

THE HUMAN BOY AGAIN

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Author: Eden Phillpotts

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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE HUMAN BOY AGAIN

Produced by Al Haines.

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*HE CANED ME FOR INSOLENCY, COMBINED WITH IRREVER-
ENCE.*

THE HUMAN BOY AGAIN

BY
EDEN PHILLPOTTS
AUTHOR OF "THE HUMAN BOY"

"There are those who scoff at the school-boy, calling him frivolous and shallow. Yet it was the school-boy who said, 'Faith is believing what you know ain't so.'"—*Pudd'nhead Wilson's New Calendar*.

"Man is more childish than woman. In the true man there is a child hidden: it wanteth to play."—F. NIETZSCHE.

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RICHARD CLAY & SONS, LIMITED,
BREAD STREET HILL, E.C., AND
BUNGAY, SUFFOLK.

TO MY DEAR FRIEND,
MARK TWAIN,
FATHER OF 'TOM SAWYER' AND
'HUCKLEBERRY FINN,'
THESE HUMAN BOYS,
WITH SINCEREST REGARD.

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PETERS, DETECTIVE

No. I

PETERS, DETECTIVE

I

Being from the first the chum and friend of Peters, I can tell about his curious ways better than anybody. In fact we shared our pocket-money, which is always a great sign of friendship; and it was understood that if ever I got into trouble when I grew up, and was accused of murder or forgery, or anything like that, which does often happen to the most innocent people, Peters would give up anything he might be doing at the time, and devote his entire life to proving me not guilty.

I remember well the day he came. I was in the big school-room at the fire, roasting chestnuts and talking to Gideon; and Shortland and Fowle were also there. The Doctor came in with a new boy and said—

"Ah! There are some of the fellows by the fire, Peters."

Then he called out to Shortland and me and said—

"Shortland and Maydew, this is Peters. Make him welcome, and if there are chestnuts going, as I suspect, share them with him."

Then the Doctor went off to have some final jaw with the mother of Peters; and Peters came down the room and said "Good-evening" in a very civil and quiet tone of voice.

He was thin and dark, and when he warmed his hands at the fire it was easy to see the light through them. He also had a pin in his tie in the shape of a human skull, about as big as a filbert nut, with imitation ruby eyes.

We asked him who he was, and he said he came from Surrey, and that his father had been a soldier, but was unfortunately dead. His name was Vincent Peters.

Then Shortland, who is a silly beast and a bully, and only in the lower fifth, though quite old—and, in fact, his voice has broken down—asked Peters the footling question he always asks every new boy.

He said, "Would you rather be a greater fool than you look, or look a greater fool than you are?"

Of course, whatever you answer, you must be scored off. But young Peters seemed to know it. Anyway, instead of answering the question he asked another. He said—

"Would you rather be uglier than you look, or look uglier than you are?"

Gideon was interested at this, because it showed at once Peters must be a cool hand.

"What are you going to be?" Gideon asked; and then came out the startling

[image]

*"WOULD YOU RATHER BE A GREATER FOOL THAN YOU LOOK,
OR LOOK A GREATER FOOL THAN YOU ARE?"*

fact that Peters hoped to be a detective of crime.

"If you go detecting anything here you'll get your head punched," said Shortland.

"I may or I may not," answered Peters. "But it's rather useful sometimes to have a chap in a school who has made a study of detecting things."

"You can begin to-night, if you like," I said; "because Johnson major's bat was found to have seven tin tacks hammered into it last week, when he took it out of the case to give it a drop more oil; and if you find out who did that, I've no doubt that Johnson major will be a good friend to you—him being in the sixth and captain of the first at cricket."

"I don't know enough about things yet," answered Peters. "Besides, you have to be sure of your ground. In detecting you may make friends, or you may not; but you will make enemies to a dead certainty. In fact, that's the drawback to detecting. Look at Sherlock Holmes."

"That's only a yarn," said Gideon.

But Peters wouldn't allow this. He evidently felt very deeply about Sherlock Holmes.

"He is founded on fact—in fact, founded on thousands of solemn facts," said Peters. "The things he does are all founded on real crimes, and if anybody is going to be a detective, he can't do better than try to be like Sherlock Holmes in every possible way."

The tea-bell rang about this time, and Peters sat next to me and told me a good deal more. He said he was very thankful that he was thin, like Holmes, and wiry, and had a beak-like nose. He asked me if he had piercing eyes; and I could honestly say that they were pretty piercing. Then he brought out a picture of Sherlock Holmes, which he always carried, and showed me that, with luck, when he grew up, he ought really to be very much indeed like the great Holmes.

He was learning to play the violin also—not because he liked it, but because of the importance of doing it in moments of terrible difficulty. He said that it soothes the brain and helps it to do its work—but not so much while you're learning. He said that after he had thoroughly mastered a favourite piece of Holmes's he should be satisfied, as there would never be any occasion for him to play more than one piece.

Chaps liked Peters very fairly well. He was a good 'footer' player, and very good at outside right. He was fast, and told me that speed often made all the difference to the success of a criminal case. Pure sprinting had many a time made all the difference to Holmes. Peters didn't know much in the way of learning, but he dearly liked to get hold of a newspaper and read the crimes. He didn't find out about Johnson major's bat, however; but he said it wasn't a fair test, because he never heard clearly all that went before the crime. A few small detections he made with great ease, and found the half-crown that Mathers had lost in the playground. This he did by cross-questioning Mathers, and making him bring back to his mind the smallest details; and then Mathers remembered turning head over heels while only touching the ground with one hand, to show how it could be done. And on the exact spot, in some long grass at the top of the playground where he had performed this feat, there was the half-crown. Mathers offered Peters sixpence on the spot, but Peters said it was nothing, and wouldn't take any reward.

He generally knew by the mud on your boots which of the walks you had been, and he always could tell which of the masters was taking 'prep' before he went into the room, by the sounds or silence. He also had a very curious way of prophesying by certain signs if the Doctor was in a good temper or a bad one. He always knew this long before anybody else, and it was a very useful thing to know, naturally.

But Peters did not really do much till his own guinea-pig was found dead in its lair about half-way through his second term at Merivale. He did not care for animals in a general way, excepting as helping to throw light on crime; which, it seems, they are very much in the habit of doing, though not intentionally. But this particular guinea-pig was far from a common creature, being a prize Angora pig, and having been given to Peters during the Christmas holidays by a friend of his dead father. It had long hair, and looked far more like one of those whacking chrysanthemums you see than a guinea-pig. It was brown and yellow, and had a round nose like a rabbit, and seemed so trusting and friendly that everybody liked it. One other boy—namely, James—had a guinea-pig also, because these were the days before we took to keeping lizards and other things in our desks—which was discovered by a dormouse of mine coming up through the inkpot hole in my desk under the Doctor's nose, and so giving itself away. And though the pig of James was a good white pig, with a black patch on his right side and one little dab of yellow fur where his tail would have been if he had had one, yet, compared to the guinea-pig of Peters, he was nothing. James, however, didn't mind the loss of admiration for his pig, and he offered Peters to let the pigs live together, which would be better for both of them, because a guinea-pig is the most sociable thing in Nature, and are known well to pine, and even die, if kept in single captivity.

But Peters had a secret fear that the pig of James was not sound in its health. He told me that he had made a most searching examination of James's pig, and discovered a spot of pink skin on its chest. He said it might be nothing, but, on the other hand, it might be some infectious disease. Also James's pig was inclined to go bald; so he thanked James very much, and said he thought that if the pigs saw each other through the bars from time to time it would be all they wanted to brace them up and cheer them. But he thought, upon the whole, they had better not meet.

James didn't like this. He was rather a rum chap in many ways, but very good at English grammar and chemistry; and he had invented a way of cribbing, while a master was actually in the room, that many copied afterwards. James got rather rude about the guinea-pig of Peters, and seemed to think in some way that it was the pig, and not Peters, that had decided not to live with his pig.

He said one day, when looking at the champion pig, "I suppose the little beast thinks it's too big a swell to live with my honest, short-haired pig. All the same, if they had a fight, I know which would jolly well win."

"So do I," said Peters. "If a race-horse had a fight with a cart-horse, the cart-horse would win. This is not a prize-fighting pig."

West was there and said the same. He, of course, understood all about prize-fighting, owing to his brother being winner of the 'middle-weights' at the championship of the army; and he said that if these pigs fought, the superior weight of James's pig behind the shoulder would soon settle it. Besides, of course, the other one's hair streamed all over it like a skye terrier's. You could see at a glance that it was never born to be a fighter.

"However, if you want a fight," said Peters, who was always cool and polite, owing to copying Sherlock Holmes, "if you want a fight, James, I can oblige you."

They were both fourteen-and-a-half, and James was a lot fatter, but not so tall as Peters.

"No," said James, "I don't want to fight. I didn't mean anything of the sort."

"I may be able to get you a guinea-pig like mine next holidays," said Peters; "and if I can, I will."

"I don't want it," said James. "I don't care about these guinea-pigs that look like penwipers gone mad. I'd rather have mine."

This, of course, was mean and paltry jealousy, and we rotted James till we rather got his wool off.

A week afterwards the champion pig was found dead on its back, with its paws in the air and its eyes open, but dim. They had a look of fright in them; and it was very interesting indeed, this happening to Peters, because it would be sure to show if his detective powers were really worth talking about.

Of course everybody said it must be James; and James said, and also swore,

that it was not.

Peters told me privately that he was trying to keep a perfectly open mind. He said there were many difficulties in his way, because in the event of a human being dying and being found stark you always have a *post-mortem*, followed by an inquest; whereas with a mere guinea-pig, belonging to a boy in a school, there is not enough publicity. He said that up to a certain point publicity is good, and beyond that point it is bad. Sherlock Holmes always set his face against publicity until he'd found out the secret. Then he liked everybody to know it, though often not until the last paragraph of the story. That showed his frightful cleverness.

I said, "I suppose you will ask yourself, 'What would Holmes do if one evening, while he was sitting improving Watson, there suddenly appeared before him a boy with a dead guinea-pig?'"

And Peters said, "No. Because a guinea-pig in itself would not be enough to set the great brain of Holmes working. If there were several mysterious murders about, or if there had been some dark and deadly thing occur, and Holmes, on taking the pig into his hand and looking at it through his magnifying-glass, suddenly discovered on the pig some astounding clue to another fearful crime, then he would bring his great brain to work upon the pig; but merely as a guinea-pig suddenly found dead, it would not interest him. In my case it's different. The pig was a good deal to me; and this death will get round to the man who gave me the creature, and he'll be sure to think I've starved it, and very likely turn from me; and being my godfather, that would be jolly serious. In fact, there are several reasons why I ought to find out who has done this, if I can."

I said, "It may be Fate. It may have died naturally."

He admitted this. He said, "That's where a *post-mortem* would come in, if it was a human being. Of course, Holmes never did *post-mortems* himself, that not being his work; but I've got to make one now. It may or may not help me."

He made it, and it didn't help him. My own opinion is that he didn't much like it and hurried it a good deal. He said there was no actual sign of violence on the surface of the guinea-pig, and the organs all seemed perfectly healthy. But when I asked him what they would have looked like if they hadn't been healthy, he avoided answering, and went on that the pig's inside ought to have been sent up to Somerset House, for examination by Government officials, in a hermetically sealed bottle. Peters declared that the public has a right to demand this service for the stomachs of their old friends and relations if foul play is suspected; but not in the case of a domestic beast like a guinea-pig.

So the pig was buried, and not until then did Peters really seem to set to work. The actual horror of the death gradually wore off, and he told me that he should now seriously tackle the case.

There was a most unusual lack of clues, he said; and he pointed out that

even Sherlock Holmes could do nothing much until clues began to turn up. Peters warned me against always taking it for granted that James had done it. In fact, he said it was very unlikely to have been James, just because it looked so likely.

I said, "That may be the way Sherlock Holmes talks; but it seems to me to be rather footle."

And he said, "No, Maydew; it isn't footle; it is based on a study of the law of probabilities. If you read accounts of crime, you will see that, as a rule, the person who is suspected is innocent; and the more he is suspected, the more innocent he is."

I said, "Anyway, James has changed. He's gone down four places in his class and lost his place in the second 'footer' eleven also. There's something on his mind."

"Yes," said Peters, "that's true. Everybody believes that he killed a valuable guinea-pig, and treats him accordingly. That is quite enough to send him down four places in the class; but if he had killed the guinea-pig he would have brazened it out and have been prepared for this, and taken very good care not to show what he felt."

"In fact, you don't think he killed the pig," I said.

And Peters said he didn't think James had; but he was keeping an open mind.

Then came the most extraordinary clue of the ten-shilling piece. Happening to go to his desk one day—between schools—for toffee, Peters found in it a bit of paper lightly screwed up. He opened it and discovered in it no less than a gold ten-shilling piece; and on the paper, printed in lead pencil, were these words—

"FOR ANOTHER GINNEA-PIG."

He said nothing to anybody but me; but he seemed to think that I was a sort of a Dr. Watson in my way; besides, it simplified the workings of his mind to talk out loud; so he showed me the clue and then asked me what I thought. I had rather picked up his dodge of talking like Sherlock Holmes, so I said—

"The first question is, of course, to see what is the date on the half-quid."

I thought this pretty good; but Peters said that this was not the first question, and didn't matter in the least.

He said, "My dear Maydew, the money is nothing; the paper in which it is wrapped up is everything."

So I turned to the paper.

"What does it tell you?" he asked.

"It tells me that some utter kid did it," I said, "for he can't spell 'another' and he can't spell 'guinea-pig.'"

But Peters smiled and put the points of his fingers together like Sherlock Holmes.

"My dear Maydew," he said, "might not that have been done on purpose?" Then I scored off him.

"It is just because it might have been done on purpose," I said, "that I think it was done accidentally."

He nodded.

"Of course, it may be the work of a kid," he admitted. "But, on the other hand, it may be a subterfuge. Besides, no kid would have killed my guinea-pig. Where's the motive?"

"The great thing is that you've got half-a-sovereign and we share pocket-money," I said.

But he attached little importance to this, except to say that the half-sov. wasn't pocket-money, though I might have half.

"Now, examine the paper," he went on.

I did so. It was a sheet of one of our ordinary, lined copybooks, used for dictation, composition, exercises, and such like.

"Evidently torn out of one of the copybooks," I said.

"Exactly; but which one?"

"Ask me another," I said. "You'll never find that out."

He smiled and arranged his hands again like Holmes.

"I have," he said.

"Then you know?"

"On the contrary, I know nothing."

"It wasn't James's book?"

"It wasn't. The first thing was to find a book with a sheet torn out. I tried twenty-five books, and seven had pages torn out. But James's book had not. Then judge of my surprise, Maydew, when, coming to my desk for the form of the thing, and looking at my own exercise-book, I found a sheet was torn out; and this is it, for the tear fits!"

"What frightful cheek!" I cried out.

"I don't so much mind that," said Peters; "but the point is that, splendid though this clue seems to be on the surface, I can't get any forwarder by it. In fact, it may be the act of a friend, and not a foe."

"What would Sherlock Holmes do?" I asked; and Peters gave a sort of mournful sound and scratched his head.

"I wish I knew," he said.

