincidence."

Jim's knees knocked together as he saw quite plainly the figure of a circle with a starred centre, similar to the one in the notebook. There could be no doubt that the coin was one of those which his master had marked.

"That settles it," remarked Mr. Farrant emphatically. "Come, Broad; you had better make short work of the matter. Give him two minutes, and if he doesn't own up, let me go for a policeman."

"I am afraid I must," said the stationer sadly.—"You see, Hartland, the thing's as plain as a pikestaff; and here," tapping the coin, "is the proof. You can't explain that away."

Jim felt that he was in a desperate situation, and he doubted if even the truth would save him now. Mr. Broad might believe the story—his friend certainly would not—but, after all, it would throw no real light on the mystery.

"Well," said his master, "are you going to confess that you took this sixpence from the till?"

"No," said Jim, "because it wouldn't be true."

"Good boy!" exclaimed Mr. Farrant sarcastically; "always stick to the truth!"

By this time even Mr. Broad was inclined to lose patience; but, controlling his temper, he said, "Perhaps you will tell me how it came to be in your possession?"

"I'll tell you all about it as far as I know, though I'm afraid it won't do much good. Some weeks ago I lent a boy sixpence. His name is Peters. This evening, while you were away, he called me to the door. He came to pay back the money he had borrowed, because I had asked him for it several times."

"Did he come into the shop?" interrupted Mr. Farrant sharply.

"No; we both stood talking outside. He took the sixpence from his pocket"—Jim was scarcely correct in this—"but we were so full of our talk that he forgot

to give it to me. However, he ran back with it directly he remembered, and I put it in my pocket."

"Any one with him?" asked Mr. Farrant, who was drumming softly on the counter, and smiling at what he called a cock-and-bull story.

"No," answered Jim confidently; "he was by himself."

"What sort of chap is this Peters? Respectable?"

"Well, he's very poor, sir, so I suppose folks are down on him a bit."

"Rubbish! You're poor, aren't you? Nobody's 'down' on you! Would you take him home, now, if your mother was there?"

This was a poser; and Mr. Farrant, noticing Jim's perplexity, began quite a brilliant tune with his fingers.

"Better leave it to the police, Broad," he advised. "I daresay they'll be able to supply us with information concerning the other boy. We aren't likely to get anything satisfactory in this quarter."

In truth Jim's story did not go far toward clearing his character, and of this he was fully aware. Curly Peters had given him the sixpence, but, just as certainly, he had not entered the shop. The more Jim puzzled, the more mixed things became, until at length his brain was in a perfect whirl. Still he stuck stubbornly to the main points of his statement, from which he could not be turned either by threats or blandishments.

His employer implored him for the sake of his mother and sister to tell the truth, while Mr. Farrant drew a vivid word-picture of the disgrace and misery awaiting him; but to each of them he replied in the same terms.

"I did not steal the money!" he exclaimed; "and I have told you all I know."

Mr. Farrant ceased drumming. "I'm tired of this farce, Broad," he exclaimed, "and if you don't make an end one way or another, I'm off!"

"Wait five minutes longer," pleaded Jim's master. "Now, Hartland, here is your last chance." And he laid his watch on the counter. "Tell the whole truth, and I promise solemnly that nothing more shall be heard of the business. Beyond the three of us, no one shall be any the wiser. If you still remain obstinate at the end of five minutes, I shall place the matter in the hands of the police."

Jim is not likely ever to forget that tiny fraction of his life. His master stood by his side; Mr. Farrant seated himself on the counter; no one spoke, and the only sound to break the silence was the monotonous ticking of the watch.

Five minutes—and then? The boy dared not think of it. He was pale and deadly cold, but he tried to stand firm, to hold himself erect, so that his employer should not think he was afraid.

"Two minutes more," said the stationer gravely, and then—"One minute more. Now, Hartland, seize your chance before it is too late."

Mr. Farrant slid to the ground; evidently he had quite made up his mind

how the affair would end. Mr. Broad took the watch from the counter, replaced it in his pocket, and waited for the boy to answer.

Jim looked helplessly from one to the other of the two men. What could he say? How could he prove his innocence? No magistrate would believe his story, and, as likely as not, Curly would deny it, in order to save himself. A boy of Curly's doubtful character was not likely to admit being in possession of a stolen sixpence.

"It is no good," said he wearily; "I have told the truth. I am not a thief, Mr. Broad. I have never stolen a ha'penny in my life, either from you or from any one else."

CHAPTER XIII.

AN AMATEUR DETECTIVE.

When Dick Boden set off after the two boys he had no definite object in view beyond keeping them in sight. As yet he did not quite grasp the meaning of what he had seen, though his suspicions were fully aroused.

Curly and his companion displayed no particular hurry in getting clear of the neighbourhood. They strolled along quietly, and without attracting attention, for the street was deserted, and the only light was that thrown out by the public lamps.

At the first corner they stopped a moment, and then, turning to the right, plunged into a narrow but busy street, much frequented by hawkers and all kinds of barrow-merchants. Quickening his steps, Dick followed, but they were already swallowed up by the throng of people.

In the middle of the road a policeman stood on point duty, and Dick felt a strong desire to accost him; but what could he say? He had really nothing to go on except his own suspicion that in some way the two boys had been up to mischief, but the officer was not likely to interfere on that account.

Putting this idea aside, Dick edged his way through the crowd, keeping a sharp lookout for his quarry. For some time he saw nothing of them, and began to fear they had dodged up one of the narrow courts, when he caught sight of them standing by a hand-cart piled with bananas.

"All ripe! all ripe!" the owner was shouting at the top of his voice. "Here you are! Two for three-ha'pence. The finest fruit in Beauleigh.—Out o' the way,

matey, if you don't want to buy; you're keeping off good customers.—Sold again, and got the money! Come on; it's like giving 'em away at the price!"

"Let's have four," said Bryant, "and don't pick out all the little uns."

"Here ye are, sonny," cried the hawker, taking the three coppers; "we're in luck to-night. Sold again!"

Bryant shared the bananas with his companion, and both fell to without delay. Evidently they were in high spirits, and enjoying themselves thoroughly, only stopping in their feast to nudge each other playfully.

"It's wonderful how flush of money they seem!" thought Dick.

While he stood watching them his mind was busy recalling the events of the evening. He pieced them all together, and, as a result, made up a pretty correct picture.

"O my aunt!" said he, "I didn't think Curly was so cute! But the dodge seems plain enough now. While Curly was bamboozling Jim, the other slipped into the shop and emptied the till. Ah, ah, you artful dodgers; that accounts for the milk in the cocoanut!"

Suddenly his satisfied smile vanished, and a shiver of fear ran through him. Why had Curly gone back? And what had he given Jim? Was it possible that his old friend formed one of the gang? No, no; he would not believe that! Jim had acted foolishly, no doubt, in taking up with these fellows, but he was not dishonest. Besides, if he wished to rob his employer, it could be done in a much simpler way.

Yet what did Curly mean by being, "square"? and why had Jim said, "It comes in very handy just now"? Had he shared the plunder without knowing it? It seemed to Dick that fifty thousand bees were buzzing in his brain.

"Broad is sure to miss the money," he thought, "and, of course, he'll charge Jim with stealing it. I wish I knew what to do! If I run back to tell him, perhaps he'll think it's a pitched-up yarn. Hullo, they're moving again."

Having finished their bananas the two boys walked on slowly, stopping now and then to speak to an acquaintance or to look at the contents of the various barrows. They did not seem at all uneasy; only once, when a policeman came their way, they separated, Bryant stepping on to the pavement just in front of Dick. A few yards farther he was rejoined by Curly, who said something to his companion which Dick could not hear.

Presently they stopped outside a small tobacconist's shop. Dick did not care to approach too closely, but he got near enough to hear that they were discussing what to buy.

At last he heard Curly say, "Them's the ones in the corner."

Apparently the other boy raised some objection which made Curly angry.