II

Gideon was helpful in a way, but nobody could make much of it. Gideon said that it was conscience money, and was often known to happen, especially with the Income Tax; because people, driven to desperation by it, often pay too little, and then, when things brighten up with them afterwards, it begins to weigh on their minds, if they are fairly decent at heart, and they remember that they have swindled the King and been dishonest; and so they send the money secretly, but, of course, feel too ashamed to say who they are.

I asked James if he had sent the money, and he swore he hadn't; but he did it in such an excitable sort of way that I was positive he had. Peters wouldn't believe or disbelieve. He went quietly on, keeping an open mind and detecting the crime; and when the truth came to light, Peters was still detecting.

But in the meantime happened the mystery of the pencil-sharpener, and the two great mysteries were cleared up simultaneously, which Peters says is a common thing. You couldn't say that one cleared up the other, but still, it did so happen that both came out in the same minute.

There was a boy whose name was Pratt, and his father was on the Stock Exchange of London. This father used to go out to his lunch, and at these times he saw many curious things sold by wandering London men who are too poor to keep shops, but yet have the wish to sell things. These men stand by the pavement and display most queer and uncommon curiosities, such as walking spiders and such like; and once from one of these men Pratt's father bought quite a new sort of pencil-sharpener of the rarest kind. It was shaped like a stirrup, and cut pencils well without breaking off the lead.

After a good week of this pencil-sharpener, Pratt found it had been stolen out of his desk, and he told Peters about it, and Peters took up the case. I asked him if he was hopeful, and he said that there was always hope; but he also said, rather bitterly, that it was curious what a frightful lot of hard cases he had had since coming to Merivale. He said it was enough to tax anybody's reputation, and that each case seemed more difficult than the last.

I reminded him of one or two rather goodish things he had done in a small way, but he said that as yet he had not really brought off a brilliant stroke.

A week went by, and then Peters came to me in a state of frightful excitement.

"The pencil-sharpener!" he said.

"Have you got a clue?" I asked. But he could hardly speak for excitement, and forgot to put his hands like Holmes, or to try and arrange a 'far-away' look on his face, or anything.

"Not only a clue," he said, "I know who took it!"

"This will be a great score for you when it comes out," I said.

"You swear you won't breathe a word?" he asked.

And I swore. Then he whispered the fearful news into my ear.

"The Doctor's taken it!" he said.

"He never would," I answered. "Pratt is positive that he left it in his desk."

"It is a case of purloining," said Peters; "and wish it had happened to anybody else but the Doctor. It's rather terrible in its way; because if once gets this habit and yields to temptation, his unlimited power, who is safe?"

"It's much more a thing Browne would have done," I said, meaning a particularly hateful roaster who wore pink ties and elastic-sided boots.

Then Peters explained that when alone in the Doctor's study, waiting to give a message to Dr. Dunstan from Mr. Briggs, he chanced to look about, and saw on the mantelpiece Pratt's pencil-sharpener and a pencil in course of being sharpened. The Doctor had evidently put them down there and been called away and forgotten them.

"What did you do?" I inquired of Peters.

"Well, Maydew," he said, "I asked myself what Sherlock would have done"—in confidential moments Peters sometimes spoke of the great Holmes as 'Sherlock'—"and I remembered his wonderful presence of mind. Me would have struck while the iron was hot, as the saying is, and taken the pencil-sharpener there and then."

"By Jove! But you didn't?" I said.

For answer Peters brought the pencil-sharpener out of his waistcoat pocket.

"Are you positive it's Pratt's?" I asked.

"Absolutely certain," he said. "It has the words 'Made in Bavaria' upon it; and, of course, this is a frightfully delicate situation to be in for me.

"Especially if the Doctor asks for it," I said.

"He won't dare," answered Peters; "but I've got a sort of strong feeling against letting anybody know who has done this. On one or two occasions, I believe, Holmes kept the doer of a dark deed a secret—to give him a chance to repent. It seems to me this is a case when I ought to do the same."

"If the Doctor cribs things, I don't see why you should keep it dark," I said; and Peters treated me rather rudely—in fact, very much like Holmes sometimes treats Watson.

"My dear Maydew," he said, "the things you don't see would fill a museum."

"Anyway, you'll have to give Pratt back his pencil-sharpener," I said; and he admitted that this was true. The only thing that puzzled him was how to do it.

But, after all, Peters didn't puzzle long. He was thinking the next morning

how to return the pencil-sharpener to Pratt in a mysterious and Sherlock Holmes-like way, when, just after prayers, the Doctor stopped the school and spoke. He said—

”Boys, I have lost something, and though an article of little intrinsic worth, I cannot suffer it to go without making an effort to regain it. I say this for two reasons. The first and least is that the little contrivance so mysteriously spirited from my study is of the greatest service to me; while the second and important reason your own perspicuity may perhaps suggest. Things do not go without hands. Somebody has taken from my study what did not belong to him; and somebody, therefore, at this moment moves among you with an aching heart and a wounded conscience. Let that boy make his peace with God and with me before he closes his eyes; and that no doubt or ambiguity may obscure the details of this event, I will now descend to particulars.

”Not long ago, a kindly friend conveyed to me a new form of pencil-sharpener which he had chanced to find exhibited in a stationer’s shop at Plymouth, our great naval port. Knowing that my eyesight is not of the best, he judged this trifle would assist me in the endless task of sharpening pencils, which is not the least among my minor mechanical labours. And he judged correctly. The implement was distinguished by a great simplicity of construction. It consisted, indeed, of one small piece of metal somewhat resembling the first letter of the alphabet. I last saw it upon the mantelpiece in the study. I was actually using it when called away, and on my return forgot the circumstance. But upon retiring last night, the incident reverted to memory while divesting myself of my apparel, and so indispensable had the pencil-sharpener become to me that I resumed my habiliments, lighted a candle, and went downstairs to seek the sharpener. It had disappeared. Now, yesterday several boys came and went, as usual, through the precincts of my private apartments. Furthermore, the Greek Testament class will recollect that we were engaged together in the evening from seven until eight o’clock. I need say no more. The loss is discovered and the loss is proclaimed. I accuse nobody. Many things may have happened to the pencil-sharpener, and if any boy can throw light upon the circumstance let him speak with me to-night after evening chapel. I hope it may be possible to find an innocent solution of my loss; but if one of you has fallen under sudden temptation, and, attracted by the portability and obvious advantages of the instrument, has appropriated it to his own uses, I must warn him that my duty will be to punish as well as pardon. The hand of man, however, is light as compared with the anger of an outraged Deity. If a sinner is cowering among you at this moment, with my pencil-sharpener secreted about his person, let that sinner lose no time, but strengthen his mind to confess his sin, that he may the sooner turn over a new leaf and sin no more.”

Then he hooked it to breakfast, and I spoke to Peters. I said—

"This is pretty blue for you."

But he said, far from it. He said—

"On the contrary, Maydew. It's blue for the Doctor; and it shows—what he's always saying to us himself, for that matter—that if you do a wrong thing, you've nearly always got to do another, or perhaps two, to bolster up the first. Sherlock Holmes often finds out one crime owing to the criminal doing another, and no doubt this has happened to the Doctor. He has told a deliberate, carefully planned lie, and a barefaced lie too; because he must know that he stole the thing out of Pratt's desk. Anyhow, my course is clear."

I said I was glad to hear that, because it didn't look at all clear to me. Then Peters said—

"I, personally, have got nothing to do with the Doctor's wickedness in the matter. In my opinion that is Pratt's affair."

But I felt pretty sure Pratt wouldn't bother about it.

"Anyway," said Peters, "I now return Pratt his pencil-sharpener, and there my duty as the detective of the case ceases. Sherlock Holmes often did a tremendous deed and only told the way he'd done it to Watson. And so it is here. It is not my work to bring the Doctor to justice, and I'm not going to try to do it."

I said he was right, because, while he was bringing the Doctor to justice, he might get expelled, and that wouldn't be much of a catch for anybody.

So the first thing after morning school we went to Pratt, and Peters put on his Holmes manner and said—

"Well, Pratt, no news of the missing pencil-sharpener, I suppose?"

And Pratt said, "Mine or the Doctor's?"

And Peters said, "Yours."

"Yes, there is," said Pratt; "I found it in my lexicon two days ago. I'd marked a word with it and clean forgotten. So that's all right."

"Not so right as you might think," I said.

But Peters kept his nerve jolly well, and, in fact, was more like Sherlock Holmes at that terrible moment than ever I saw him before or after.

"I'm glad it's turned up," said Peters, "and I hope the Doctor's will."

Then he and I went off, and I congratulated him.

"You've got a nerve of iron," I said.

"Yes," he said, "and I shall want it."

Then he told me there was nothing like this in Sherlock Holmes, and that the whole piece of detective work was a failure, and rather a painful failure to him.

"I don't mind the licking, and so on," he said, "but it's the inner disgrace."

"It was a very natural mistake," I said, to cheer him up.

"Yes," he said; "but detectives of the first class don't make natural mistakes—"

nor any other sort either. It's the disappointment of coming such a howler over a simple felony that is so hard. At least, of course, it's not a felony at all."

"If it is, you did it," I said; "and now of course you'll chuck away the pencil-sharpener and sit tight about it?"

But he shook his head.

"No, Maydew. Of course I could evade the consequences with ease, if I liked. But I have decided to give this back to the Doctor and tell him the whole story," said Peters.

"Sherlock Holmes would never have done that," I said.

"No, he wouldn't," admitted Peters. "Because why? Because he'd never have been such a fool as to be deluded by a false clue. He knew a true clue from a false, as well as we know a nice smell from a nasty one."

"Well," I said, "if you take my advice for once, you'll do this: You'll leave that thing on the Doctor's desk in a prominent place next time you're in there alone, and you'll bury the rest in your brain. Holmes buried scores of things in his brain. What's the sense of going out of your way to get a licking?"

"If I told him the truth, I don't believe he would lick me," said Peters. But I jolly soon showed him that was rot. In fact, Watson never talked so straight to Holmes as I did to Peters then.

"My dear chap," I said, "you go to the Doctor and say, 'Here's your pencil-sharpener, sir; I saw it on your mantelpiece and thought you'd stolen it from Pratt, who has one exactly like it. So I took it to give to Pratt, but his has turned up since.' Well, what would happen then? Any fool could tell you."

All the same Peters went up next day at the appointed time, and, curiously enough, James was in the study waiting for the Doctor too. The muddle that followed was explained to me by Peters afterwards.

Me and James began to talk; then James said to Peters, "I am here, Peters, about a very queer and sad thing, and it is evidently Providence that has sent you here now."

And Peters said, "No, it isn't. I am here about a very queer thing too, and it may also turn out to be sad—for me."

Then James, who was excited to a very great amount, said these strange words—

"I had come to confess that it was me killed your guinea-pig! I couldn't hide it any more. It's haunting me—not the pig, but the killing of it. I hoped, and even prayed in my prayers, that you might detect me, but you didn't. Then I wrote home for ten shillings for a debt of honour, and put it in your desk, and disguised the spelling—but still I was haunted by it. And now, as you are here, I confess it openly to you that I killed your beautiful, kind-hearted pig, and I hope you'll forgive me for doing a beastly, blackguard thing. And if you can't forgive it, I'll

tell the Doctor and get flogged rather than go on like this; because it's haunting me."

Peters said, "How did you do it?"

And James said, "With poison from the laboratory mixed in his bran."

And Peters was so much rejoiced when he heard this, that he forgave the worm, James, on the spot.

"That is where sending the stomach to Somerset House would have come in," said Peters; "but as I was not in a position to do this, I do not so much feel the slur of not having discovered you were the criminal."

He forgave James freely. Then he said—

"You may be amused to know that I am also here about a crime. I thought I'd found one out and, instead of that, I've jolly well committed a crime myself. In fact, it's about the queerest thing, really, that has ever happened in the annals of crime."

Then he told the story of the pencil-sharpener to James, and showed James the pencil-sharpener to prove it. James actually had the pencil-sharpener in his hand, when who should come in—not the Doctor—but the matron, with the extraordinary news that the mother of Peters was just arrived and had to see him at once! This was so awfully surprising to Peters that he went straight away to the drawing-room and left the pencil-sharpener with James; and in the drawing-room were the Doctor and Peters's mother, who, after all, had merely come to tell him that his uncle was dead. But far more important things than that happened in the study, because when Peters arrived to see his mother, the Doctor, having said something about bearing the shocks of life with manly fortitude, went off to his study, and there, of course, was James waiting for him.

And what James did we heard afterwards. First, on thinking it over, he began to doubt why he should confess about the guinea-pig to the Doctor, now that Peters had utterly forgiven him. And he speedily decided that there was no occasion to do so. But then, out of gratitude to Peters, he determined to carry through the delicate task of getting the pencil-sharpener back to the Doctor. And he did. He told the Doctor that he had taken the thing, because he thought it was Pratt's. He said he felt sure Pratt must have left it in the study by mistake. But he didn't say anything about thinking the Doctor had stolen it, and, in fact, was so jolly cunning altogether that he never got into a row at all. The Doctor ended up by remarking that Pratt's having one was a curious coincidence, and he said to James, "As for you, boy James, you stand acquitted of everything but too much zeal. Zeal, however——" and then he talked a lot of stuff about zeal, which James did not remember.

I said privately to Peters afterwards—

"How would Holmes have acted if this had happened to him?"

And Peters said, "For once I can see as clear as mud what Sherlock would have done. He would have said, 'I think in this extraordinary case, Watson, we may safely let well alone.'"

And that's what Peters did.

THE DOCTOR'S PARROT

No. II

THE DOCTOR'S PARROT

When Johnson maximus, young Corkey's cousin, left Merivale, he went to sea, and a very curious thing happened. He went into what is called the mercantile marine, which means liners, and not battleships or destroyers; still you see a good deal of the world, and have not got to fight for your country, but only for yourself. A pension is not so certain in the mercantile marine as it is in the Royal Navy; but, Johnson maximus told Corkey, when he came off a voyage from the East Indies, that he was hopeful. He had seen a good many curious things and brought home several, including a parrot, chiefly grey with a good deal of red about its tail. But what was far more wonderful than the parrot was the reason that Johnson maximus had brought it home.

He had brought it home, and also a very fine tiger's skin, as gifts to Dr. Dunstan, and when Corkey reminded him very naturally that he had always hated Dunstan as much as anybody when he was at Merivale, and been jolly thankful to leave and go on to the *Worcester*, training ship for the mercantile marine, Johnson maximus admitted it, but confessed that, looking back, he had found it different, and felt that Dunstan was an awfully good sort and that he owed him a great deal. But all the same, Johnson maximus never would come and see the Doctor in after life. Corkey asked him why, and he said he wanted to remember the awe and terror of the Doctor, and thought, if he ever saw him again it might not be the same; because, since the Merivale days, Johnson had seen so many queer places and things, including his own captain in the mercantile marine, who, Johnson maximus said, was himself one of the wonders of the deep.

Of course Johnson maximus left Merivale long before I came there. He was, in fact, nearly twenty when he sent the parrot by young Corkey; and it seemed that the Doctor had never had a gift from an old pupil until that time; and though Corkey said he thought the Doctor would rather have had almost anything than a parrot, still it was so; and he took the parrot and the tiger skin; and Corkey told me that Johnson maximus got a letter of four pages from Dr. Dunstan, thanking him for these things, and telling Johnson many facts about parrots in general.

The great point about the parrot was not so much its appearance as the thing that Johnson had taught it to say. Simply looked at from the parrot point of view, it was grey with a black tongue, and curious white lids to its eyes that went up and down like blinds. It climbed about its cage with its claws and bill, and had a way of eating nuts, especially walnuts, which was rather amusing. We hoped that it might have learnt some sailor words and would bring them out some day when least expected: but if it knew them it never spoke them. It only said three words, and they were rather cheek; but they were rather romantic in a way, when you knew what young Corkey knew and was able to tell me.

It was this: that Milly Dunstan and Johnson maximus were undoubtedly engaged in secret during his last term at Merivale. She was just an ordinary little squirt of a girl, with nothing to look round after but a lot of hair, and eyes that happened to be uncommonly blue by some accident; and, naturally, the moment Johnson went into the mercantile marine, she forgot him and turned her attention to other chaps, until old Dunstan sent her to a boarding-school. But she jolly soon made him let her come back again, and she was back some terms before the parrot arrived.

Then the parrot settled down and suddenly said (after it had been at Merivale four days), "Dear Milly Dunstan, dear Milly Dunstan"; and after that the wretched girl chucked about ten chaps and blubbed in secret for hours, so Corkey said, and let it be known to the sixth that she was true to Johnson maximus, because through many and many a watch on the trackless main, when he ought to have been resting from his labours in the mercantile marine, he had sat hour after hour by the parrot and repeated, doubtless many millions of times, the footling words, 'Dear Milly Dunstan.'

I don't think the Doctor was so pleased about it as Milly was. Certainly he did not cry, and Corkey said if the parrot had begun by speaking, Dr. Dunstan might have considered it cheek on Johnson's part and sent the parrot back with the four-page letter; but seeing that he had accepted it before it said "Dear Milly Dunstan," he couldn't well return it. Besides, in the meantime, Johnson maximus had set sail for South America, and Steggle's foretold that he would bring another parrot back from there which he might train to say something even stronger. He told Milly so, and rose her hopes a good deal; but Steggle's also told her that she

needn't get excited about it, because her father would never let her marry a chap in the mercantile marine, and that sailors have a wife in every port. This was that same Steggles who did many things at Merivale in the past, but he was now exceedingly old, and expected at any time to be taken away. Many believed he was nearly eighteen, but he had nothing much to show it except experience.

The first thing to do was to give the parrot a name, and Milly told us in triumph that she had made the Doctor call it 'Joe.' Of course this was the Christian name of Johnson maximus, though I believe the Doctor had quite forgotten that. Anyway, 'Joe' is a very good name for a parrot, and everybody got very fond of him, and old Briggs lectured on him and told us that parrots reach a great age, and have often been known to live a hundred years and more, owing to their healthy diet and the number of bites they take to each mouthful, and their habit of never worrying whatever happens. Old Briggs himself is frightfully keen about fruit and nuts and such things, and I believe, in secret, he hopes he'll live a hundred years too. But nobody else does. Steggles discovered a likeness between 'Joe' and old Briggs. They shut their eyes in the same way certainly, but 'Joe's' eyes are like grey diamonds, and old Briggs's, through many years of looking through microscopes at seeds, and bits of seaweeds, and stones, and so on, have got a sort of film over them, and are not up to much now, even with two pairs of spectacles to help them.

Well, 'Joe' was as good a parrot as ever you saw, and there is no doubt that he would have outlived everybody at Merivale and got to be a sort of heirloom in Dr. Dunstan's family, if he had been spared; but after he had been there two years—at the beginning of his seventh term, in fact—the great and sorrowful death of the parrot took place; and such was the general feeling about him that there would certainly have been a public funeral if the Doctor had allowed it.

Mathers went further, and wanted it to be a military funeral and have the cadet corps out with reversed muskets; but Mathers, who is merely Mathers minimus really, though his brothers have long since left, is a chap who is like a girl in some ways, being easily made to laugh or cry. To show you the peculiar sort of ass he is, I may say that he always writes home letters of dreadful anguish at the beginning of the term, and then, when the holidays really do come, seems never to want to go home at all! Trelawny says this is contrary to nature, and will end in pure insanity for Mathers; but Fowle, on the other hand, says that Mathers is already mad. I heard Browne, the mathematical master, speak about Mathers too—to Mannering, a new under-master. They were watching Mathers in the playground, and he was in one of his most cheerful moods, and imitating a monkey on a barrel-organ catching fleas. He certainly did it jolly well, and even a chap or two from the sixth stopped to watch. And then, when he saw these chaps looking on, he got above himself and began playing the giddy ox, and spoilt the

show. Then it was that Browne gave his opinion of Mathers, and said that he had 'the artistic temperament,' whatever that may be. Anyway, it is no catch, for though boys laugh at you, they despise you, and so do masters. Masters never seem to have the artistic temperament much; or, if they have had it, they get well over it after being masters a few terms. I suppose it was the artistic temperament that made Mathers join the cadet corps; which he did do, chiefly that he might wear the red bags with black stripes, and drill once a week under the sergeant. He was rather small, and it took all his strength to carry the musket round; for the corps had twenty-five old muskets, and I believe it was a regular military affair under Government in a sort of vague way. Anyhow, we had percussion caps for the muskets, and fired them off at times in the course of the drill; and the first time that young Mathers had a musket with caps he turned rather white, hating explosions and noise of all kinds, and said out loud in the face of the corps, to the drill sergeant who stood in front of the brigade, "Is it loaded, sergeant?" The sergeant, who was old and had seen battle, and had a grey moustache and medals and a fierce expression, looked at him and merely said, "Good God, boy, d'you think I should be standing here if it was?" Then he spat a scornful spit and twirled his moustache, and seemed to think he'd come down a good deal in the world to have to drill kids like Mathers. So always, afterwards, if anybody wanted to rot Mathers, and most people did, they had only to say, "Is it loaded, sergeant?" and he instantly became depressed and mournful, or got into a frightful bate—one or other according to his frame of mind at the time.

I am telling you all these things about Mathers for two reasons. First, because he is the principal person, after 'Joe,' in this story, and secondly, because he was my chum.

My name is Blount, well known at Dunstan's as having had diphtheria and two doctors in my first term, and recovering. What I saw in Mathers I never could tell, but there was something about the piffling duffer that I liked. His good nature was very marked, and he was peculiarly generous of dried fruits, which drew me to him as much as anything. His father was a merchant, and traded with various foreign places especially celebrated for dried fruits; and in this manner much grand tuck, that ordinary people have to pay pretty stiffly for, such as candied melons and crystallized pineapples and other amazing food, very seldom seen in a general way, came to Bunny Mathers as a matter of course from time to time; and he thought no more of opening a hamper and finding the richest and rarest things in it than I should of getting a windfall from our apple-orchard. This provender he gave to his friends and to those he wanted to be his friends; and some became his friends in consequence; but their friendship, as Mathers rather bitterly pointed out to me, sank to nothing between the times of the hampers. Whereas I made Mathers a real chum, and once, when, owing to

some fearful crisis in the sugared violet trade with France, his father forgot for six weeks to send Mathers any hamper at all, I remained unchanged.

Then the parrot died and naturally the first question was, "Why?"

We had a debate on it. Our public debates are listened to by the Doctor and the masters, and the subjects are chosen by them; but sometimes we have private debates that are not listened to, and we had one on 'Joe'; and the Government, led by Macmullen, our champion debater, held that 'Joe' had died a natural death, and the Opposition, led by Richmond, thought he had died by treachery. On a division the Government was defeated by two votes, owing to the magnificent speech of Richmond, and Steggles said there ought to be an inquest and a *post-mortem*; and so did Peters, who was positive the death was a murder. The mystery was who could have done it, because 'Joe' had not an enemy in the world, unless it was Mrs. Dunstan's cat, which he mimicked to its face and then barked suddenly and made the cat think there was a dog after her.

But this cat could not have done it. The parrot was found dead in its cage on the morning of a day in February. It was quite stiff and dignified. No cat had touched him. Mathers said it cut him to the heart to think of poor 'Joe' falling off his perch in the dead of night, and lying helpless there, and perhaps calling for help. He said if there had been loving hands to give it a drop of brandy and put its claws in mustard and water, it might be among us yet. And he went on in such a harrowing way, and thought such sad ideas, that at last I had to smack his head and make him shut up.

There was no inquest and no *post-mortem*, for the Doctor refused to have 'Joe' examined, much to our astonishment. In fact we thought it was rather un-sportsmanlike of the Doctor to hustle 'Joe' into his grave so jolly quickly. The corpse disappeared, and the Doctor was slightly changed for several days. He had got very fond of the bird, and I think he missed hearing it say, "Dear Milly Dunstan, dear Milly Dunstan," which it did hundreds of times in the day when it was feeling well and happy.

Then, a week after 'Joe' was buried, came the marvellous determination of Mathers. For the first time in his life I felt a sort of pride in Mathers, and was glad to be his chum. At the same time the danger was frightful, and I had no idea what the end might be. Only two people knew it, Milly and myself. I rather advised him against it; but she was hot and strong for it: so Mathers went ahead into a regular sea of danger. Not that he did it for Milly—far from it: he did it for himself, and to advance his prosperity with the Doctor. His prosperity with the Doctor was extremely low, and he had made one mistake already by offering the Doctor half-a-box of dates in a rather patronizing way; and so now it was neck or nothing, and Mathers well knew the frightful risks he ran in the thing he was going to do.

He said, "I always make a success or an utter failure—at games, in class and everything. Either this will make me the Doctor's friend for life, or make him my bitter enemy for life."

The idea in the strange mind of Bunny Mathers was to bring 'Joe' back again to Merivale. He could not raise him from the dead, but he meant to do the next best thing, and dig him up and secretly stuff him.

Only Mathers could have imagined this, though there were one or two other chaps equal to doing the thing if somebody else had thought of it.

I said to Mathers, "What do you know about stuffing parrots?"

And he said, "More than you might think."

He had read the article on stuffing beasts in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, which Briggs allowed him to refer to, little knowing the reason; and he said that stuffing was simpler than embalming, and that his brother, Mathers minor, had often stuffed bats and moles and other things in the holidays at home. He told me that all you want for bird-stuffing is wire, cotton-wool and pepper; and for sixpence he could get all these things in great abundance.

Milly Dunstan knew where 'Joe' was buried, and the only difficulty, in the opinion of Mathers, was digging him up. For some reason, though he did not shrink from the horrors of getting 'Joe' ready for the stuffing treatment, he hated the digging up; so I undertook to do this. There was little danger, as 'Joe' had been buried in a secluded rockery under a large fern, where nobody ever went. Milly showed me the spot on a half-holiday, when I was supposed to be stopping in, owing to bronchitis or something of that sort; and I popped out, got a trowel from the gardener's potting-shed, and dug up 'Joe.' He had been very nicely buried in a large, empty tobacco tin of Browne's; and I also made the grave look all right again and put back the wooden gravestone. Minnie had stuck this up, and on it Freckles had carved for her the rather sad words—

"To the memory of darling 'Joe,' died 7th February, 1901. Age unknown. Regretted by all."

Owing to the weather being frosty, and the ground simply full of splinters of ice, 'Joe' had fortunately kept perfectly. This comforted Mathers a good deal, and when I told him the poor old chap was not even gamey, he was much pleased. He worked in fearful secrecy at night, and kept 'Joe' in his play-box by day. Most of the actual work was done at the passage window by moonlight; and when the moon was no good, which happened in two days, we used a candle-end. Once the pepper got up our noses, and we both sneezed in a way to wake half the

dormitory; but nobody suspected, and the work was gradually done.

[image]

MOST OF THE ACTUAL WORK WAS DONE BY MOONLIGHT

I merely held things and advised. The actual stuffing was entirely the work of Bunny. When 'Joe' was once ready for the cotton-wool, the stuffing was as simple as possible; and owing to his toughness we easily sewed up his chest afterwards; but the thing was to get him to look as if he was alive. This is evidently the great difficulty in the stuffer's art, and Mathers had not mastered it by any means from the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. I said—

"For a first attempt it is spiffing; but all the same, 'Joe' never looked like that in life or death. He is now, as it were, neither dead or alive."

Mathers admitted this. He said he thought it was the want of the eyes, and that all would come right when they were in.

I asked him where he was going to get the eyes, and he said he was going to write to the great Rowland Ward for them. This he did do, and they sent a pair of most lifelike parrot's eyes, and only charged three bob. The eyes did a great deal for 'Joe,' and certainly made him look alive. But it was a strange sort of unearthly life, I thought. They made him look creepy, as if he was a ghost risen from the tomb to haunt somebody who had killed him. Also about this time we had to get some Condy's fluid to steady poor old 'Joe' down a bit. I thought this was serious, but Mathers said not. He assured me that Condy's fluid is an everyday thing in stuffing parrots and suchlike; and then I had an idea, and got my 'anti-something' tooth-powder; which also helped, and so it came to be some use after all, which tooth-powder seldom is. We varnished the claws, and tried to stick back a lot of feathers that unfortunately came out in the process of stuffing. Then I got a bit of wood and a stick for a perch, and we wired 'Joe' on and put a walnut at his feet; which was a good thought of Bunny's, because walnuts were always his favourite food.

Then, from being very confident and hopeful and full Of the Doctor's joy and gladness when he should see the parrot, Mathers sank suddenly into a sort of state of despair. He couldn't get the wings right, and he said the thought of them tortured him day and night and sent him down three places in his class. At each attempt more feathers fell out, and finally I got impatient with Mathers and told him that if he messed about with the parrot any more the thing would fall to pieces and fail utterly. I also reminded him that the matron, when passing by the play-boxes the day before, had thought there must be a dead mouse behind the

wainscot. Things were, in fact, coming to a climax, and I said that as he'd had the pluck to stuff 'Joe,' I hoped, after all the fearful danger and swot we'd had, that he would keep on to the end and give him to the Doctor and trust to luck that it would come off all right.

Then he lost all heart about it and said that Milly should decide; but he was not fair to her, and only showed her the head. The rest he hid from her in a bath-towel. Of course the head was the champion part, owing to the eyes from Rowland Ward.

She cried first, but in a general way she was delighted. She praised Mathers; and she also said that it would be well to present it quickly to the Doctor, so that he could get some proper professional staffer to finish it and put a glass case over it as soon as possible. Of course a glass case was beyond our power.

Still Mathers hesitated; then, urged by me, he decided to have a second opinion. He said—

"I don't like Steggles; but he is the oldest and therefore the wisest boy in the school. I will show him the work and put myself entirely into his hands."

"There's a fearful risk," I replied, "because Steggles doesn't care for man or beast, and if he sees a chance to have some frightful score off you, he will."

"No, he won't," answered Bunny. "I shall throw myself on his sportsmanlike feeling."

"He hasn't got any," I said.

But he risked it; and for once Steggles behaved less like a common or garden cad than usual. We showed him the parrot, after making him take an oath of secrecy. The oath would have been merely a matter of form with him generally, for I have known him to break a blood-oath as if it was nothing; but somehow the excited state of Mathers and the extraordinary thing that he had done took the fancy of Steggles, and he showed a great deal of interest in the parrot, and gave us some jolly good advice into the bargain.