"What are you frightened of?" he said savagely. "Think I'm on the cross?

You change the bob, and we'll square up afterwards."

Bryant went to the door reluctantly, but, as if unable to make up his mind, returned and whispered something to his companion. A scornful laugh greeted his remark, and without further delay he entered the shop.

All this time Dick had stood a little distance off, thinking. By a lucky accident the boys had chosen the shop kept by a man named Martin, for whom Dick had occasionally done a few odd jobs.

"I'll tell Martin," said Dick to himself, "and ask his advice."

In a minute or two Bryant, still looking rather dissatisfied, came out with a small packet of cigarettes; and, standing in the doorway of an empty shop, he proceeded to share them with his companion.

This was Dick's opportunity, and, screening himself from their view by the aid of the passers-by, he slipped into the shop, which, save for the proprietor, was fortunately empty.

"Hullo, Dick; what is it?" said the man behind the counter. "You haven't taken to smoking, have you?"

"No," said Dick, who hardly knew how to begin his curious story.

"What is it then? Anything wrong at home?"

"No; we're all right, thanks. I say, Mr. Martin, what did that chap buy who was in here just now?"

"Packet of cigarettes," answered the man, looking in surprise at his questioner.

"Would you know him again?"

"Pick him out of a thousand, if you like."

"Did he give you a shilling?"

"Eh?" said Martin, opening the till hastily, and taking out the coin. "Is it bad?" And he rang it on the counter. "Sounds all right," he added with a sigh of relief, "and there doesn't seem anything the matter with it. But one is never safe with these young sharks."

He held the coin up to the light, turning it round and round, and examining it attentively.

"Good enough," he decided, and was about to put it back, when something again arrested his attention.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed, "some one has scratched a circle and star here. Looks like a private mark." And he handed it to Dick.

The boy was in such a state of excitement that he could hardly see. What was the meaning of this? Had Mr. Broad, suspecting something wrong, laid a trap for Jim? It seemed very much like it. But if he had marked one coin he had probably marked others.

The very notion made Dick shudder. He felt sure that Curly had passed

some money to Jim. Suppose it happened to be marked too! "Good gracious!" he thought in despair; "they'll take him to prison like a common thief! The disgrace will kill his mother!"

Noticing the agitation which Dick could not conceal, the shopkeeper said,—

"What's it all about, Dicky? I hope you haven't got mixed up in anything wrong?"

"No," answered the boy. "But trust me; I'll tell you all about it to-morrow. I must be off now; and, I say, Mr. Martin, keep that shilling by itself, will you? I shouldn't be surprised if the police want to see it."

"All right, Dick. It shall be ready for them."

"Thank you," said Dick, and left the shop.

"I wonder now," mused the shopkeeper, "what the game is. Something queer, by the youngster's showing. But he's an honest little chap, and sharp as a knife. Well, I'll put the shilling away."

Looking round, he discovered an empty tobacco tin, in which he placed the coin, and then locked it up in one of the drawers.

"No doubt the youngster will be back again, presently," he said to himself, "and I shall hear what it's all about. It's very curious, anyhow."

Meanwhile Dick, hot and flustered, was threading his way through the side street. He was too excited to steer very cautiously, but, after numerous bumps and joltings, he found himself at the top, where the traffic was less dense.

"Hullo, Dick Boden; you ought to be home and abed! There's your mother down the road with a cane looking for you." And Curly Peters, who stood on the edge of the curb puffing away at a cigarette, laughed boisterously.

Dick did not answer, but, being afraid of arousing suspicion, he walked very leisurely till he had turned the corner and was out of sight. Then he ran at his topmost speed, reaching the stationer's shop breathless and exhausted. He was approaching the door to knock when he noticed, through the side window, that the shop was brilliantly lit.

"Broad must have returned," thought he, "and perhaps brought a policeman. I wonder if they are searching Jim."

He tried to peer in, but could see nothing. Then, crouching close to the door, he listened. All was still; he could hear no sound.

"I may as well knock," he thought, and had raised his hand to do so when a man inside began speaking. "That's Broad," said Dick to himself, and directly afterwards he heard his chum's voice. Then the key turned in the lock, the door was flung open, and Dick found himself face to face with Mr. Farrant.

"Hullo!" exclaimed the latter, who was just going for a policeman; "who's this?"

Dick was rather taken aback, but he answered boldly, "If you please, I want

to see Mr. Broad."

"Come again in the morning; he is busy now."

"But I can't wait," pleaded Dick. "I must see him now; it's very important."

"Let him in, Farrant," said the stationer; "he may know something of this miserable business."

"Come along then," grumbled Farrant, pulling him roughly inside and shutting the door. "Now, what have you to say? Make haste with your yarn, whatever it is!"

Dick glanced around apprehensively, and felt relieved at finding no policeman in the shop. He smiled brightly at Jim, as if to say, "Cheer up, old chap; I'll soon get you out of this scrape!" and then walked over to Mr. Broad.

"I fancy I have seen you before," said that gentleman. "Aren't you one of Hartland's friends?"

"Yes, sir," replied Dick promptly; "Jim and I are old friends."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Farrant, showing a sudden interest in the conversation; "is your name Peters?"

"No," replied Dick in surprise; "my name's Boden, but Peters has something to do with what I've come about.—Have you lost any money, Mr. Broad?"

"I've been robbed of some," answered Jim's employer sternly.

"Was there a shilling amongst it?"

"Yes. Why?"

"I'll tell you soon, sir," said Dick; "but I want to make sure of my ground first. I should like to ask if there was a circle with a starred centre scratched on it?"

"Yes," replied the stationer, now thoroughly interested—"the same mark as on the sixpence which has been found in your friend Hartland's pocket."

"I hope you don't think Jim a thief, sir. He wouldn't steal a pin."

"We aren't listening to testimonials of character," remarked Mr. Farrant dryly; "they can be left to the magistrates. But now, just tell us how you come to know anything about this business."

Jim had not said a word. On seeing his chum his face had become white, and he hardly dared look at him. By degrees, however, he became more composed; and when Dick spoke so emphatically about his honesty, the warm blood surged to his face. Somehow he felt that in some mysterious way Dick would be able to prove his innocence, and his heart grew light at the thought.

Mr. Farrant prepared to listen with a cynical smile, but Mr. Broad was anxious to give a favourable hearing to anything that might help to clear Jim's

character.

CHAPTER XIV.
CURLY AND COMPANY.

"Before Jim came here to work," began Dick, clearing his throat, "we were generally together in the evenings. Since then, of course, he hasn't had much time; but now and then I've been up to wait for him. Coming up this evening I met Mr. Broad, and just afterwards Curly Peters with a boy named Bryant."

"Is this Peters a friend of yours?" interrupted Mr. Farrant.

"No," replied Dick; "and I've never had anything to do with him. I thought a long time ago that he wasn't up to much."

"All right; go on."

"Well, thinking they were going to see Jim, I turned back, and they acted in such a funny way that I became curious. First of all, Bryant followed Mr. Broad, very likely to see where he went; then they walked up to the shop."

"Where were you?"

"On the other side of the road. Curly went to the shop, while the other chap hid in the next doorway. Presently Jim came out; and, after a time, Curly managed to draw him away from the door a bit. Then Bryant slipped into the shop, and was back again almost before you could say 'Jack Robinson!'"

"Why didn't you call out?"

"That wouldn't have done any good. Besides, Curly was on the move directly. He joined his mate down the street, got something from him, and ran back all in a breath to give it to Jim."

The two men exchanged significant glances. Thus far, at any rate, the story fitted in very well with the suspected boy's assertions.

"But if you knew these boys had been thieving, I can't understand why you did not tell your chum," said Mr. Farrant.

"I didn't know for certain," responded Dick promptly. "Besides, I thought the best thing was to keep an eye on them."

"That's reasonable enough."