Of course he rotted Mathers when he'd got over the shock of the surprise. He struck an attitude of horror and fear and terror, and said, "Great snakes! Is it loaded, sergeant?" Then he pretended it was a ghost, and finally he held his nose and fainted. After all this foolery Mathers asked him for his candid opinion, and Steggles very kindly gave it. He said—

"If you take my advice you'll instantly bury it again: for two reasons. Firstly, because if the Doctor sees it he'll probably expel you; and secondly, because if you don't, the whole school will jolly soon be down with a fell disease."

To show you what Mathers is, after hearing this, nothing in the world would make him bury the parrot again. He said that it was a cruel thing, after all the danger and trouble and expense of stuffing 'Joe,' that Steggles should advise him just to bury him again; he also said that the slight scent was purely

medicinal; and that, as for expelling, if the Doctor could really and truly go so far as to expel a boy who had done nothing but try with all his might to give him a moment of great and sudden happiness, then the sooner he was expelled and sent to another sort of school the better.

In fact, he was so worked up by the idea of reburying the parrot that he decided he would carry 'Joe' before the Doctor the very next day—either immediately before or after prayers.

Steggles merely said that Mathers was young and headstrong, and he hoped that he should be there to see. Then he went, and Bunny and I had a long talk as to whether before or after prayers would be best. I said after prayers on a Litany morning, because the Litany always leaves the Doctor weak but in a very kind and gentle state; whereas before prayers he is sometimes rather short.

Therefore it was so, and after the next Litany morning Mathers went up, as bold as brass to the eye, and in his hand he carried 'Joe' hidden under a clean pocket handkerchief lent by me.

The Doctor had just shut his big prayer-book, and he looked down pretty kindly at Bunny.

"What have you there, Mathers minimus?" he asked, little knowing the nature of the thing that was going to burst upon his gaze.

"Please, sir," said Bunny, "it's poor old 'Joe!'"

Doctor Dunstan didn't seem to remember.

"Poor old 'Joe!' What do you mean, boy?" he asked in a changed tone of voice.

"The parrot, sir. I thought—I thought it was a pity he should be lost to you, being a beautiful object, and I—in fact—here he is, sir—stuffed by me; and the slight smell is medicinal," said Mathers.

Then he drew off the handkerchief and held the parrot up to the Doctor. Certainly it was a great effect, and at first the Doctor was evidently far too astonished to be much obliged to Mathers. He didn't take the parrot—on the contrary, he fell back a pace or two, and his astonishment seemed slowly to change to a sort of wild horror. First he looked at the parrot, then he looked at Mathers, then he regularly glared at the parrot again. Seen from a distance the effect of the parrot was not good. Evidently we had lost more feathers than we thought, and its back had got a lump between the shoulders, more really like a vulture than a parrot. Still, of course one could recognize it.

Mathers held it up; then, getting frightened, he put it down on a form, and I knew, from the trembling way he began to handle my handkerchief that if the Doctor didn't speak pretty soon, Mathers would blub in public.

These silences of the Doctor's are well known as awful. You can hear a pin drop in them; and during them his eyes roll round and round in the sockets, like

Catherine wheels, but much slower.

At last he spoke.

"Am I to understand, boy Mathers, that unaided you—you dug up, or disinterred, that unfortunate fowl and then sought to impart to it this bizarre, this grotesque, this indelicate semblance of life?"

Mathers said he was to understand that. He added with a shaking voice—

"I did it to give you pleasure, sir—on my honour."

The Doctor looked at Mathers minimus much puzzled.

"It is hard to conceive that even an immature mind, such as you possess, could suppose that pleasure would result to any intelligent being from so pitiful and indecent an achievement," he said. "The boy who tore this wretched bird from its last resting-place and set it up to caricature the entire race of *Psittacus erythacus*— However, this is no time to investigate your conduct, Mathers. You will join me after evening school in the study."

Then he looked at the parrot again and cleared his throat. Mathers slunk away to his seat, and as he did so, suddenly the Doctor started and seemed to 'point,' like a sporting dog. I think he had discovered there was more than met the eye about the parrot. He called up Macmullen, who happened to catch his gaze, and told him to take 'Joe' to the gardener.

"Direct Smith to place these remains in the spot I originally selected," he said; "and if anybody ventures to disturb them again the consequences will be exceedingly serious. Now go to your classes."

He waved his hand, and Macmullen took the parrot, and nobody ever saw it again. But to this day Mathers swears that Smith never buried him. He believes that in some secret place in his house the gardener has 'Joe' in a glass case; because, very truly, he says that no ordinary gardener would be likely to resist the temptation of having a rare and beautiful bird to decorate his house. Besides, the glass eyes. Also it is well known that Dr. Dunstan never goes into the gardener's house; which is really the entrance lodge to Merivale, and is full of Smith's wife and children. So I dare say Bunny is right there.

He told me afterwards that Dunstan was very cold, but not actively angry in the evening. Mathers said that the Doctor didn't seem to attach any importance to the fact that he'd stuffed 'Joe' to give him a great and sudden pleasure. Instead, he evidently thought that Bunny had done a rather daring thing to please himself.

"'Unseemly' was the word he used," said Mathers to me. "He seemed to think it was not a case for much punishment; but, all the same, he has told me to write out the article on the stuffer's art from the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, which is rather rot, because I shall certainly never want to stuff anything again in this world. I couldn't tell him all I'd been through to do it, because he'd got a sort of beastly idea that I *liked* doing it; though you know that it was nothing of the

sort. On the whole it has left him against me, and he seems to take a good deal of credit to himself for not making a lot more row about it. But whether he's going to let it rankle in his mind, so that I may suffer for it more or less till the end of the term, or whether, when I've done the impot., he'll feel as usual—just neither for me nor against me—I can't say yet. He might have tried to look at it from my point of view."

"You could hardly expect him to do that: masters never do," I said.

"It's all the worse for him, anyway," answered Mathers minimus. "To re-bury the parrot was a slight on me in a way; because whether he liked it or not he could have seen at a glance the hours and hours of awful trouble, and the fearful expense it must have been to me. The eyes alone were three shillings; and nobody in this world ever threw away valuable money in such a cruel manner. Besides, if it had gone off well and he'd taken it as I meant it, I fully intended other good surprises for him."

"You'd better not surprise him again for a jolly long time," I said. "He doesn't much like surprises—people don't when they grow up. They have a footling way of preferring everything to drag on in a tame and dull manner. My father hates telegrams, for instance."

"I had fully meant to get Johnson to bring him another and a better parrot," said Mathers. "Even a pair of parrots might have been arranged; and they would have made a nest about April, and laid eggs, and there would gradually have been parrots for all his daughters; and he could have taught them what he liked, even to the extent of Latin; for it is well known that a parrot will learn anything. But it's all over now. Never again will I try to give him pleasure—or anybody else either. Why, even Milly hasn't pitied me much—just because it's all a failure; whereas if he'd taken it in a manly way, and thanked me before the school, and, perhaps, given us a half-holiday or something and sent the parrot off at once to be measured for a glass case—how different it all would have been! Nobody would have called me 'body-snatcher' then; whereas now I shall be called that for life."

Which was all true enough in its way, and he was called 'body-snatcher' for ever more. Whereas, to show what mistakes happen, I'd done that part—simply as a friend.

THE BANKRUPTCY OF BANNISTER

No. III

THE BANKRUPTCY OF BANNISTER

I

I am Bannister, and what happened to me was a very gradual thing at first; but it grew and grew until finally something had to be done, and that something was called 'bankruptcy.'

Curiously enough I had heard the word before at home. In fact, as I told Gideon, who kindly let me explain my position to him, my father had once been bankrupted; and when he was a bankrupt my mother cried a good deal and my father talked about 'everlasting disgrace' and 'a bloodthirsty world,' and something in the pound. And then there came a day when my father told my mother gladly that he had been discharged, whatever that was, and my mother seemed much pleased. In fact, she said, "Thank God, Gerald!" and they had a bottle of champagne for lunch. It was in holidays, and I heard it all, and tasted the champagne, and didn't like it.

So, remembering this, when Gideon talked of me being a bankrupt, I said, "All right, and the sooner the better."

As I say, one gets hard up very gradually, and the debts seem nothing in themselves; but when, owing to chaps bothering, you go into it all on paper you may often be much surprised to find how serious things are taken altogether.

What I found was that my pocket-money was absolutely all owed for about three terms in advance, and that Steggles, who lent me a shilling upon a thing called a mortgage, the mortgage being my bat, was not going to give up my bat, which was a spliced bat and cost eight shillings and sixpence. He said what with interest and one thing and another his shilling had gained six shillings more, and that if he didn't take the bat at once he would be out of pocket. So he took it, and he played with it in a match and got a cluck's egg, and I was jolly glad. Then the tuck-woman, who is allowed to come up to the playground after school with fruit and sweets and suchlike, was owed by me seven shillings and fourpence, and she wouldn't sell anything more to me, and asked me rather often to pay the money. I told her that all would be paid sooner or later, and she seemed inclined not to believe it. Other debts were one and six owed to Corkey minimus for a mouse that he said was going to have young mice, but it didn't, and he had consented to take ninepence owing to being mistaken. Tin Lin Chow, the Chinese boy, was owed four shillings and threepence for a charm. It was a good enough charm, made of ivory and carved into a very hideous face. All the same, it never had done me much good, for here I was bankrupted six months after buying it, and

the charm itself not even paid for.

There was a lot of other small debts—some merely a question of pens and caterpillars; but they all mounted up, and so I felt something must be done, because being in such a beastly mess kept me awake a good deal at night thinking what to do.

Therefore I went to Gideon, who is a Jew, and very rich, and well known to lend money at interest. He is first in the whole school for arithmetic, and his father is a diamond merchant and a banker, and many other things that bring in enormous sums of money. Gideon has no side, and he is known to be absolutely fair and kind even to the smallest kids. So I went to him and I said—

"Please, Gideon, if it won't be troubling you, I should like to speak to you about my affairs. I am very hard up, in fact, and fellows are being rather beastly about money I owe them."

"I'm afraid I can't finance you, Bannister," said Gideon awfully kindly. "My money's all out at interest just now, and, as a matter of fact, I'm rather funky about some of it."

"I don't want you to finance me," I said; "and that would be jolly poor fun for you anyway, because I've got nothing, and never shall have in this world, as far as I can see. I only want you to advise me. I'm fourteen and three-quarters, and when I was twelve and a half my father got into pretty much the same mess that I'm in now; and he got out again with ease, and even had champagne afterwards, by the simple plan of being bankrupt."

"It's not always an honourable thing—I warn you of that," said Gideon.

"I'm sure it was perfectly honourable in my father's case," I said, "because he's a frightfully honourable man. And I am honourable, too, and want to do what is right and proper as soon as possible."

"Why don't you write to your father?" asked Gideon.

"Because he once warned me—when he was being bankrupted, in fact—that if ever I owed any man a farthing he would break my neck, and my mother said at the same time—blubbing into a handkerchief as she said it—that she would rather see me in my coffin than in the bankruptcy court. All the same, they both cheered up like anything after it was all over, and father said he should not hesitate to go through it all again if necessary; but, still, I wouldn't for the world tell them what I've done. In fact, they think that I have money in hand and subscribe to the chapel offertories, and do all sorts of good with my ten bob a term; whereas the truth is that I have to pay it all away instantly on the first day of the term, and have had to ever since two terms after I first came."

"What you must do, then, is to go bankrupt," said Gideon thoughtfully.

"Yes," I said, "that's just the whole thing. How do you begin?"

"Generally other people begin," said Gideon. "Creditors, as a rule, do what

they think will pay them best. Sometimes they will show great patience, if they think it is worth while, and sometimes they won't. My father has told me about these things. He has had to bankrupt a few people in his time, though he's always very sorry to do it."

"In my case nobody will show patience, because it's gone on too long," I said. "In fact, the only one who has got anything out of me for three terms is Steggle, who has taken my bat."

"He has foreclosed on a mortgage. He was quite within his rights for once," said Gideon, who rather hated Steggle, because Steggle always called him 'Shylock junior.'

"To begin," continued Gideon, "two things generally happen, I believe; there is a meeting of creditors, and soon afterwards the bailiffs come in."

"I remember my father mentioning bailiffs wildly to my mother," I said, "but I don't think they ever came in; if they did, I never saw them."

"Then no doubt the meeting of creditors decided against it; and a meeting of creditors is what you'd better have," declared Gideon. "Tell everybody you owe money to that there is to be a meeting in the gym. on Thursday evening to go into the affair. I will be there, if you like, as I understand these things pretty well."

I thanked Gideon very much indeed and asked him if he could tell what happened next after the meeting.

"The claims are put in against you," he explained, "and then you say what you've got to say, and give a reason why you can't pay; and then your assets are stated."

"What are assets?" I asked.

"What you've got to pay with, or what you hope to have in course of time."

"I've got nothing at all," I said, "and never shall have until I'm old enough to go into an office and earn money."

"Then the assets will be nil," said Gideon. "But they can't be absolutely nil in your case. For instance, you have a watch, and you have that Chinese charm you bought from Tin Lin Chow and various other things, including the green lizard you found on the common last Saturday, if it's still alive."

"I can't give up the watch," I said, "it isn't mine. It's only lent to me by my mother. The lizard died yesterday, I'm sorry to say, owing to not liking captivity."

"Well, at any rate, the thing is to declare something in the pound," Gideon told me.

"It may be," I said, "but first get your pound. You can't declare anything in the pound if you haven't got a pound. At least, I don't see how."

He seemed doubtful about that and changed the subject.

"Anyway, I'll be at the meeting of creditors," he promised; and I felt sure he

would be, because Gideon was never known to lie.

II

A good deal happened before the meeting of creditors. Among other things I went down three places in my form, because my mind was so much occupied with going bankrupt; and I also got into a beast of a row with the Doctor, which was serious, and might have been still more serious if he had insisted on knowing the truth. It was at a very favourite lesson of the Doctor's—namely, the Scripture lesson, and, as a rule, he simply takes the top of the class and leaves the bottom pretty much alone, because at the top are Macmullen and Richmond and Prodgers, all fliers at Scripture, and their answers give the Doctor great pleasure; and at the bottom are me and Willson minor and West and others, and our answers don't give him any pleasure at all. But sometimes he pounces down upon us with a sudden question, to see if we are attending; and he pounced down upon me, to see if I was attending, and I was not, because my mind was full of the meeting of creditors, who were more important to me for the minute than the people in the Old Testament.

So when the Doctor suddenly said, "Tell us what you know of Gideon, Ban- nister, if you please," I clean forgot there was more than one Gideon, and said—

"Gideon is an awfully decent sort, sir, and he has advised me to offer some- thing in the pound."

Naturally the Doctor did not like this. In fact, he liked it so little that he made me go straight out of the class and wait for him in his study. Then he caned me for insolence, combined with irreverence, and made me write out about Gideon and the dew upon the fleece twenty-four times; which I did.

I also asked our Gideon if he was by any chance related to the Bible Gideon, and he said that it was impossible to prove that he was not, and that it was also impossible to prove that he was. In any case, he said, such things did not trouble him, though a friend of his father's, wanting to prove that he was related to a man who died in the year 734 A.D., went to a place called the Herald's Office and gave them immense sums of money, and they proved it easily. He said also that it was a jolly good thing the Doctor did not ask for particulars, because if he had known that I was a bankrupt and just about to offer something in the pound, he would probably have expelled me on the spot.