"And it was lucky I did, too. I followed them into West Street, where they bought three pennyworth of bananas. Then they went on to a tobacconist's, and Bryant bought a packet of cigarettes. He paid for them with a shilling."

"How do you know that?"

"Because directly he came out I went in and asked the man. His name's Martin, and he knows me. He doesn't know Bryant; but he could recognize him."

"And what about the shilling?"

"Martin is taking care of it in case it's wanted. And so, sir, the whole thing's as plain as anything, you see. They just diddled Jimmy, and there you are.—How came he to give you the sixpence, Jim?"

"To pay back one that I lent him a month ago."

Mr. Broad was quite satisfied of the truth of Dick's story. It cleared Hartland. Even with the marked coin before him he had somehow doubted the boy's guilt. His friend showed himself rather more sceptical; but he, too, admitted that the two stories fitted in admirably.

"We had better go to the tobacconist's," said he, "and then give information to the police. I suppose there won't be much chance of tracing the florin."

"If Curly doesn't know it's marked," said Dick, "he'll stick to it till the shilling's gone, and then I expect Bryant won't get much of a share."

"Then he mustn't be allowed to suspect anything," said Mr. Farrant.—"Broad, suppose you go along with this amateur detective and identify the shilling. I'll lock up and meet you later at the police station."

"What about Hartland?"

"Hum! If this Peters sees him with any of us the florin will soon be a minus quantity.—Can you get home without his seeing you?"

"Yes; over Cannon Hill and round by the Park. He isn't likely to be there."

"Well, I suppose we must trust you, though I don't half like it. However, take care, for your own sake, that you do not meet him."

"Come as usual in the morning, Hartland," added his master. "You will be required to give evidence at the police-court."

"And thank your lucky stars," remarked Mr. Farrant, "that you won't be in the dock. Your friend here has saved you from that."

Jim recognized this fact fully, and was never slow to acknowledge it either to himself or to others. Slinking home by a roundabout way, he entered the house, where his mother was awaiting him somewhat anxiously.

"You're late, my boy," said she. "I'm afraid your supper has got cold."

"It doesn't matter, mother, thank you. I'm not hungry."

His mother looked curiously at him, wondering what had happened.

"Don't you feel well?" she asked.

"My head aches a bit. There's been a bother at the shop."

"Try to eat your supper," said she gently. "You can tell me about it afterwards."

Jim did his best in order to please her, but the attempt was not very suc-

cessful. He was thinking of his marvellous escape, and how, but for Dick, he would now be locked up in a prison cell. His mother watched him closely, and with something like fear in her heart; but, being a tactful woman, she did not press him to tell her his story.

It came out at last, little by little, and the boy did not spare himself. After all, beyond the folly of associating with unprincipled companions, he had done little of which to be really ashamed.

His mother did not interrupt him once; but Jim will never forget the look in her eyes when he told her of the finding of the marked coin, and of his narrow escape from prison.

"Where is Dick now?" she asked when he had finished.

"Gone with the master to give information to the police. I expect he will come in on his way home; but don't you think we ought to tell his mother? She may be fidgeting about him."

"Yes; I will go round at once."

Putting on her hat and jacket, she went out, leaving Jim to wonder if the marked florin would be found in Curly's possession. A great deal might depend on that.

Meanwhile, Dick having piloted the worthy stationer to the tobacconist's shop, where the shilling was at once identified, accompanied him to the police station. Here they were shown into a sparsely-furnished room, where an inspector sat at a table writing.

After Mr. Broad had given an outline of the case, Dick was called on for his story, which he related in the most straightforward and convincing manner.

"Simple enough," remarked the police inspector, "especially if we can find the florin;" and, ringing a bell, he ordered the man who answered it to send Pedder to him.

Pedder was a short, stout, bull-necked man in plain clothes, who, in answer to his superior, said: "Curly Peters? Oh yes, I know the young gentleman quite well. I've been expecting to put my hand on his shoulder for a long time."

"And a lad named Bryant?" asked the inspector, reporting Dick's description of him.

Pedder shook his head. "I've seen a chap with Curly, but don't know anything of him, good or bad."

"Well, take a man with you and bring them both here. Be sure that Peters has no chance to get rid of any money."

"Very good, sir," said Pedder, looking at the clock. "The round trip oughtn't to take more than half an hour, if I've any luck."

"Sit down, Mr. Broad—and you, my boy," said the inspector, who immediately resumed his writing, and did not look up again till Mr. Farrant was shown

into the room.

Five minutes after the half-hour there was a scuffling noise in the passage, the door was thrown open, and in marched Curly Peters and Bryant in the custody of the two plain-clothes policemen.

Curly looked about him with easy self-assurance. His companion, on the contrary, was white and trembling, and would have fallen but for the officer's support.

"Search them!" said the inspector briefly.

"You won't find anything on me but my own money," said Curly defiantly. "I've only a two-shilling piece, which I worked hard enough for, too. I earned it yesterday, carrying boxes on the quay."

"You'd better keep a still tongue," advised the inspector gruffly. "All you say may be used as evidence against you."

"I ain't afraid of telling the truth," responded Curly boldly.

Presently the search was over, and Dick heaved a sigh of satisfaction when Pedder placed a florin on the table. Bryant's share of the plunder had dwindled to twopence halfpenny.

"Can you identify this coin, Mr. Broad?"

"Yes," said the stationer, after examining it carefully; "here is my private mark quite plain."

"And the tobacconist can identify the boy from whom he received the marked shilling?"

"I took him to the shop," said the second officer, "and he knew him in an instant."

When all the formalities were concluded, the two boys were marched off, Curly throwing a savage glance at Dick, and muttering, "I'll pay you out for this!" as he passed.

"I think there is nothing further now," said the inspector to Mr. Broad. "Of course you will be present in the morning. As to the shop-boy, I hardly know whether he should not have been charged with the others; but no doubt we shall get at the truth when the case comes before the magistrates."

"Jim Hartland didn't know anything about it, sir!" cried Dick, who was bold as a lion in defence of his friend.

"Perhaps not, perhaps not!" replied the inspector testily. "However, we shall soon see."

As soon as he could get away, Dick ran off to Brook Street, knowing that his chum would be anxiously awaiting him. As a matter of fact Jim stood at the gate, and on seeing Dick he cried eagerly, "Did you catch them? Had Peters spent the money?"

"Make yourself easy, old chap!" laughed Dick; "it's all right. Curly had the

florin, and he gave himself away before knowing it was marked."

"Did he try to drag me into it?"

"No. Don't pull such a long face. The truth is bound to come out. I shall be surprised if Bryant doesn't own up; he's nearly frightened to death. Well, I must be off; mother will think I'm lost."

"She knows where you are; we told her."

"That's a good chap. She's been awfully fidgety since Dandy Braithwaite was drowned. Well, ta-ta! See you in the morning, as the fisherman said when he popped the trout into his basket."

"You won't come in?"

"I'd rather not. Wait till this affair's done with, and we'll celebrate the event in fine style."

"Good-night, then. I can't thank you properly just now, but I shan't forget in a hurry what you've done for me."

"All right, old fellow! *I* know." And Dick went off whistling.

Jim closed the gate softly, but did not go into the house for some time. Thus far—thanks to Dick—all had gone well; but there was still a prospect of danger. Suppose Curly, finding himself trapped, endeavoured to throw the blame on him. He might even assert that he, Jim, had planned the robbery, and had knowingly shared the plunder.

The magistrates might doubt such a tale, but some people would believe it, and in their eyes he would be a thief.

"Oh yes," they would say, "that's the lad who was mixed up in the till robbery. Nothing was proved against him, you know, but—" And then there would be expressive glances and waggings of heads.

Again, he could hardly expect Mr. Broad to continue to employ him. Of course he would be dismissed, and no one would care to engage a boy who had lost his situation under such suspicious circumstances. It seemed to him just then that he had recklessly spoiled his career before it had fairly begun. His thoughts were very, very bitter; but he had not altogether lost his moral courage, and readily confessed that he was only reaping what he had sown. This, however, was but poor consolation, and it was with a heavy heart that he at last went into the house.