Gideon asked me if I had done anything about the bankruptcy, and I told him privately that I had. But I did not tell him what. I had, in fact, taken a

desperate step and written a letter to my grandmother. I marked it "Private" in three places, and begged her, on every page, not to tell my father; because my father was her son, and he had often told me that if I wrote to her for money he would punish me in a very terrible manner, How, he never mentioned, but he meant it, and so I had to make my grandmother promise not to tell him. I wrote the letter seven or eight times before I got it up to the mark, then I borrowed one of Foster's envelopes, already stamped with pink stamps for writing home, and sent it off. It was the best letter I ever wrote, or ever shall write, and this is how it went—

"MY DEAR GRANDMOTHER,

"I write this line, though very busy, to hope that you are exceedingly well and enjoying the fine weather. I hope your lovely, little clever dog, 'Fido,' is well also. I never see such a clever and beautiful dog anywhere else. My parents write to me that they are well. I am quite well. At least, I am quite well in body, though I have grown rather thin lately through not being able to eat enough food. This is not the fault of the food. It is my *mind*. You will be very sorry to hear, dear grandmother, that I am a bankrupt. I hope you may never know what it is to be one, for it is very terrible, especially if you are honourable and honest, as I am, owing to the books you always give me so very kindly at Christmas. To be a bankrupt is to be called upon at any moment to have to pay something in the pound, and this is a dreadful position, but even more dreadful in my case than in some others. For instance, when dear father was bankrupted he paid something in the pound and had plenty over for a bottle of champagne; but in my case *I have not got the pound*.

"I don't mean, of course, my dear grannie, that I want anybody to *give* me the pound; but the terrible thing is, I can't be a bankrupt without it, and so really I don't know what will happen to me if I don't get it. If by any wonderfully kind and lucky chance you could *lend* me a pound, my dreadful situation would, of course, improve at once, and I should, no doubt, get fatter and cheerfuller in a few days; but as it is I lie awake and sigh all night, and even wake chaps with the loudness of my sighs, which fling things at me for keeping them awake. But I cannot help it. I don't tell you these things to worry you, dear grannie, as very likely you have worries of your own; but it would not be honest not to tell you how very badly I want a pound just for the moment. There is to be a meeting of my creditors in the gymnasium in a few days, and how I am going to declare anything in the pound I don't know. It makes me feel terribly *old*, and I have gone down several places in my class and been *terribly caned* by Dr. Dunstan. But nothing matters if I can honourably get that pound. It would change the

whole course of my life, in fact. My beautiful bat has gone, you will be sorry to hear, owing to a mortgage, and I hope you may never know what a mortgage is. I have to borrow it now when I play cricket. But I am playing very badly this term, because you cannot be in good form if the brain is worrying about a pound. I shall lose my place in the second eleven, I expect. I have missed several catches lately, and I fancy my *eyes* are growing *dim and old*, owing to being awake worrying so much at night about that pound.

"Of course if you can give any sort of idea where I can get that pound I shall be very thankful. Unfortunately, in this case, five shillings would be no good, and even ten would be no good, strange though it may seem. Only a pound is any use. I must now conclude, my dear grannie, with best love and good wishes from your very affectionate grandson,

"ARTHUR MORTIMER BANNISTER.

"P.S.—Though all this fearful brain worry has thrown me back a lot in class, still *my Scripture is all right*, and I shall be able to say the Kings of Israel, either backwards or forwards, next holidays, in a way that, I hope, will surprise you. I have been a good deal interested in Gideon and the dew upon the fleece lately."

Well, I sent off this ripping letter, which was far, far the longest and best I had ever written in my life; and before sending it I printed at the top of each page, "Don't tell father," feeling that to be very important. Then I waited and hoped that my grandmother would read the letter in the way I meant her to, and great was my relief when I found that she had. On the very morning of the meeting of creditors she wrote a whacking long letter and sent a postal order for a pound; and the letter I put away for future reading and the postal order I took to Mr. Thwaites, who always changes postal orders into money for boys.

Me seemed surprised at the great size of the postal order, but gave me a golden pound and told me to be careful of it. I was so excited that I very nearly got kept in at morning school, but I escaped; and when the time came I went to Gideon, and he walked up to the gym. with me to meet the creditors.

III

Ten chaps were assembled for the bankruptcy, but I jolly soon cleared out Stop-

ford, because the sixpence he said I owed him had been paid at the beginning of the term, and Westcott was able to prove it. So Stopford went, but reluctantly. Steggles also went. He wanted me to take back my mortgaged bat and owe him about six shillings instead, but, knowing Steggles, I felt sure that something must have gone wrong with the bat, and when I examined it, I found that it was so. In fact, the bat was badly sprung; and Gideon said it was like Steggles, and a beastly, paltry thing to try to do. So Steggles also went, and that left eight fellows. These eight chaps were told to make their claims, and when they had, Gideon made me examine them to see they were all right. Only four claimed too much, and Mathers, who is an awfully kind-hearted chap, claimed too little.

So I said, "I'm afraid I owe you one and nine, not one and three, Mathers."

And he said, "That's all right. I knocked off a tanner when you won the house match against Browne's a week ago." Which shows the sort of chap that Mathers was.

I said, "Does anybody else feel inclined to knock off anything owing to my winning the house match against Browne's?"

But nobody did, and seeing that five of the creditors actually belonged to Browne's house I couldn't expect that they would.

"When you've admitted the claims," said Gideon, "I'll add them up myself."

So I went through the claims and had to admit them all.

Then Gideon added them up and said—

"The claims lodged against you, Bannister, amount to exactly one pound twelve shillings and eightpence; but I think you told me that the tuck-woman was also a creditor. If so, she ought to be here."

[image]

*"THE TOTAL LIABILITIES ARE EXACTLY TWO POUNDS," SAID
GIDEON.*

"I have spoken to her," I said, "and she says that I owe her seven shillings and fourpence. That is the figure. I told her that I was going to have a meeting of creditors, and she said I was beginning early and that she wished she could let me off, but that she had an invalid husband and twenty small children at home—or some such number."

"Then the debt ranks good," said Gideon. So he added the seven and fourpence to the one pound twelve shillings and eightpence.

"The total liabilities are exactly two pounds," said Gideon. "Now, Bannister, as the debts are admitted to be two pounds, the next question is, what are the

assets? I may tell you kids," he continued, turning to Corkey minimus, and Fair-lawn and Frost, who were the smallest of the creditors in size and age, "that the word 'assets,' which you very likely do not know, means what Bannister has got to pay you with. You have made him a bankrupt and he owes you two pounds; so now the simple question is how much can he pay of that money? Of course he can't pay it all—else he wouldn't be a bankrupt—but he is going to pay according to his assets. Now, Bannister," he concluded, turning to me, "you'd better tell the meeting what your assets are. Does everybody understand?"

Everybody understood, or said they did, except Frost, and he kept on saying over and over again, like a parrot, "Fivepence and a lead pencil, five-pence and a lead pencil," till Gideon at last had to tell him to shut up and not interfere with the meeting.

Then I spoke. I said, in finite a quiet sort of way, as if it was an everyday thing—

"I have decided to pay something in the pound, Gideon."

But Gideon was rather impatient.

"We all know that. That's what we're here for," he said.

"You couldn't all know it," I answered, "because none of you knew that I'd got a pound. You can't pay something in the pound unless you've got one. And I thought it might interest the creditors at this meeting to know that I have got one."

They were frightfully interested, naturally, and even Gideon was. I put it into his hand and he looked at it and turned it over and nodded.

"The assets are a pound," said Gideon; "I've no doubt you'll all be glad to hear that."

The chaps evidently felt very different to me when they heard the assets were a pound, because most of them, as they told me afterwards, didn't know there were any assets at all. They got rather excited, in fact, and Fowle even asked if there might be any more assets.

But I said, "No. There is only this pound. When I became bankrupt I determined that I would pay something in the pound, and I wrote to private friends and put the position before them, and they quite agreed with me and sent the pound; and now I am going to pay something in it. I don't quite know what that means, but it is an honourable and proper thing to do; and Gideon does know what it means, and I shall be very much obliged to him if he will say what I am to pay in it."

"It is quite easy," said Gideon. "You have a debt; you can't pay it all, so you pay so much in the pound."

"That's what I'm going to do," I said.

"The question is, how much you're going to pay in the pound," said Forrest,

who had made more row than all the rest of the creditors put together, though I only owed him a penny.

"I know that's the question without your telling me," I answered. "Gideon has the pound, and he will say what I am to pay in it."

Gideon looked rather puzzled.

"You don't seem to understand even yet, Bannister," he said. "You don't pay so much in the pound of the assets; you pay so much in the pound of the debts."

I didn't pretend to understand what Gideon meant by this complicated way of putting it, and told him so.

"All I want," I said, "is to do the strictly honourable thing and pay so much in the pound, which I have handed over to Gideon for that reason."

But Gideon, much to my surprise, seemed to feel rather annoyed at this.

"I wish you'd try and understand the situation," he said. "When you speak of so much in the pound, it's a figure of speech in a sort of way. It isn't a real, single, solitary pound."

"It's real enough," I said; "Thwaites gave it to me in exchange for a postal order."

"*This* pound is real, but——" Then Gideon broke off in a helpless sort of way, and then he began again.

"You owe two pounds—d'you see that?"

"Of course," I said. "That's the whole thing."

"And you've got one pound—d'you see that?"

He held it up, as if he was going to do a conjuring trick with it.

Of course I said I did see it.

"Then, if you owe two pounds and can only find one, how much are you going to pay in the pound?"

"Whatever you think would be sportsmanlike, Gideon," I said.

"It isn't a question of being sportsmanlike, it's a question of simple arithmetic," he said. "You've got twenty shillings, and you owe forty; you owe just twice as many as you've got; therefore it follows that you'll pay ten shillings in the pound; and that's a good deal more than many people can."

"I'll pay more than that," I said. "I'll pay fifteen shillings."

"What an ass you are, Bannister!" answered Gideon. "You *can't* pay fifteen shillings, you haven't got it to pay."

"My Dear chap," I said, "I've got a pound."

"You've got nothing at all," he said. "You pay ten shillings in each of the two pounds you owed, and then there's nothing left."

After that I began to see; and when we went into it all and got change, and paid each chap exactly half of what I owed him, it turned out that Gideon was perfectly right, and there wasn't a farthing left over. Everybody was fairly well

satisfied except the tuck-woman, but nobody seemed much obliged to me; and I couldn't help thinking that though Gideon had been awfully decent about it, and managed it all frightfully well, nevertheless a grown man would have managed it even better. Because, take my father's bankruptcy and look how jolly different that turned out to mine. I don't know what he paid in the pound, but I do know there was enough left over for him to buy a bottle of champagne, and for my mother to say "Thank God!" Whereas my bankruptcy appeared to have left me exactly where I was before, and there was nothing whatever left over to buy even a bottle of ginger beer.

I pointed this out to Gideon, and he said—

"Of course I don't know how much your father paid in the pound."

Presently I said, "I'm awfully obliged to you, Gideon, and I shall never forget how kind you have been. And I wonder if you'd mind adding to your fearful kindness by lending me a penny."

"What for?" said Gideon; "ginger beer?"

"No," I said; "for a stamp to write to my grandmother. I may tell you privately that she sent that pound out of her own money, and it was very sporting of her, and of course I must thank her."

Gideon didn't much like it, I could see; but at last he brought out the penny and entered it in his book.

"If you can pay it back by the end of the term I'll charge no interest," he said.

And just to show what luck Gideon always has, the very next Sunday, at church, I found a three-penny piece, doubtless dropped by somebody, so Gideon had his penny back in three days, and I went so far as to offer him a halfpenny interest, but he would not take it from me.

THE TIGER'S TAIL

No. IV

THE TIGER'S TAIL

Curiously enough a very curious thing happened to the other foreign curiosity that Johnson maximus sent to Dr. Dunstan. You may remember that Johnson, who is in the merchant service, brought the Doctor home a parrot and a tiger's skin, and that strange things overtook the parrot, especially after death. Well, strange things also overtook the Bengal tiger's skin, owing to me and Freckles and Smythe. I am Macmullen, and the real name of Freckles was Maine, and he came from Australia and had a great ambition to be a bush-ranger in course of time, and revive the practice of bushranging in New South Wales. Among other things that he had was an important bowie-knife—the same the Chinese boy, Tin Lin Chow, borrowed to commit 'harri-kari' with and failed. Well, with his great feeling for sport, Freckles naturally felt a good deal of interest in the tiger's skin, and often went to look at it in the Doctor's study. It was a good one, no doubt—white and yellow and black, with a long tail and a very fine head. In this head were glass eyes, like life, and the mouth was open and pink, with terrific teeth—worn smooth where the tiger had chewed his prey.

[image]

FRECKLES OFTEN WENT TO LOOK AT IT IN THE DOCTOR'S STUDY.

Then there came to Merivale a kid called Smythe. He was very small, but pretty solid and rather decent, and keen as mustard, and fiery in colour too.

It's a rum thing with boys, that some get chums with the greatest ease and some never do. And also the boys who often want to make chums never do, for some reason or other. But this kid soon made chums, though I couldn't tell you why. Of course he was nothing to me, because I'm thirteen—in fact, nearly fourteen—but for a chap just ten he was all right, and other chaps of his own age found him interesting. He had a lot of rather peculiar knowledge, gathered up from his father, who was a very learned man and wrote books for libraries. And he believed in heathen charms and old sayings, and remembered many queer things that his father had told him. He wanted to be the caretaker of a museum some day, but said that he hoped to be allowed to travel round the world first, like Darwin did, and see dwarfs and giants, and write books, and shoot a few specimens of different things not often heard of.

Of course he went through the ordinary adventures of new boys at Merivale, and it was in the matter of the 'kid test' that he became so generally known as a kid out of the common.

There is, just beyond the cricket ground, and before you come to the wood,

a huge clump of rhododendrons that is covered with purple flowers in May. It is just the sort of place that a wild beast would choose for its lair, if there were wild beasts at Merivale, and it was a regular thing with kids to tell them that a savage animal did live there, and only came out at night. This beast was a test of the pluck of new kids, and the new kid who would walk past the rhododendrons after dark alone, was considered to be all right. Of course something was done to make it seem more terrible, and, in fact, till he left, John Batson, the gardener's boy, was always told to hide in the rhododendrons, and shake the bushes and growl when a test was being made. This he did very well, having a chronic sore throat, and a very harsh and growling voice, like a ferocious beast. But he had to go, owing to some row with the servants, and the new gardener's boy could only squeak, and was useless for the test. Generally, however, somebody in the fifth could be got, and for some time Freckles kindly obliged when a test had to be made. It amused him, and he growled very fairly well, and could also imitate wolves in a state of hunger, which he had once heard at a menagerie.

Well, young Smythe was told about the mystery of the rhododendron bed, and seemed more interested than frightened.

"Hasn't anybody ever seen the thing?" he asked.

"No," answered Stegges, who was there. "The sound it makes is so frightful that chaps generally run for their lives, and never wait to see it."

Smythe was very keen about it.

"I wish my father would come up and hear it," he said.

"The point is," explained Freckles, "that each kid must go past alone. It only growls for kids, and doesn't growl for grown-up people. It is a test of bravery. There are chaps here still who have never been brave enough to pass after the first growl. They were chaps who turned out quite brave in every other way, too."

"What have I to do?" asked Smythe.

"You've got to walk out on an appointed night, after evening school, and go round the rhododendron bed twice, no matter what happens. It is a winter beast, and is never heard in the summer. So it is a winter test. You've just come in time for it," explained Fowle, who was also there.

Smythe had been at Merivale about a fortnight when he was asked to undergo the great kid test.

He thought a bit after this speech from Fowle. Then he asked a question.

"And what do you think the creature is?"

"Nobody knows," said Fowle. "Of course if that was really known, something might be done."

"It ought to be shot," said Smythe; but Gideon thought not.

They all pretended to be serious, and Smythe quite believed the story, because he was very young. In fact, only one kid had ever refused to believe it.

"No," declared Gideon; "it may be the only beast of its kind in the world, and to shoot it would be a thousand pities."

"Then it ought to be photographed," said Smythe.

"Impossible, because nobody ever sees it," answered Steggles.

"That's no reason," said Smythe; "it might be done with Rontgen rays."

Which shows what a clever kid he was, though so ready to believe this rot about the beast.

"One person did see it, however," said Fowle, "and that was Montgomery, who went into a bank last term, and it left a great impression upon him."

"What did he say it looked like?" asked Smythe.

"A sort of thing between a tiger and a donkey," answered Fowle very seriously.

"Rum," said Smythe. "It might belong to the zebra family."

"Zebras don't growl," said Freckles.

"More they do," admitted Smythe. "They bray."

Then he went on to tell us some things about zebras that we didn't know ourselves.

"If it could be killed, it would be a good thing," said Smythe; "and the chap who did it would have a very precious charm, because the skin, or part of the skin of a savage beast is a very tremendous charm to the man or boy who gets it. The Boringos, my father said—at least, I think they were Boringos, or if not, Kinnatoos, or some other tribe—always wear the skin of a fierce beast next their own skin, and by so doing get the fierceness of the beast into themselves, and so nobody ever interferes with them, and they always have the most remarkable luck, and live to a great age. So this fierce beast would be a good chance."

"You might have a dash at it," said Freckles, though he could hardly help laughing. "If you killed it and skinned it, and wore a bit of the skin, it would be a fine thing for you."

"Yes, it would," admitted Smythe. "I'd risk a good deal; but I've got nothing to kill anything with except a catapult, and of course that's no good against a fierce and growling beast."

Everybody laughed, but young Smythe was as serious as possible.

"If anybody would lend me a decent knife, I'd have a go," he said.

"You'll be frightened when you hear its dreadful sound," declared Fowle. "I was, and I'm never ashamed to say so."

"Very likely I might be," admitted Smythe. "But often a jolly good thing has been done by a man who was in funk at the time; and I'd have a dash, anyhow; because, think if I succeeded, and got a charm that would last for a lifetime!"

"I'll lend you my well-known bowie-knife if you'll be careful of it," said Freckles.

With that he took it out of his pocket, where it hangs suspended by a lanyard, so that Freckles can get it in a moment, in time of need, when he goes on his hunting expeditions on half-holidays.

Young Smythe thanked him frightfully, and took the knife.

"It's just been sharpened for me by the gardener," explained Freckles. "It can pretty-well cut hairs, so you'd better be careful." And Smythe promised he would be.

Then it was decided that the test should take place that evening before evening prep. It was a good day to choose, because the Doctor and Mrs. Dunstan were going out to dinner somewhere, and we always felt a sort of feeling of more freedom at such times.

When the kid had gone I warned Freckles that he might be doing a dangerous thing; but he laughed and said not. Then Steggles had one of his terrific ideas, that nobody gets but Steggles, and he said—

"What a lark it would be if we could fake up a fierce beast, and make it come out of the rhodo. bed just as you let off a frightful yell, Freckles!"

Of course Freckles admitted it would.

"With some kids one couldn't dare," he said. "Such a thing happening to Mathers, for instance, would certainly make him go dotty for ever; but this kid doesn't know what fear is. It would be a lark to see what he'd do."

"You'd better be pretty careful, or he'll stab you," said Gideon. "He's jolly quick, and you'd look rather a fool if a new kid went and ran you through with your own bowie-knife."

"So I should," admitted Freckles; "but I'm not afraid. You forget my great power of seeing in the dark. I'm jolly near as good as a cat at it."

Then I suddenly had the most awfully fine idea, apart from machinery, that ever I did have. Little did I know what would happen, but still, looking back, it is only fair to me to admit the awful fineness of the idea. I said—

"The Doctor being out, couldn't we get the tiger-rug and stuff it with pillows, and stick it up on four cricket-stumps just round the corner of the rhodo. bed? Then, where we are all hidden behind the pavilion, we see the fun, and after it's over and the kid has bolted, we can take the skin back."

Freckles whistled, and Steggles asked—

"Did you think of that all by yourself, Macmullen?"

And I said, "Certainly I did."

But Gideon thought it wouldn't do.

"In his excitement he might actually stab the skin," he said; "and that would lessen the value of it a great deal. The Doctor would be frightfully annoyed."

"Not that that matters," said Steggles.

"No," admitted Gideon, "not to us; but a treasure is a treasure, and just for

the sake of swizzling a kid it seems a pity to spoil a valuable tiger-skin worth three or four pounds at least, and perhaps more."

However, we didn't look at it in that light. Steggles and Freckles were a great deal taken with the idea, and Fowle, who was something of an artist, or thought he was, promised to make the tiger-skin look alive if somebody else got it. Of course he wouldn't have run the risk of taking it—such an utter footling coward as him. No more would Steggles.

I and Freckles both wanted to have the honour of getting it, and I argued that as the idea was mine I ought to be allowed to do this; but Freckles said that as a much more experienced hand at adventures and dangers than me, he must do it.

He said, "If it was machinery, Mac., I should say nothing; but for breaking rules and doing daring things after dark you are not in it with me."

Which was true. So he got the rug, and was late for prayers in consequence; but when Briggs reads prayers instead of the Doctor, many are late, because Briggs is short-sighted. Besides, the other masters generally don't come at all when Briggs reads them, though they never dare to stop away when the Doctor does.

Anyhow, Freckles got the rug, and Fowle, with some cricket-pads and Thompson's bicycle, faked up a most extraordinary and hideous monster looking out of the rhododendrons. It glared through its glass eyes and seemed ready to spring, and its tail was stretched into the path, with the point, as it were, wagging like a cat wags her tail when she's in a bate. Even before dusk it looked terrible, but much more so when it began to get dark.

Then the time came, and we hid behind the edge of the pavilion, and Freckles practised a growl or two, and got into the rhodo. bed, and Steggles found young Smythe and told him the time for the test had come.

Steggles said, "The playground is quite empty now, and I see the rhododendrons bending in the middle, so the beast is evidently there. You'd better be quick, and go and get it over—twice round, mind."

Smythe was pale, but firm.

"One thing," he said, "the chap called Fowle has been trying to funk me all the afternoon, and he says the beast has killed two boys in its time, and that they were both red-haired boys. Of course, if that's true, it is rather serious, me being red-haired."

"You needn't mind what Fowle says," answered Steggles; "he never passed the test at all. I remember when he came as a kid—the nastiest kid that ever did come, for that matter. He is a coward to the backbone, and would rather have paid away his pocket-money for the whole of the term than go through the test."

"So I was told," said Smythe; "and I told him he was a coward, and that I

didn't care for him trying to funk me. All the same, if it really and truly killed two boys with red hair—"

"It didn't," replied Steggles. "On my word of honour, it didn't. It feeds on poultry, I believe, and nobody can really prove that it ever killed a boy. You just show what you're made of, and you'll soon find you've got good friends up in the fifth form, including me myself. As for Fowle, since Travers licked him with one hand tied behind him, and since Johnson found the name of 'Maude' written thirty-two times in various letterings on his blotting-paper, nobody has cared to be seen with him. He can draw angels with wings fairly well, though nobody wants them when they are drawn; and that's all he can do but sneak, and tell lies, and be a cur in general."

So Smythe was comforted, and took out the bowie-knife lent him by Freckles, and went off, as he supposed, into the empty playground. But there were at least twenty chaps hidden there to see what he would make of the beast that Fowle and Freckles and I had set up.

II

Well, young Smythe came boldly on, and only stopped when Freckles gave his first growl. Then the kid stood still, and then he pulled out the bowie-knife and opened it. He evidently felt that it would be better to do the deed pretty quick, before he had time to think about it; so, despite the sounds and howls of Freckles, he dashed round at his best pace, and was actually past the beast before he had grasped the horror of it. But he saw it all right, and he told me afterwards that the moment he saw it he began to stream with perspiration strangely enough, though the night was jolly cold. He also said that there came a very strange feeling in the pit of his stomach, but he couldn't be sure whether he felt frightfully hungry, or merely that he was going to be sick. He waited a moment before making the second dash round, and we could see him dimly panting, and his breath going into the air like steam. At the same moment the bell also rang, but nobody went immediately, because we wanted to see if Smythe would face the beast again. Freckles now began to imitate wolves in a state of hunger, and Steggles bet me sixpence that Smythe wouldn't go round again. But, of course, nobody but new boys, who don't know him, ever bets with Steggles, as he has never been known to pay when he loses. So I took no notice.

Then Smythe dashed round again, and we were just going to come out and rot him about it, and cheer him for passing the test, when he did a thing of the

most astonishing character. He seemed now to have got a little accustomed to the horror of the beast, and he suddenly crept towards it with the bowie-knife of Freckles ready to strike. He regularly stalked it, like a hunter stalks his prey, and Freckles, who was hidden just behind the beast, growled and roared all he could; but I think he roared rather nervously, for the kid looked frightfully keen, and evidently meant to have a dash at the beast, whatever happened. We were just going to rush out and stop him, but he didn't give us time. He suddenly screamed very loudly, partly to keep up his own courage, and partly to distract the beast, and then he dashed forward, and stooped down and cut the creature's tail off at a blow! He then leapt aside very cunningly—to avoid its spring, as he told me afterwards; but of course it didn't spring, but only glared. A moment later Smythe was flying for his life—with the tail!

As if this wasn't curious enough, still stranger things happened afterwards. Because the next difficulty was what to do about it. In fact, after young Smythe had hooked it with the tail of the Doctor's tiger-skin, the rest of us looked rather fools. Of course, the first thing to do was to get the skin back into the study, and this Freckles did; and the next thing to do was to get the tail back from Smythe, and this Fowle, who was monitor in Smythe's dormitory, promised to do that night.

But Smythe wouldn't give it up. He had most carefully hidden it, and absolutely refused to give it to anybody! The next day Freckles, and Steggles, and I had Smythe before us in the gym., and asked for an explanation. We told him all about the test, and applauded him for his bravery, but explained that the tail he had cut off belonged to Dr. Dunstan's tiger-skin, and that its loss would make an awful row in the school, and very likely end in his being expelled. Then he said that Dr. Dunstan couldn't expel him, because he wouldn't know he had had anything to do with the tail. Which was true; besides, the Doctor being so blind, it might be a long time before he discovered the tail was gone. Then Smythe argued jolly well for a kid. He said that, for all he knew, the beast that we had made was a live, and furious, and dangerous beast; therefore his bravery in cutting the tail off single-handed with the bowie-knife was just as great as if it *had* been alive. Freckles admitted this. He said that the bravery of Smythe was undoubtedly immense, and that, so far as that went, he richly deserved to keep the tail. He even said that if he could have spared it he would have given Smythe the famous bowie-knife; but of course he could not do this, for it was his most important arm in all his own adventures when he practised to become a bushranger. Then Steggles asked Smythe what he had done with the tail; and Smythe made us promise faithfully not to tell, and we did so. Then he said that he was wearing it next his skin—round his stomach, in fact—and always should do so for the rest of his life, if it worked well.

He said, "It's awfully uncomfortable, and scratches something frightful, but that's a mere nothing to the advantages. I didn't, of course, kill the tiger, but in a way I might have; and, anyhow, I thought it was alive; and I'm going to give it a fair trial."

I asked him what he expected the tiger's tail would do for him, and he said, "Make me fierce. By rights the fierceness of the tiger ought to go straight into me, and I ought to fear nothing, in the same way that the tiger when it was alive feared nothing. But as I didn't actually kill the tiger, of course it may not work as I hope."

He assured us solemnly that he believed the beast was alive when he dashed at it and cut its tail off; and he also assured us that he had never seen the Doctor's tiger's skin, and did not so much as know that he had a tiger's skin. And we believed him, and let him keep the tail.

Steggles, however, warned young Smythe of one thing. He said, "Be jolly careful that Fowle doesn't see it when you're getting up or going to bed, or very likely he'll sneak. He hates you already for scoring off him, so mind you hide it from him."

Smythe naturally thanked Steggles a good deal for this kind advice, and said that he would be cautious, and that he already hated Fowle a good deal, and that if he really did become fierce pretty soon, Fowle would be the first to know it.

So there the thing was left, and when the Doctor found that his tiger's tail was gone—which he did do, owing to one of his daughters pointing it out—nobody knew anything at all about it.

The Doctor made far more fuss than we expected, and was bitterly hurt over the loss, and seemed to be inclined to expel everybody, because nobody would confess. But, of course, from the business point of view he couldn't do that, because, as Gideon said, his occupation would have been over, and it might have taken many years for him to collect together one hundred and three boys again. Gideon also said that the competition was fearful among school-masters, and expelling was quite a thing of the past, owing to the difficulty of getting new ones.

Then came the tremendous end of the whole business, and such fierceness as young Smythe had managed to get, after wearing the tiger's tail for three days, was as nothing to the fierceness of the Doctor when he found it out.

It burst upon us on a half-holiday, and the half-holiday, as such, was ruined by it. After saying 'Grace' at dinner, Dr. Dunstan told the school to be in chapel—every boy—at half-past two. Leave was stopped, and only the football team, which played a match that afternoon, was allowed to go. Everybody had theories during dinner, but nobody was right, or anything like right. We noticed

that the Doctor seemed thundery, and that he looked sometimes very fixedly at the bottom of the table, where Mr. Mannering, the underest master of the lot, though a 'blue,' presided over the dinner of the lower school.

Then we went into chapel, and those interested in the tiger's tail were all there, except Freckles, who is in the footer eleven.

"Boys," began the Doctor, "I have received an anonymous letter, and if any among you should be in doubt of the meaning of that word, I may tell you that it is derived from the Greek *a* and *onoma*, signifying 'without a name,' or 'nameless.' The letter is, in fact, unsigned.

"Now, in the ordinary course of events, I should disdain to notice such a communication. As I remarked during a newspaper controversy in '82 to an agnostic writer who propounded infamous opinions and hid himself behind the *nom de plume* of 'Lucretius,' 'the man who fears to proclaim himself, and lacks the courage of his own views, *ipso facto*, places himself beneath the notice of any serious antagonist.' The discussion, which verged on the acrimonious, and to which two bishops contributed, was protracted through August and the earlier part of September. Then, having proved my points to the satisfaction of all religious men, I withdrew from the debate. That, however, is not what you are here to know, and, indeed, happened many years before any among you was born. What will more directly interest you is this: that for once I have decided to give weight to my nameless correspondent's communication. It is brief, and printed in capital letters. I shall rehearse it to you."