"Dick has brought good news, mother," he cried, trying to speak cheerfully: "the police have caught Peters with the money on him. I am going to bed now.

We shall have to be up early in the morning." And he kissed her good-night.

CHAPTER XV.
"WHEN THIEVES FALL OUT."

Fortunately for Jim's peace of mind the next day was not a particularly busy one at the police court. He and Dick sat with Mr. Broad and the tobacconist in the space reserved for witnesses, while in the public portion of the building only a few people besides his mother and Mrs. Boden had assembled.

Presently a small side-door was opened, and the two youthful prisoners took their places in the dock. Curly was still smiling and cheerful, but his companion in misfortune looked even more miserable than on the preceding night.

When the charge had been read over, Mr. Broad proceeded to make his statement, describing how he had marked the coins and placed them in the till, and how, on returning to the shop, he had found they were gone.

Then Jim went into the witness-box, feeling horribly uncomfortable. He thought the two magistrates regarded him contemptuously, and as if they thought his proper place was in the dock with the prisoners. However, he managed to give a connected account of what had passed, and was stepping down again when one of the magistrates observed, "If this witness speaks the truth, it is clear that the prisoner Peters could not have been in the shop."

"I wasn't, sir," spoke up Curly. "I never put my foot inside it."

"We suggest that he was acting as a blind," said the inspector—"that he engaged the shop-boy's attention while the other prisoner stole the money. I think the next witness will make that clear."

"Very well," said the magistrate; "let him he called."

"Richard Boden!"

Dick stepped into the box, took the oath, and began his story without the least hesitation. As he proceeded Curly's confident smile began to fade: the witness was not leaving him a single loophole for escape. The evidence was so clear and simple and yet so conclusive that, as one constable remarked in a whisper, the prisoners had not "the ghost of a chance."

"Uncommon smart boy that," he added graciously. "Ought to join the force when he's old enough."

When Dick had finished, Sir Thomas Arkell, the senior magistrate, a tall,

stout man with bristling moustache, leaning forward, said, "I congratulate you on the way in which you have given your evidence, my lad." And the compliment was well deserved.

Martin, the tobacconist, then identified Bryant as the boy who had paid him the marked shilling, and the officers deposed to searching the prisoners and finding the florin on Peters. No one had any doubt of their guilt, but several people thought Jim very lucky in not having been placed with them.

However, Curly did not quite despair of getting off. Certainly he would leave his accomplice in the lurch, but that misfortune he was prepared to bear philosophically.

"I didn't steal the money!" he protested energetically, "and I didn't know it was stole. It will teach me a lesson, though, to mind who I takes up with another time. This all comes of being pals with Sam Bryant. Last night I met him in West Street. He said he had won some money on a race, and asked me to mind a two-shilling piece. He said he durstn't take it home for fear his father would nab it. And that's the solemn truth, gentlemen! Why, I'd no more think of stealing a penny than of swallowing it!"

Now, fortunately for Jim, Curly's frantic effort to save himself roused Bryant from his stupor. Hitherto he had displayed no interest in the proceedings, but now, glaring savagely at his companion, he exclaimed in a shrill voice, "Oh, that's it, is it? I am to bear all the blame, am I? Well, then, I'll just tell the truth. Curly made friends with Jim Hartland on purpose to get him to rob the till. Curly sounded him several times, but could make nothing of him, so we agreed to do it ourselves. We went in two or three times before, but didn't get much. Last night seemed a good chance, and Curly agreed to get Hartland out of the way. I got three and ninepence altogether, and out of that Curly gave Hartland sixpence that he owed him. I ain't going to prison by myself, when Curly Peters had more to do with it than me!"

"I told you it would come out!" whispered Dick to his chum.

The magistrates consulted together for a few minutes, and then the two prisoners were remanded, with a view to being sent to a reformatory.

As this was the last case set down for hearing, the people began to leave the court; and Mr. Broad, turning to Jim with a smiling face, said,—

"I am glad you have come out of it so well, Hartland. I am sorry I suspected you at all, but at one time things looked rather black against you, eh? However, you've had your lesson, and I hope you will profit by it. By the way, I shall be glad if you can come an hour earlier this afternoon. This wretched business has thrown the work back a good deal."

"Are you going to keep me on, sir?" asked Jim, who could scarcely believe his own ears.

"Keep you on? Of course! Why not? You've been a pretty silly chap in choosing your friends, but that won't happen again. There, there; don't thank me." And the worthy stationer bustled away, leaving Jim with flushed face and sparkling eyes. This was a greater piece of good fortune than he had dared hope for.

In the corridor he found his mother with Mrs. Boden; and directly afterwards Dick, who had suddenly disappeared, ran up waving his cap and hardly able to keep from hurrahing.

"O my aunt!" cried he; "here's a stroke of good luck! Let's go outside, where I can tell you all about it. You'll never guess where I've been."

"You had better tell us, then," said his mother.

"So I will. Don't get too excited, now. What do you think of an interview with Sir Thomas Arkell in the magistrates' room? I thought you'd open your eyes. O my—"

"Never mind your aunt," said Jim, laughing; "we're dying to hear about the interview."

"Well, while you were talking to Mr. Broad, a policeman came up and asked if I was Richard Boden. When I told him I was, he said, 'Come this way. Sir Thomas wishes to speak to you.' He was a solemn old chap, and marched along like a mute at a funeral. I began to feel frightened."

"I wish I'd been there to see you, Dicky," said Mrs. Hartland.

"Well, it really was enough to make me nervous," declared Dick. "However, at last he knocked at a door; some one said, 'Come in,' and there was Sir Thomas standing with his back to the fire.

"'Ah,' said he—and he isn't half as fierce as he looks—'are you Richard Boden?'

"'Yes, sir.'

"'Well, I wanted to say I was very pleased with you this morning. Where do you go to school?' And when I told him, he said, 'I suppose your master can give you a good character?'

"'I think he will, sir,' I answered; and then he wrote down my name and the name of the school in a notebook.

"'I will see Mr. Holmore,' he said; 'and should the result be satisfactory, as I have no doubt it will, I shall find a berth for you in my business.'"

"O Dick!" exclaimed his mother, "it sounds too good to be true!"

"It's true enough," cried Dick gaily, throwing his cap into the air. "Don't you hear the bells, 'Turn again, Richard, Lord Mayor of Beauleigh'? Why, it's as simple as anything: just like going upstairs. Office-boy, clerk, confidential clerk, manager, partner—Arkell and Boden! We'll hang out a big signboard when that time comes. Hurrah! Trot along, Jimmy!"

"You might both run on," suggested Mrs. Hartland, "and get a cup of tea ready for us."

"Rather a drop from the Lord-Mayor business, isn't it?" laughed Dick good-humouredly. "Still, it's as well to make use of me while you can."

That afternoon has often been talked of since. Every one was in good spirits, and Dick rattled on like a merry madcap, building, half in jest, half in earnest, golden castles in the air. To judge by his remarks when Mrs. Hartland began talking of his kindness to Jim, the whole affair had been got up specially for his benefit.

"It's I who have to thank Jim," he laughed. "But for him I shouldn't have had an interview with Sir Thomas!" adding solemnly, "I won't forget you, Jim; you shall have a ticket for my mayoral banquet, and shall sit near me."

"Thanks," replied Jim humbly; "I shall be satisfied with a seat at the bottom of the table."

"What a rattle-pate you are, Dick!" laughed Mrs. Hartland. "How poor Susie would enjoy being here now!"

"Is the doctor really doing her good?" asked Dick's mother.

"He thinks so. He is trying a wonderful new discovery of some foreign doctor, and the nurse told me on Sunday he's more than satisfied with the result."