Then he read out these remarkable words—

"*Dear Sir,—The tiger's tail is worn by Smythe next his skin, under his vest.*"

"That is all," continued Dr. Dunstan. "There is no clue—either to the sender or to his object in conveying this astounding information to me. Concerning him I shall make researches anon, when we have proved the truth or falsity of his statement; but for the present we are concerned with the name of Smythe. Now, the name of Smythe may not be familiar to many among you. I find that Smythe is a newcomer. He has been at Merivale only since the beginning of this term. He is very young, and unusually ignorant, but he is not too young, and not too ignorant to know the meaning of such simple and straightforward Anglo-Saxon as I am in the habit of employing when I address my boys. He is aware that I have a tiger's skin, and that this interesting relic is dear to me as the gift of one who distinguished himself within these walls, and carried the moral lessons, and even a little of the scholastic erudition of Merivale School into the larger life beyond,

when he went down to the sea in ships. Huxley Smythe is also aware that this integument has been mutilated by some senseless and wicked hand. Then let him come forward and tell us more, if, indeed, he knows more than we all know. Let him step before me and explain the significance of these words from a nameless source. I hope with all my heart that he may proclaim them false, and, what is more, prove them false, for Huxley Smythe's father is a very distinguished and learned gentleman, and a Fellow of the Royal Society. It is impossible too highly to esteem his discoveries and surmises respecting the customs of the Ancients. Such a man puts truth before all things; such a man will be cut to the heart if his offspring should prove other than honest and upright. Come hither, Huxley Smythe!"

So Smythe went, and jolly cheap he looked. His face turned the colour of gooseberry fool, and his hair seemed to become many shades redder than usual as he walked up the chapel. He was naturally small, and he seemed much smaller than he was, owing to walking up the chapel all alone.

"Speak," said the Doctor, "and address your remarks to me. Do you, or do you not know what has become of the caudal appendage of my tiger-skin?"

"Yes, I do, sir," replied Smythe.

"You do, sir! Then why, when I invited information on this subject, did you deny it to me?"

Smythe did not reply to this question. He merely said, "I cut off the tiger's tail, sir, in a moment of great excitement, and having once got it, I thought I'd keep it."

"Well may you have been excited, sir, at the instant of such an outrage! And what next, sir?" asked the Doctor.

The whole of the upper part of his body began to lift in a lump, as it always did when he got worked into a rage.

"Next, sir, I decided to wear it round my waist."

"And will you be so good as to enlighten us as to the reason for this extraordinary decision?"

"The Boringos do it, sir, or else the Kinnatoos. My father told me that they—"

"Boringos, sir! Kinnatoos, sir! What are the Boringos to you, wretched youth—or the Kinnatoos, either? Because certain heathen nations, as yet far from the light, indulge in gross superstition for their own benighted ends, and credit inanimate objects with imaginary virtues and grotesque qualities which we, who are civilized, know right well that they do not possess—because these things are so, is that any reason why a Christian boy in a Christian school should seek to emulate their misguided credulity? The question before us is not why the Boringos do these things, but why you cut off my tiger's tail, sir, and wore it

round your person?"

"To get fierce, sir," said Smythe.

The Doctor simply heaved in his indignation.

"To get fierce, sir!" he said, repeating Smythe's words in a tone of helpless despair.

"Yes, please, sir. With luck the fierceness of the tiger ought to go into me," explained Smythe.

"This is almost too much," said Dr. Dunstan.

"Because I thought that to be as fierce as a Bengal tiger would be useful, sir," Smythe ventured to say.

"Silence, sir!" roared the Doctor in such a tremendous tone of voice that Steggles whispered to me the Doctor himself must have been wearing about a dozen tigers' tails all his life.

"And how *dare* you want to be fierce, sir?" went on the Doctor. "You come among us a child from a Christian home—an inexperienced and ignorant youth. And yet at ten—for that is your age, Huxley Smythe—you develop a disgraceful yearning to deteriorate from the state of civilization to which you are born; you debase your intellect and your morality by deliberate efforts to become demoralized; you seek to take a retrograde step, and recover the ferocity of primitive—or, as we say, pre-Adamite—humanity. You have striven to acquire the physical brutality of palæolithic man, sir, and—worse, far worse—you deliberately endeavour to impress upon your nature the disgusting attributes of one of the most pestilential animals that an inscrutable Providence has created and let loose upon this planet. He who could seek to secure the attributes of the tiger, Huxley Smythe, must already possess the potentialities of the wild ass! Never in the whole course of my scholastic experience have I met anything quite so painful as this depravity in a child of ten. Shed no tears, sir," went on the Doctor; "the time has not yet come for tears."

Because Smythe was blubbing a good deal at this dreadful view the Doctor had taken of him. Of course he didn't understand a word of it, and that made it all the worse.

"And where is my tiger's tail now, sir?" finally asked Dr. Dunstan.

"On, sir," answered Smythe humbly.

"Then it had better be taken off, sir!" said Dunstan, and he roared again. "Divest yourself of your upper attire, wretched boy. Let this lesson not be lost on the least among us. Take off your clothes, sir, so that one and all of us shall be warned what evil instincts may, and do still mar human nature in the most unexpected quarters. I mourn for your accomplished father, Smythe; and still more for your poor mother. It was none too soon that they sent you into my care, young though you be. Go and stand beside the fire, sir, that the ordeal may

not physically injure you.”

The kid went to the chapel fire, which always burns in winter, and took off his coat and his waistcoat, his collar and his tie, and his shirt and his vest. Under the vest, fastened round pretty tight, just below his ribs, was the tiger’s tail. He looked awfully rum like this, and still cried a bit. A few chaps, including several of the sixth, laughed out loud at the appearance of Smythe and the tail; but the Doctor soon shut them up.

”Silence! Silence!” he shouted out. ”This is no laughing matter, Mayne; and you, Trelawny; and you, Cornwallis major. We ought to weep rather than laugh. Here is sortilege, necromancy, black art in our midst! Here we find a boy permeated with the—with the fetishism, the thaumaturgy, the demonology of the savage and the cannibal. And, what is more astounding still, we find him at Merivale! Take off that tail, sir!”

Smythe undid the tail, and took it off. There was a bright red mark all round his white body, and I should think the tail must have given him a pretty good doing. A tiger’s hair is undoubtedly scratchy when applied to a tender part of the human frame, like the stomach; and perhaps savages know this, and that is really the reason why they wear them. Because nobody who kept a tiger’s tail under his clothes for any length of time could help getting fairly snappy, if not actually fierce.

The Doctor ordered me to bring him the tail, because I happened to be near, and he caught my eye. This I did, and meantime Smythe got back into his clothes. Then the Doctor told the school it could go about its business—all but the culprit; and he marched away solemnly and slowly with Smythe and the tail.

The tail was very skilfully sewn back into its original place, and nobody who did not know the truth could have guessed at what had happened to it. And Smythe told us afterwards that Dunstan talked to him till tea-time, and then, suddenly reminded of the hour by the bell, flogged him, but very slightly. It is always a hopeful sign if the Doctor begins a row with talk; and the longer he talks, the less painful is the end. But if he begins with the licking and talks afterwards, it is bad, and adding insult to injury, as Steggles says.

One thing may be worth mentioning. The Doctor never asked for details, so Smythe never gave him any; and, as old Dunstan never heard about what Freckles did, or I did, we escaped intact. This made what Smythe had done seem far worse than it was. Of course we richly rewarded the kid for being such a jolly good plucked one, and gave him many a thing worth having; and we also made it up pretty thoroughly to Fowle for writing the anonymous letter to the Doctor. It proved to be him, because nobody else in the dormitory ever kept awake after everybody else was asleep, which was in itself a beastly mean thing to do; and we made him finally confess that he had spotted the tail. With the help of a

Chinese torture that Tin Lin Chow had shown us, we made him confess. It is beautifully simple, and a kid can do it. And when Fowle confessed at the first twinge, and said he did it for revenge because young Smythe had cheeked him in front of about twenty chaps, we felt that he was beneath a fine thing like a Chinese torture, and just kicked the calves of his legs for a little while, and then arranged, as a punishment, for the whole school to send him to Coventry for a week. Which was done.

RICHMOND MINIMUS, PREACHER

No. V

RICHMOND MINIMUS, PREACHER

I

Properly speaking he wasn't 'minimus' in his preaching days; but once there were three Richmonds in the field, as Dr. Dunstan used to say, and after Richmond major went to Sandhurst, young Richmond ought to have become 'minor,' and very much wanted to, but nobody could get into the way of changing it. Even when he was left all alone and Richmond minor left to go into a tea merchant's office, chaps still called him 'minimus.'

His father was a clergyman who had risen into a rural dean; but Morrison, who lived at Exeter and understood a frightful deal about religious people, said that, while a very good thing in its way, a rural dean was mere dust beside a cathedral dean. He seemed to think really, though I don't know whether it is true, that a minor canon is almost as classy as a rural dean, if not quite. Anyway, the father of Richmond minimus was one, and, until Morrison explained that it was nothing to make a fuss about, we were all rather interested. No doubt it was through his father that Richmond got his preaching power. He was going into the Church himself some day, and looked forward to being something out of the common in course of time. He said that he always felt a great liking for church—even from his earliest years—and had never been known to object to going, though his brothers—especially the one now training to become a tea

merchant—had not in the least cared for it.

He was a frightfully good kid, and Mathers always said he would die young, or else get consumption, if there was any truth in the stories we were allowed to read on Sunday afternoons. In these, which were different to week-day stories, there were many deaths. And sometimes the bad boys died and sometimes the good ones; but they died in a very different way. The good ones died in the lap of luxury, with their friends crying round the bed, and grapes and clergymen, and pretty well everything to make it all right; but the bad ones were smashed like flies, owing to setting machinery in motion; or fell over cliffs birds'-nesting; or got taken up by policemen. The difference was that the good ones died from sheer bad health. They had hectic coughs or something of that kind, and nobody could cure them—in fact, nobody ever seemed to try to; but the bad boys were always as hard as nuts and never had hectic coughs or anything. In fact, they would all be alive now if they had only gone to church on Sundays and not always chosen that day for adventures. In these adventures they invariably got mucked up, excepting when occasionally they were saved by good boys coming home from church, or sometimes even by good girls; which Stopford said must have been worse than death, owing to his hatred of girls.

This Stopford ought to have died a hundred times a Sunday really. He was not merely bad. That was nothing, because we all were. At any rate, none of us were good enough to get consumption. But he was a beast as well—an utter beast—and nobody liked him but Fowle; and nobody ever liked Fowle, so in self-defence Fowle had to like Stopford.

This Stopford was a bully, among other things, and a great hater of Richmond minimus. I think really it was the frightful sufferings of Richmond that made him take to preaching in a way, because, though Richmond minor was as old as Stopford, he had no muscles, being merely a piece of string for strength; so, though Richmond major could tackle Stopford, and did so till he left, after he had gone, there was nobody much to care whether Stopford bullied the kid or didn't bully him.

The first time I saw any of the instinct to preaching in Richmond minimus was after a footer match. It was the time when Buckland Grammar School licked us rather badly, owing to Mathers and Bray having smoked in secret before the match and being in far too footling a condition to play; and Richmond said to me afterwards, when we went back to Dunstan's, smothered by four goals to none, that often what we did in secret was rewarded openly.

I said—

"Hullo! That's like the Doctor on Sunday."

And he said—

"Let us take this defeat in a proper spirit, Gregson. It may be for our good.

As you know, I suffer a great deal from Stopford. Well, it will all tell some day. I don't exactly understand now why Stopford is allowed to twist my arms and then hit the muscles till they ache for hours and often keep me awake at night; but there's a reason."

"The reason is that Richmond major has gone," I said.

"There's a better reason than that," he said. "I may turn Stopford from his beastliness yet. Once or twice I've staggered him a bit with telling him what will come of his cruelty to me."

That was the first time I seemed to see a screw loose in Richmond minimus; but he didn't absolutely preach right bang out until we'd had a missionary at the chapel one Sunday.

Our chapel was also the big school-room, and at one end were panels of wood on week-days which very cunningly opened and turned into the Ten Commandments on Sundays. On each side was a door, and one was the Doctor's private entrance into the chapel, and the other was a deep cupboard wherein were kept blackboards, large maps and other things. In this chapel the missionary, who was an old pupil of Dr. Dunstan's, preached to us about the heathen of some rather good-sounding place; and Richmond minimus was so excited that he gave all his pocket-money and borrowed two-pence of Williamson. In this manner he subscribed in all five-pence; and if he could have borrowed more he would have given more. From that day he decided to be a missionary at least, if not a martyr.

The missionary was certainly a good preacher, besides having seen lions wild. It shows the difference between chaps that the lion part interested me most and the heathen part bored me, while Richmond minimus simply hated the lions, but the heathen part seemed to act on him like ginger-beer and excite him to a fearful pitch.

Three days afterwards the fit burst out in Richmond minimus. I came into the big school-room one night, ten minutes before the tea-bell, and there he was preaching to about eight chaps, chiefly kids! But Mayne and Morant were also there listening, Mayne being high in the sixth. Words seemed to flow out of Richmond as easily as they flow out of a master! He was talking about pocket-money.

"What is it but round bits of silver and copper?" he said. "Yet, my dear friends, there is a great power in it, and we should not spend it all on self. There are thousands of people who never have pocket-money, but they deserve it quite as much as us; perhaps more. Suppose you have threepence a week, which I have myself. Will it hurt you to yield up one halfpenny to the charity box? Oh, my friends, it won't! Yet that half-penny, given cheerfully every week through the term, comes out at twelve halfpennies, which is sixpence. Do it gladly and your

holidays will be brighter by sixpence well spent than they otherwise would be.”

Here the bell rang, and Mayne seemed in doubt whether to smack young Richmond’s head or rag him, or merely tell him he wasn’t to preach again. However, he did nothing except say to his chum, Morant, that it was queer.

It wasn’t what Richmond minimus said, but the way he said it. He was as keen and solemn as if he’d been preaching to a million people in a cathedral. The stuff about his wretched pocket-money might have been the most important thing ever uttered by a bishop, such was the way he said it. You couldn’t help listening. It was only afterwards, when you thought about it, that you realized what tommy rot it was. To cast away a half-penny into the charity box weekly was a childish idea, I thought; and Gideon, who understands the ins and outs of pocket-money in a way nobody else does, owing to being the son of a diamond merchant, said that the idea was false political economy; and I said so too.

As to Stopford, the charity box was a painful subject with him ever since the Doctor happened to see him putting something into it. The Doctor had found him subscribing rather often, and knowing the other things that Stopford did, it much surprised him. So he set a trap and had the box empty next time Stopford subscribed; and so at last found out that it was Stopford who put in brace-buttons—a great problem that had puzzled everybody the whole term. And they weren’t even his own brace-buttons.

After preaching three times Richmond minimus had the nerve to attack Stopford publicly in a sermon! About twenty chaps were listening to him, and as soon as he uttered the name, Stopford prepared to go and scrag him; but two or three big fellows told him to sit down and not interfere, and Richmond was so strung up and in such a frightfully excited state that he sailed right on and spoke about Stopford in a way that made many chaps bar Stopford for weeks afterwards.