"Hurrah for Dr. Stewart!" cried Dick; "he's a fine fellow. I'll keep a place for him on my visiting-list."

Thus they laughed and chattered, enjoying themselves in an innocent way, and endeavouring to banish the disagreeable incidents of the morning, until it was time for Jim to start for work.

"I may as well walk with you as far as the shop," said Dick, going out with him; "I feel like a fish out of water, not being at school to-day. Won't there be a buzz when the fellows hear the news?"

"Too much for me. I don't think I shall go back."

"What?" Dicky turned and looked his chum full in the face. "Surely you aren't going to show the white feather, old man. Why, that would be just giving the fellows a stick to beat you with."

"It is easy to talk," said Jim, "but I don't want to see sour looks and hear sneering remarks every day. I know what chaps like Simpson will say."

"And I know what they'll say if you don't turn up."

For some distance the two boys walked in silence. Jim was thinking. His chum was right, of course. It would be much braver and more manly to "face the music;" but he shrank, and perhaps naturally, from the ordeal. Besides, he would be leaving in any case at the end of a few weeks, and why should he go out of his way to suffer misery for the sake of a fad?

"Here we are nearly at the shop," cried Dick, stopping suddenly. "You will

come in the morning, won't you?"

"I won't promise," said Jim slowly.

I think that at this juncture it was the boy's master who proved his guardian angel. He greeted him cheerily, and showed by every means in his power that he had confidence in his honesty. This absolute trust brought back Jim's self-respect. If his employer believed in his innocence, why should he trouble himself about the sneers of others? His courage gradually rose; he threw off the gloom that hung about him. He determined to hold up his head and bear himself bravely, whatever happened.

"'Twill be jolly hard, I know," he said to himself; "but I'll live it down." And his heart grew lighter as he registered the resolve.

"By the way, Hartland," remarked his employer later in the evening, "I have been thinking we might make a fresh arrangement. I should like you to stay all day, and you might start on Monday."

"I'd rather not begin till the holidays, sir," said Jim, with an effort.

"Why not?"

"Because, because—well, they might say I was afraid to go back to school."

"Well, it won't be particularly pleasant," replied Mr. Broad, "and that is partly why I made the offer. But yours is the better plan, and I wish you luck, my boy."

"Thank you, sir," returned Jim, brightly, though in his heart he could not help wishing that the next day was safely over.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FRESH START.

The police-court proceedings created a great sensation at the Deanery, and were canvassed with characteristic schoolboy freedom. Dick, of course, received much praise; and on his arrival, just before opening time, he was surrounded by an admiring group. However, he bore his blushing honours meekly, remarking that he had done nothing in particular.

"Your being there was a lucky thing for Jim Hartland, though," observed Alec Macdonald.

"A good many people think there's more in it than came out!" sneered Simpson. "*I* shouldn't like to be caught with a marked sixpence in my pocket!"

"You're just a cad!" cried Dick hotly, "and no one cares a brass button what you say. As to Hartland, he showed more grit in five minutes than you'd show in five centuries."

"How's that?" cried several boys eagerly.

"That's part of what Simpson says didn't come out. Of course you know old Broad found the sixpence on him. Well, he's a good sort, though at first he did think Jim guilty. 'Look here, Hartland,' said he; 'you'd better own up. You're certain to be sent to prison, because, even if you're innocent, you can't prove it.' Well, what did Jim answer?"

"He wasn't likely to give the show away, anyhow!" said Simpson.

"Broad didn't ask him to. 'Just admit you stole the money, and you'll hear no more of it,' said he. 'I'll hush it up, and no one will be any the wiser.'"

"That was handsome," remarked several of the boys.

"Yes," agreed Dick, "but Jim wasn't taking any 'Send me to prison for life if you like,' said Jim; 'I shan't confess to what I didn't do!'"

"Good old Jim!" cried Alec Macdonald. "He always was a plucky beggar." And the others echoed his cry.

Few of them believed he was mixed up in the robbery, and Dick's story was received with acclamation. A sudden revulsion of feeling took place, and those who had looked rather coldly on Jim since the fatal accident to Braithwaite now spoke loudly in his defence.

Just as the bell rang he was seen coming in at the gate, and quite a number of boys ran across to meet him.

Once more Alec Macdonald voiced the general sentiment.

"We're jolly glad you got out of that mess, Jim," he exclaimed, "and we know it wasn't your fault."

Jim blushed like a peony; his eyes were suspiciously moist, and he felt a choking sensation in his throat. This reception differed altogether from what he had expected. He looked at the group of boys and tried to answer, but his words were very stammering.

"This is—very—kind—of you chaps," he managed to say, "and I didn't expect it."

"Come on!" cried Dick; "there's Mr. Laythorne! He'll be giving us an extra half-hour's grind." And they scudded away to their places like so many rabbits into a warren.

Jim's class-fellows were not alone in expressing their belief in his innocence. After prayers, and before beginning morning work, Mr. Laythorne, standing before his class, said, "I am glad to see you in your place again, Hartland. We have all heard of your trouble, and we all rejoice that you have come through it so triumphantly. I am speaking not only for myself and the boys, but for all

the masters, including Mr. Holmore. Let me say for all of us that we are quite convinced of your honesty."

"Yes, yes!" murmured the class approvingly.

"Thank you, sir," said Jim. "I'm—" But he got no farther. Cold looks he had steeled himself to meet, and angry words he would have thrown back with interest, but this kindness broke him down utterly. The tears would come into his eyes, and he covered his face with his hands. The young master said nothing further, thinking it best not to disturb him. He had always felt great interest in Jim, and no one had been more disappointed at his failure to gain a high place in the Gayton Scholarship list.

Several times recently he had endeavoured to save him from drifting, but without success; now he resolved to make another effort.

"He is a clever boy, and ought to do well," he said to himself thoughtfully, "but lately he seems to have got into a set of cross currents. One would think he had thrown that Gayton Scholarship away deliberately."

Mr. Laythorne was not aware how very severely Jim had been handicapped; but that same afternoon, during a talk with Dick Boden on quite another subject, he learned the truth. When school was dismissed, he called Dick to him and said, "By the way, Boden, I have to congratulate you. Sir Thomas Arkell has been to see the head-master, who referred him to me. I was glad to be able to report favourably on your conduct, and he has decided in consequence to take you on at his place as soon as the holidays begin."

"Thank you, sir," answered Dick gratefully. "Mother meant me to stay a little longer, but we can't afford to miss this chance, and I shall be able to attend the continuation school."

"I hope you will. Well, it appears we shall both be leaving the dear old Deanery together."

Dick glanced up hastily, saying, "Are you going away from Beauleigh, sir?"

"Yes. It will soon be known now. I have been appointed to a school in Portsmouth."

"The boys will be sorry," exclaimed Dick, "and glad too—sorry on their own account, and glad on yours."

"I think," said the master, smiling, "we have got on very comfortably together. By the way, I am sorry about your chum Hartland. I had hoped he would do better."

"Jim's had very hard lines lately, sir. Things have all gone wrong, somehow, and he took the result of the 'Gayton' very much to heart."

"So I should imagine," exclaimed the master dryly.

"It wasn't his fault coming out so low down," said Dick. "You can't sprint very fast with a heavy load on your shoulders, and Jim was carrying too much

weight. A lot of his time was taken up at the shop, morning and evening; then his mother fell ill, and he had to work like a nigger keeping things straight at home. Why, for weeks he had hardly a minute to breathe in!"

"He did not mention this to me when I spoke to him about his position."

"No," responded Dick with a twinkle; "Jim isn't built that way. He's too proud to let the world into his little secrets."

"Oh!" said the master thoughtfully, "that puts a very different complexion on the case."

That same evening Jim's mother was surprised by a visit from Mr. Laythorne, who, by a few skilful questions, soon discovered that Dick had not overstated the case. It was plain that, despite his folly elsewhere, Jim had behaved splendidly at home; and the class-master's good opinion of his scholar was more than restored.

"What are you going to make of the boy?" he asked.

"Well," replied Mrs. Hartland, "had his father lived we should have tried to start him as a pupil-teacher, but I fear he must give up that idea now. Mr. Broad has been very kind, and has offered to take him into the shop altogether."

"And what does Jim think of the proposal?"

"He doesn't really like it, but he is a good boy, and raises no objection."

Mr. Laythorne was more than ordinarily thoughtful that evening. For more than an hour he sat in his room, thinking deeply, too absorbed even to open one of his favourite books.

"It's a quixotic scheme," he muttered once, "but upon my word I've a good mind to try it. The lad has brains, and, properly trained, should do well. He'll do no good here if his heart isn't in the work and he may slip back. It would remove him from temptation, too. Well, I'll sleep on it, and ask Holmore's advice."

The result of these cogitations, and of an interview with the head-master, became apparent at the end of the week, when he once more called at the house in Brook Street; but this time late in the evening, when Jim had returned from work.

He was not a man given to much beating about the bush, and he introduced the object of his visit at once.

"Hartland," he began quietly, "I understand from your mother that you would like to be a pupil-teacher?"

"Yes, sir," answered Jim readily, "but," trying to smile, "that's out of the question now."

"I'm not so sure of that. You know I am going to Portsmouth?"

"Yes, sir; Dick Boden told me, and very pleased I was to hear it."

"How would you like to go with me?"

Jim sprang to his feet, his cheeks flushed, his eyes sparkling, and every

fibre of his body quivering with excitement. Then he shook his head mournfully, saying, "We can't afford it, sir."

"Your mother and I will discuss that part of the business," remarked Mr. Laythorne quietly. "But if you go, I shall expect you to work hard, to pass your examinations high up, and, generally speaking, to do me credit."

"I would do my very best!" exclaimed the lad earnestly.

"I believe you would. Well, now run away, while I have a talk with your mother."

The boy went out to the front door, and stood looking into the dingy street. Now and again he turned toward the room, straining his ears, not to hear what was said, but just to make sure that Mr. Laythorne was really there. It seemed altogether too wonderful; he feared almost to dwell on it.

Presently he heard the visitor stand up, and come into the passage. What had been decided? His heart beat fast at the question. Here was Mr. Laythorne shaking his hand. What did he say? What strange noises buzzed in his head! Ah, the words became plain.

"I hope, my boy, that this will be putting your foot on the first rung of the ladder."

So the wonderful thing had come to pass, and he was really to go! I cannot write down Jim's answer because neither his mother nor Mr. Laythorne understood his broken words; but it is certain that he was extremely grateful and supremely happy.

"By the way," said their visitor, before taking leave, "it will not be necessary to inform the world of our private arrangement. It will be sufficient to say that Jim is coming with me." For Mr. Laythorne was a gentleman, and had no sympathy with the blowing of trumpets at street corners.

Jim and his mother had little to say when they were left alone. They were overwhelmed with surprise, and their happiness was too great for words. But when the boy had gone to his room, he knelt by his bedside and asked for strength to prove himself worthy of his benefactor's generosity; and many times over, before falling asleep, he said to himself, "I will not disappoint him!"

Of course, Mr. Broad had to be told of the contemplated change, and he was really sorry to have to part with Jim.

"I should have liked to keep you, Hartland," he said, "but I mustn't stand in your light; and, by the way, don't buy any lesson-books. Ask your master to write out a list of what you will require for next two years, and I will get them."

"Why," exclaimed the Angel delightedly, when he heard the news, "there's such a lot of silver lining that very soon you won't be able to see the black cloud at all!"

Dick was prophesying better than he knew. But we must not anticipate.

On Sunday Jim went with his mother to the Children's Hospital. Susie still kept her bed, and her back was encased in plaster of Paris; but she had grown decidedly stronger, and the nurse spoke most hopefully of her case.

"And if she does walk," said she, "you will have to thank Dr. Stewart. I have never known any one take such an interest in a case."

Mrs. Hartland left Jim to reveal his great secret, and it was charming to observe the look of delighted surprise steal into the girl's face.

"Do you know," she said thoughtfully, after congratulating her brother on his good fortune, "I think people have been very kind to us."

"Yes," exclaimed her mother, kissing her fondly; "and I hope we shall never forget it."

CHAPTER XVII.

A STARTLING SURPRISE.

The next fortnight was about the happiest time Jim had passed since the news arrived of his father's death. Thanks in some part to his wages, they had tided over the worst of the crisis; and his mother, who was really a skilful needlewoman, had now no lack of employment.

At the Deanery School he had quite recovered his popularity. The boys sought his advice as in the old days; and one half-holiday the Football Committee begged him to assist the team in an important match. Mr. Broad readily granted him an extra hour's leave, and much to the delight of his numerous admirers, he had the satisfaction of kicking the winning goal for the school.

"There's an end to my football in Beauleigh," he said, as he left the field with his chum.

"And a very good finish!" laughed the Angel. "The Deanery fellows will miss you at cricket next season."

"I expect they'll miss us both. I hope, though, they'll keep the shield."

"They're bound to!" said Dick, with a grin. "Haven't they got Simpson?"

"Of course; I'd forgotten him. Have you heard from Sir Thomas Arkell?"

"Yes; I'm to begin work on the morning they reopen after the holidays. I can hardly believe it now."

"I understand the feeling. D'you know, I think we've been awfully lucky, Dick."

"The reward of merit!" murmured the Angel; and a stranger, judging by the tone of his voice, would have thought he really meant it.

Jim, however, knew him better, and greeted the remark with a laugh, saying, "Well, every one who deserves the reward doesn't get it, anyhow."

"Only one week more," cried Dick, flying off at a tangent—a by no means unusual proceeding on his part. "I'm counting the days now."

That week seemed a long time to the eager boys; but it came to an end at last, and the Deanery scholars assembled in the large hall for dismissal. It was the head-master's custom to speak a few words before they separated, and he did so now.

That part of the speech which met with the greatest attention referred to Mr. Laythorne's approaching departure. The boys were sorry to lose him, as he was very popular, and they punctuated every sentence with ringing cheers. But the greatest applause was reserved for the unveiling of the handsome presents which boys and masters alike had subscribed for; and when Mr. Laythorne stepped forward to express his thanks, the cheering became deafening.

"Three cheers for Mr. Laythorne, and one cheer more!" yelled the Angel. "Hurrah!"

It was a breaking-up scene such as had rarely occurred at the Deanery, and one to be long remembered. Mr. Laythorne made a modest little speech, and then, unchecked by the masters, the Angel led off with "For he's a jolly good fellow!" and was strenuously backed up by the vocal powers of three hundred enthusiastic boys. It was not, perhaps, strictly orthodox, but it was undoubtedly genuine; I fancy Mr. Laythorne, though not a demonstrative man himself, was rather pleased by the warmth of his reception. When the boys were dismissed, he called Jim, to give him his final instructions.

"My arrangements are quite complete," said he, "but I shall write in the course of a week or two. Most likely I shall want you to come over a few days before school begins."

"I shall be ready, sir, whenever you send."

"Well, good-bye! Have a good holiday, because there will be plenty of work when you get to Portsmouth."

A good holiday! How surprised both would have been had they known the kind of holiday which was in store for Jim!

Instead of going straight to work, the boy ran home with his bag of books, and stayed a few minutes with his mother, chatting of the splendid send-off to Mr. Laythorne.

"Dick led the cheering," said he, "and we all sang, 'For he's a jolly good fellow!'"

"So he is," said Mrs. Hartland, smiling—"none better, as far as we are con-

cerned."

"Well, I must be off," remarked Jim, "or Mr. Broad will wonder if I'm lost."

They were very busy at the shop, and the boy worked away with a will. Perhaps the breaking-up scene had put him in good spirits; at any rate, the stationer remarked on his cheerfulness. While they were waiting for the evening papers, Jim, anxious not to waste time, sat down in a recess and began addressing a pile of labels.

Suddenly he saw a man pass the window, stop as if hesitating, and then enter the shop. Knowing his employer was at the counter, he went on with his work, not thinking he would be required.

"I can polish these things off to-night if I peg away at them," he said to himself. "Where's that other book of addresses, I wonder? Oh, I see!"

He got up to fetch the volume. From where he stood he could just see the top of Mr. Broad's head, but nothing of the customer. He heard his employer say "Good-evening," to which the stranger replied in a tone that made Jim jump.

He placed the book on the table, and sat down. It was no business of his, but he felt compelled to listen to the conversation. The first words brought the blood to his face with a rush.

"Have you a boy named Hartland employed here?" asked the stranger.

"I have."

"James Hartland?"

"That is his name. Why?"

"I should like to speak to him for a minute, if I may."

"Is it anything important? because he is busy at present."

Jim thought the man laughed; but he said aloud, "I think it's important enough for me to see him."

"Hartland!" cried his master, "here's a gentleman wishes to see you!" And Jim, half dazed by surprise and doubt and fear, moved slowly toward the counter.

The man on the other side of the counter was of medium height, well proportioned on the whole, but with a great breadth of chest. He was dressed in heavy serge of a dark-blue colour, and wore a peaked cap. His hair was short and curly; a few silver threads sprinkled the tawny brown of an ample beard. His eyes were gray; his face was white, and rather drawn. An observant critic would probably have called him a strong man just recovered or recovering from a severe illness.

For a moment he looked hard at the boy; then a tender smile overspread his face, his lips parted, and in a soft voice he whispered, "Jim!"

I do not know that the stationer ever complained; he might have done so with reason. Jim was a good all-round athlete, who, on ordinary occasions, could vault over the counter with ease. Now, dizzy with excitement, he made an erratic

kick, sweeping papers, books, and stationery to the floor. Neither did he stop to repair the mischief, but flung himself with a cry of joy into the man's outstretched arms.

Presently the man looked round on the pile of wreckage, and smiled.

"Come, Jim," said he, "let us put this straight." And while Mr. Broad looked on in undisguised amazement, the pair proceeded to pick up the fallen articles.

"If," said the stationer, slowly rubbing his hands, "I were in the habit of guessing, I should say you are Mr. John Hartland, who was drowned off Cape Horn."

"Right you are, sir!" returned the man, smiling pleasantly; "I am John Hartland, and this is my boy. I'm just down from London. I heard Jim was up here, and I've come to borrow him. You see, he has to tell his mother. I've kept it out of the papers, and no one but the owners of the *Morning Star* know I'm still in the land of the living."

"Take him, my good sir!" said the delighted stationer. "Take him, and good luck to you both! But come to see me, Jim; come to see me!"

"I'll tide you over the busy time, sir!" exclaimed Jim; "I won't leave you in the lurch. But I must go now. Oh, *how* shall I tell mother?"

People stopped to look at them in the streets—they were so patently, so undeniably happy. John Hartland clutched his boy's arm tightly, and every now and then Jim smiled up into his father's face.

"We're living in Brook Street now, father," he remarked.

"Yes, I know. I've made inquiries," replied his father. "How is Susie?"

"She's in the Children's Hospital, and getting better. The doctor says she is going to walk in a few months. O father, I can hardly believe you are here!"

"Can't you? Just feel this!" And he squeezed the boy's arm. "How is mother living?"

"By her needle. She does beautiful needlework."

"I know! I know!" said the man abruptly. "Isn't this Brook Street? You go on, and I'll wait here a bit. But don't be long, Jim, don't be long! My patience will soon bubble over. I've been burning to get a peep at her."

Jim smiled brightly, ran a few yards, and then walked soberly to the house. His mother was busy with her work, and she looked up at him in surprise.

"What is it, my boy?" she asked. "Why aren't you at the shop?"

"It's all right, mother," answered the lad; "there's no bad news. Mr. Broad said I might come. I've something to tell you—something pleasant, that will make you very happy."

"Yes?" she said wonderingly, and looking straight into his eyes.

"A marvellous thing, mother—more marvellous than you ever dreamed of. Only Susie said it could be true, and even her faith failed."

The woman had put down her work. Her face was white, her lips twitched nervously.

"Jim," she said pathetically—"Jim, this can only be one thing. Tell me quickly! O Jim, I can't bear it!"

"It's true, mother!" cried the boy. "It is the one thing. Yes, father is alive; there's news of him. He's coming home—coming to Beauleigh!"

Mrs. Hartland slipped to the floor, clasped her hands, and offered up a silent prayer to Heaven. She could not speak, but the joy and the praise and the thanksgiving were all there.

And then! Then they heard a click at the little gate, and a firm step on the path, and the front door was gently pushed open.

"O mother," cried Jim, "try to bear up! It is father!"

He came along, slowly and with even steps at first; but, in his own words, his patience bubbled over, his feet broke into a run, and the next instant he was within the kitchen clasping his wife in his arms.

"Mary!"

"John!"

Nothing more than that was heard for a long time, but no words were required to express their joy. Later in the evening there were numerous questions to be asked and answered, and the returned sailor's account of his wonderful escape to be given.

I cannot set the story down in his own words, though it was full of interest to his eager listeners, but the outline is simple enough. The man Davies's account proved correct in the main, though John Hartland was astonished to find he had survived. As for himself, being a good swimmer, he had struck out for the shore, which, for a time, it appeared he would in all likelihood reach. Then his strength failed, and he could do no more than turn on his back and endeavour to float in the rough sea.

The waves tossed him where they listed; he was worn out and exhausted by the prolonged struggle; but for the thought of the loved ones at home, he would have sunk down, down to the depths, like a weary child laying its head on the pillows. Only for the sake of his wife and children he fought on, though with ever-increasing weakness, until the roar of the sea was meaningless in his ears, and his upturned eyes gazed at the sun, without sight.

Death was then very close at hand. He never knew the exact manner of his rescue or the period of his unconsciousness. He came back to life in a wretched hut on a desolate coast. Several natives stood around him. They were ill clothed, miserably poor, and, to our way of thinking, absolutely without the necessities of life. However, they treated the white man to the best of their ability, lighting a fire for him, gathering shell-fish for him, even giving up to his wants their greatest

dainty—an occasional bird.

From this savage condition he was rescued by an American whaler; and afterwards, joining a Chilian ship at Valparaiso, he worked his way round to Rio. Thence he got to the West Indies, where, by a fortunate accident, he secured a mate's berth in a homeward-bound vessel.

Then Mrs. Hartland had to tell her story; and as she praised Jim's unselfishness, the sailor kept patting him on the shoulder and murmuring, "Good boy! Good boy, Jimmy! You did well!"

"As to this young schoolmaster," said he, "he's a regular brick! Thank goodness we can pay him for Jim's upkeep and all that, but we can never repay his generous thoughtfulness. Money's no good for that part of the case."

"No," remarked his wife; "and money will not repay Dr. Stewart either. We have had much to be thankful for, John."

"'Pon my word!" exclaimed the sailor, bringing his great fist down on the table with a mighty bang, "I did not think, lass, there was so much kindness in the world. When shall I be able to see Susie?"

"We must consult the doctor," said his wife. "The sudden shock may not be good for her."

"Ah," said he with a sigh, "we must be careful; but my heart's sore to see the little lass."

True to his promise, Jim was early at the shop next morning, and for several days he toiled early and late until his employer's busy time was over. It was one way of showing his gratitude, and he had no thought of reward.

The news of his father's return quickly spread through Beauleigh, and he received the congratulations of all kinds of people. Dick Boden, of course, found his way to Brook Street, where, it is perhaps hardly necessary to state, he was warmly welcomed.

"I shan't forget you in a hurry, my son!" exclaimed the jovial sailor, "nor what you did for Jim. I've heard the yarn. Just wait till I come back from my next voyage."

"I hope," observed Dick, with the usual innocent expression on his face, "that it won't take quite as long as the last." And the sailor laughed.

He would have felt quite happy now, had his little girl been at home. His heart yearned for the lass, but he was buoyed up by a wonderful hope. With the doctor's permission, he had seen her at the hospital, and had come away with the profound conviction that she was gradually growing stronger. Indeed, Dr. Stewart had said as much, and more also.

"Next summer," he had said, "in all human probability, Pussy will walk, and before the end of the year even go a short distance without the aid of crutches."

Mr. Laythorne had left the town at the beginning of the holidays, and Jim

could not communicate with him; but at last his letter arrived, directing the boy to join him at 7 Mortimer Gardens, Portsmouth, on the following morning. Accordingly, Mrs. Hartland packed his things, Jim paid a farewell visit to his sister, went to see Dick, who was now installed in Sir Thomas Arkell's business, and then spent a quiet hour with his parents.

"I'll come with you, my boy," said his father. "I wish to thank this Mr. Laythorne, and to have a little talk with him."

The schoolmaster was naturally somewhat surprised by the appearance of the sturdy, deep-chested sailor; but Jim soon explained matters, and then his father said,—

"I am a plain man, sir, and not much used to figures of speech, but I want to thank you from my heart for your kindness. You've been a real Samaritan to my boy, and none of us will ever forget it. There is just one thing to be said. I mustn't trade on your generosity. The owners of the *Morning Star* have behaved very handsomely, so that I can well afford to pay Jim's shot. Now that his father is home again, the boy mustn't be a burden on you, sir. You see that?"

"Very well," said Mr. Laythorne; "that shall be as you please." And before Jim's father left, the two drew up a fresh and eminently satisfactory arrangement.

"And now," said the sailor, "I'll just slip my moorings and run back.—Good-bye, my boy. Write often to your mother, and try to show this gentleman you're worth the care he has bestowed on you.—Good-bye, sir. If Jim comes to be worth anything in the world we shall have you to thank for it."

They watched him go down the street; and then, turning to the boy, Mr. Laythorne said,—

"This is a happier start than I expected. Now let us go to the school; there are several things to be done before the boys return."

"Yes, sir," replied Jim, anxious to make himself useful, and to begin his fresh start in life.

L'ENVOI.

Seven years have gone by since the events just recorded. It is Christmas Eve, and the streets of Beauleigh are ablaze with light.

People are hurrying to and fro, laughing, talking, pausing now and again to wish each other the compliments of the season. Children stand at the shop windows, gazing in wonder and delight at the gorgeous toys, the pretty picture-books, and the numerous games which make them look like fairyland. The bright red berries of the holly shine and sparkle in the brilliant light, the mistletoe hangs temptingly overhead, the turkeys and geese are garlanded with ribbons

and decked with green.

Inside the shop of Messrs. Gotch and Parker, the eminent jewellers, a young man is buying an exquisite brooch.

"I think, mother, that this will please her," he remarks to the well-dressed woman seated close by.

Look at the laughing blue eyes, the fresh-coloured cheeks, the winning smile. Surely this young gentleman is an old acquaintance. Mr. Boden, the shopman calls him; but to us he is Dick, or Dicky, or the Angel, just as memory prompts.

"Thanks," he says, placing the tiny packet in his pocket. "Now, mother, lean on my arm."

Yes, it certainly is our light-hearted Dick, whom we will take the liberty of following, as he pilots his mother through the crowded streets, then into the quieter part of the town, and so to the foot of a fairly steep hill facing the sea.

He is evidently well known in Beauleigh, and respected, too, one would imagine. Many people stop to shake his hand, and to wish him a "merry Christmas." Some are poor, other well-to-do; but their wealth or poverty makes no difference in the warmth of his greeting. It is easy to see that things have prospered with him, but he is just as kind and generous and simple-hearted as in the old days.

"O my aunt!" he exclaims with a boyish laugh, looking at the hill; "fancy having this to climb! You'll need a rest, mother, by the time we reach the top!"

Mrs. Boden smiles, and glances proudly at the handsome young fellow on whose arm she is leaning. It must needs be a steep hill she could not climb with him to help her.

They are up at last, and a stream of light comes from the open doorway of a large, old-fashioned house.

"There he is!" cries Dick excitedly; and the next instant he is shaking hands with another young fellow, who pulls him laughingly inside.

"Come along, old man!—Come along, Mrs. Boden!" he exclaims. "A merry Christmas to you both!"

"The same to you, Jim, and many of 'em. You're looking well, old chap, considering that heavy grind.—A merry Christmas, Mrs. Hartland! See, you have half killed mother! How? Why, by living up in the clouds. You ought to keep a special tramway for your guests—'pon my word you ought."

"Quite right, Dick, my boy!" exclaims a deep voice; and a tanned, bearded man comes into the room with a sailor-like roll.

"Let me congratulate you on your appointment, Mr. Hartland," cries Dick. "No more ploughing the salt seas for you!"

John Hartland has just procured the berth of traffic manager to the harbour

board.

"It's almost a pity, though," says Mr. Hartland with a laugh, "that the house is perched up so high. I tell the wife we live in a sort of eagle's nest. Still, it suits Susie remarkably well; I must admit that."

"Isn't Susie here?" asks Dick innocently, looking round as if he had only just discovered her absence.

"She's upstairs," laughs her father, "putting on a few more fal-lals, I expect. The lasses are all alike in that respect."

Dick whispers to Mrs. Hartland, at the same time slipping something into her hand, and the others smile at one another as she glides out of the room. She reappears presently, followed by a young girl, the neck of whose dress is fastened by an exquisite brooch.

"O Dick!" she exclaims, running forward, "thank you very much. It is just lovely!"

Dick, looking a trifle shamefaced, murmurs some reply, while Jim can hardly take his eyes from his sister's face. He has not been at home much of late years, and he can never quite restrain a thrill of surprise on seeing the beautiful girl as she passes before him with all the grace of a young fawn.

Presently, when they are all quietly seated, Dick says, with a joyous laugh,—

"By the way, I have a surprise packet for you. Barton, our manager, has resigned, and Mr. Leverton has been appointed in his place. That leaves the under-manager's berth vacant, and—"

"You haven't got it, Dick?"

"How can a fellow tell his yarn if he's interrupted in this fashion? But, just to relieve your suspense, I beg to state that the new under-manager for Sir Thomas Arkell is Mr. Richard Boden, whom his friends call Dick, and sometimes Dicky."

How they laugh, and cheer, and congratulate him—almost like a parcel of school-boys! It certainly is a memorable Christmas Eve.

"That partnership is decidedly drawing nearer!" laughs Jim. "I shall soon begin to look for the altered sign."

He himself has not done badly. He has passed through college with flying colours, has earned the right to place "B.A. (Lond.)" after his name, and now, on returning to Beauleigh, has been appointed one of the masters at the Deanery School.

They are very proud of him at home, for he has more than fulfilled their expectations, and has brought some amount of credit to the good old town.

"Sometimes," he exclaims thoughtfully, "it all seems like a dream, and I pinch myself to make sure that I am awake. I little imagined, dad, when we heard of the loss of the *Morning Star*, that things would turn out like this. We

have been very fortunate in finding good friends, and the best one of all, as far as I am concerned, sits here," he says, pointing to Dick.

* * * * *

Draw the curtains now, light the gas, heap more logs on the roaring fire, and let us, before saying our final word of farewell, take one more glance at the merry party. For the elders, the stress and storm of life's battle has abated; they have glided into a peaceful haven, where they hear only the echo of the thundering waves outside.

As to the younger ones, who shall prophesy? Life holds many storms and tempests for them yet; but their barks are well manned and stoutly built, and, I think, are likely to ride triumphantly through life's seas, until they, too, come to a peaceful anchorage.

And so, farewell.

THE END.

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