”Oh, my friends,” said Richmond—he was standing up in front of the panels that turn into the Commandments on Sundays, and we were sitting down in the body of the chapel—”Oh, my friends, and there is another peril—a horror that walks in the noonday—a human leviathan seeking what it may devour, and its name is Stopford! I who speak to you know only too well this thorn in the flesh. I have suffered many things from him, and shall again. But I suffer gladly. I am chastened for my own good. Offences must come, but woe betide Stopford. He will have his portion in the burning lake, my friends, for he is a son of Belial; and he will call for a cup of cold water and probably none will bring it. He is a bully, a coward, a cribber and a dirty beast who never even washes his neck if he can help it. But black though his body may be, his heart is blacker, dear friends—”

It was at this point that Stopford jumped up with his eyes blazing; but Trelawny rapped him on the head and told him to sit down again. And Richmond

minimus went on faster and faster.

"Let us Christian spirits seek this vile boy and try and lift him out of the slough. Let us not shun him as a thing unclean; let us not dispatch him where the worms they crawl out and the worms they crawl in, dear friends, but let us rejoice over this sinner as over a piece of silver which is lost by a widow and was found again. Oh, my friends, remember that Stopford is a human creature with a soul. It is hard to believe this, but I am right. He is one of ourselves; that is the sad truth. For our own sakes—for the sake of the school—let us try and turn him from his evil ways, and teach him that to twist my arms in the sockets till they ache all night is doing the devil's work, and that to kick me till my shins, which are very thin, bleed and gather, is also the devil's work; and to take sweets out of desks is also the devil's work; not to mention many, many other things, such as smashing young Dobson's birthday present from home and—"

"I didn't take anybody's sweets, you little beast!" screamed out Stopford; and the big chaps roared and gave three cheers for Richmond and three hisses for Stopford.

It was a frightfully exciting sermon, though never finished, and Richmond minimus seemed quite dazed and wet with perspiration afterwards. I talked to him in secret during evening prep., and told him I was afraid that Stopford would never forgive him, and have a fearful score off him sooner or later. I said—

"I remember hearing my father tell a story about a great clergyman—the champion preacher, I believe—and being champion he had to preach to Queen Victoria, which he did do. But instead of being terrifically careful what he was about, he lost his head, like you did to-night, and I believe he gave it to the Queen pretty much like you gave it to Stopford. Not of course that the Queen was ever a quarter as bad as Stopford. In fact, it was high treason to say she was bad at all—such a magnificent Queen as her—easily the best ever known in history. And everybody was in a frightful rage with the champion preacher; and the Queen didn't like it too well herself; and the result was that he never became the Archbishop of Canterbury, though it was a dead snip for him before."

"I know," answered Richmond minimus, "but when you're preaching, the things come pouring into your mind. You can't pick and choose. You have to say what you're told to say, if you understand me."

I said I didn't in the least.

"If you wanted to give it to Stopford in a sermon you ought to have chosen a time when he wasn't among the audience," I said.

"For safety, yes," admitted Richmond; "but at these times when I preach, I care for nothing. I caught his little, hateful, pink-rimmed eyes on me and my rage against him rose. I felt like those old prophets when they had to go and give it straight out from the shoulder to the kings that did evil."

"It was jolly fine," I said. "But what about Stopford?"

"If he would meet me publicly and argue it out—" said Richmond minimus.

I laughed.

"That's not the way of Stopford," I said. "He won't argue about it; but he'll give you his sort of sermon when he gets you alone in a corner some evening after dark. Preachers are often pretty nearly martyred before they've done with it; and they die gladly; and very likely Stopford will martyr you."

"Very likely he will," said Richmond minimus; but not as if he looked forward to it.

II

Everybody in the lower school expected some pretty fearful things would happen to Richmond, but instead a miracle seemed to occur and Stopford did nothing. Gideon thought that he might have taken an action for libel against Richmond minimus if he had been grown up, owing to young Richmond's saying what he said about stealing sweets. It was well known to be true, but Gideon said that, curiously enough in law it didn't matter in the least if you said the truth. Because the law is often down on the truth far worse than on a lie. But Stopford never mentioned the matter again, and actually behaved kindly to Richmond and gave him two new kinds of nibs for his nib collection. He also let him have a picture of a very beautiful girl out of a box of cigarettes. I asked Richmond minimus what he thought of it, and he said Stopford was converted, and that Stopford was his first triumph. He was so earnest and hopeful about it that I felt when he became a missionary and went into those lands near the equator, that he wouldn't be contented with converting niggers, but jolly well want to convert lions and everything.

Encouraged by the remarkable success of Stopford, Richmond minimus preached several times more, and it got to be a regular lark, and chaps came from the other houses to hear him. Stopford always came and took it frightfully seriously; and then happened the row about Dr. Dunstan's medlar tree, and Mr. Browne caught Stopford after dark and reported him, and Mr. Mannering, the 'blue,' flogged Stopford at the order of the Doctor.

Now this Browne was the least but one of all the masters, and without doubt the utterest squirt that ever came to Merivale as a master. It is true that he was a Cambridge man, but there was nothing more to be said for him. Young

Forrest, however, knew something more, for it happened by a curious accident that he came from the same place that Mr. Browne did. What it was that Forrest knew we couldn't understand; but it appeared that Browne gave Forrest a great deal of help with his prep. on condition that he would not mention it.

This man was very ignorant and could only teach kids, and even them he didn't teach well. It was well known that he had many cribs in his room, and often—especially when he had to take the fourth in algebra—he would creep away from time to time and look at his crib swiftly, and return, and do off a sum on the blackboard as if he had no difficulty at all. He was great at having favourites, and he always chose sneaks, and often turned on them afterwards, as he did on Fowle, and also on Stopford over the medlars; though when caught, Stopford solemnly swore to Browne that he was getting the medlars for him.

Anyway, nobody liked Browne, and when Stopford begged Richmond minimus to preach against Browne, he thought a little and finally said that he would. I advised him strongly not to do it.

I said—

"Can't you see the frightful danger? Some word you may say may get to Browne's ears, and you may have a flogging at least, if you're not expelled."

But Richmond minimus shook his head.

He said—

"Not at all. A word in season often does good, as in the case of Stopford. I want to warn the fellows against the mean nature of Browne. I want to show them what Browne is and how a master may use his power like a beast, as Browne does."

"If it gets back to him, you're cooked," I said. "And you know how you work yourself up when you're preaching. I don't think it's at all wise."

"I've promised," answered Richmond minimus. "I'm going to preach to-morrow evening in the time after tea before prep.; and all Browne's house is coming to hear me."

Somehow I felt from the first it would be the undoing of Richmond minimus. The danger was too frightful. However, of course I went. It was the biggest congregation Richmond ever had, and he said that he itched to make a collection as he looked at the chaps—not for himself but for some good purpose. A crowd was in the chapel before I got there, and Browne's were all in a knot together, eager and longing to hear what young Richmond had to say about Browne. A lot of fellows from the sixth had also come in, and of course all the personal friends of Richmond minimus were there. Stopford was also there.

Richmond went up to the master's desk at the top of the room, full of calm cheek, and said a few things of a general sort; then he caught Stopford's eye. This reminded him and he began.

”Now I want to speak to you of a subject that will especially interest the boys of Mr. Browne’s house, namely, Mr. Browne. My friends, I wish I could say something hopeful about him; I wish I could tell you that he was a bright, shining example for us all to follow and imitate; but alas! you know it is not so. Mr. Browne is a very mean character. Before saying these words about him I have thought a great deal about him and studied him very closely, when, I am afraid, dear friends, I ought to have been studying something else. But I tell you fearlessly to beware of him. I know he has favourites; I know he encourages the sneak and the tale-bearer in our midst; I dare say among you at this moment may be some wretched chap who will go to Browne after my sermon and tell him what I am saying now; but do I care? No, I do not care. Nobody need care if they are doing right. Browne has had a good deal of mystery about him, and I have come to the bottom of it. One among us who lives where Browne does, knows the truth. I will not name him; but he had his head slapped by Browne the day before yesterday, though it is well known Dr. Dunstan won’t allow our heads to be slapped, owing to the danger of hurting the brain. At any rate Browne slapped his, and in a moment of natural anger, my dear friends, that boy told me the truth. Browne is a tailor’s son! That, of course, is nothing against him. The shameful and disgusting thing is that Browne is ashamed of it! He hates to think of it. Oh, my friends, what a paltry nature is this. I dare say his father is a better man than he is, though he *does* make clothes; and I do not hesitate to tell you, my friends, that Browne’s father makes clothes a long sight better than Browne teaches Latin; for we have all noticed the scabby manner in which he continually sneaks out of this room during class to rush up to his own study and consult cribs. I say nothing of his appearance. He cannot help that, though he could help those pink ties and those horrid boots with pearl buttons; but what I do say is that with such a lesson in our midst we must learn firstly, not to be ashamed of our parents, whoever they are; and secondly, not to make friends of dirty sneaks; and thirdly, not to be a hound in general; and fourthly, not to pretend we know enough Latin and algebra to teach it, when really we don’t know any worth mentioning; and fifthly, and lastly, my friends——”

What Richmond minimus was going to say for fifthly, and lastly, against the wretched Browne, we didn’t hear, for at this point a frightful thing happened. The door of the cupboard on Richmond’s right, where the blackboards were kept, opened violently and out leapt no less a person than Mr. Browne himself!

A very strange sound went up from the congregation of Richmond minimus, but he said nothing. For a moment Browne stood at bay, glaring out of his double eye-glasses, like the picture of a wounded tiger in *C. B. Fry’s Magazine*; then the chaps began to scutter out, and many dived and proceeded to the door entirely under the desks, hoping they would not be recognized. In fact, I did this

myself. But Browne was not bothering about us. His eyes, which squint by nature, had turned in upon each side of his nose and he was darting a horrid glance of rage and scorn at Richmond minimus.

Then, with dreadful slowness, he raised his hand and took Richmond by the right ear and said—

”Come!”

And Richmond merely said, ”Yes, sir,” and went, led by Browne, to the Doctor. As for me, I felt that Richmond minimus need never have worried about not being a martyr. He was going to be a martyr all right now.

After the blow had fallen—about two days after—he told me exactly what happened. By a curious chance the Doctor was writing a sermon himself when Browne appeared before him. The Doctor always preaches at Merivale on the first Sunday in the month, and this was the sermon he was writing, no doubt.

He put down his pen and took off his glasses and stretched his eyes in a way he has; then he told Browne to speak. And Browne said—

”I have to report this boy for insolence and profanity combined. Never have I known a boy do such a thing. Before half the school assembled in the great school-room he stood up and preached.”

”Preached!” said the Doctor, looking with great surprise at Richmond minimus. ”What did he preach about?”

”About me!” said Browne furiously. ”He dared to preach about my private affairs—at least—”

”Begin at the beginning,” said the Doctor. ”How did particulars of this outrage reach you, Browne?”

”Through the boy Stopford,” said Browne; and Richmond minimus fairly gasped to think how mistaken he had been about converting Stopford.

”Stopford,” explained Browne, ”came to me and said that he was very much afraid that liberties were to be taken with my name. I refused to believe it at first. Then, to satisfy myself, I went into the great school-room at the time mentioned by Stopford and stood behind the blackboards in the cupboard.”

Browne then related all that he had heard, and Richmond minimus said that he trembled with indignation and spoke so fast that Dr. Dunstan had to ask him once or twice to repeat the sentence. But Richmond admitted that Browne’s version of the sermon was very fairly just.

Then the Doctor said—

”Thank you, Browne. I much regret your natural annoyance. You may leave the sequel to me.”

So Browne hooked it and Richmond minimus was left alone with the Doctor.

The Doctor said nothing for some time. Then he sighed, and looked at his

sermon, and rose and went to the cane corner.

"What led you to do this outrageous thing, impious boy?" he asked.

"I felt called to do it, sir," said Richmond minimus. "I've preached seven times now, and more fellows come each time."

"I am aware that you are probably destined for the sacred calling," said Dunstan solemnly, "and your theological papers have always led me to regard you as a promising recruit, Richmond minimus; but preaching, or I should say a travestie, a bizarre burlesque of that difficult branch of the pastor's calling! And to select one of your masters for a theme!"

"He seemed a good subject to show what we oughtn't to do, sir. In preaching, of course, you want—"

The Doctor looked his most awful look, and Richmond minimus dried up.

"Probably what I want in preaching is as well known to me as to you, preposterous youth!" said the Doctor. "The present question is not what I want in preaching, but what I want in boys; and what I expect from boys after they have been for the space of three years under my personal care and control. To play the buffoon before your fellows is in any case degrading; but to do it under pretence of advancing their moral welfare—to preach in jest—this is perilously akin to profanity. Only a vitiated spirit of secularism can explain so gross an action. My heart bleeds when I think upon your parents, Richmond minimus, and upon your brothers who worthily upheld the honour and dignity of Merivale, and now, in the wider field of life, are bringing forth the good fruit sowed within these scholastic cloisters."

The Doctor always spoke like this about chaps who had left.

"Then," said Richmond minimus, "the usual event happened and, as you know, on the next morning I had, in addition, to tell Browne I was sorry publicly after prayers."

"One thing," I said. "What was that 'fifthly and lastly' that you were prevented from preaching?"

But Richmond didn't remember; so it was lost.

"Shall you ever preach again here?" I asked him.

And he said not. He said—

"No. On the whole it isn't good enough. And yet you mustn't think I mind the martyrdom. Only of course I don't want to be utterly martyred and done for before I grow up."

He evidently meant to be a martyr in rather a biggish way in foreign parts, like the Germans in China; because when they are bashed by the heathen, Germany always gets a few miles of China as payment. And so Germany is proud of her martyrs, and the Emperor too.

What did become of Richmond minimus I can't tell you. He ran away once,

to do good on a large scale, but he was captured and brought back before he had time to do much worth mentioning. He'll tell you that story himself. Anyway, he never preached again, and the whole affair, if it did nothing else, helped to show what Stopford was.

THE 'BOLSOVER' PRIZE

No. VI

THE 'BOLSOVER' PRIZE

I

There was once a chap at Dunstan's, ages and ages ago, called Bolsover, who turned into a novelist afterwards; and he was so frightfully keen about other chaps turning into novelists too that he gave a prize for composition. It was a book worth a guinea, and Dr. Dunstan had to choose it each year, and only the junior school was allowed to enter for it, according to the conditions made by the chap who gave it. Gideon calculated it out, and said that as twenty pounds is about good for one pound at simple interest in an ordinary way, the novelist chap must have handed twenty pounds over to Dr. Dunstan; and Steggles said he rather doubted if the novelist chap would have much cared for the books that Dr. Dunstan chose for the prizes; because they were not novels at all, but very improving books—chiefly natural history; which Steggles said was not good for trade from the novelist chap's point of view.

No doubt old Dunstan ought to have bought stories; and Steggles went further and said that it would have been a sporting thing for Dr. Dunstan to get the novelist chap's own books, of which he wrote a great many for a living. Steggles had read one once in the holidays, but he didn't tell me much about it, excepting that there was a man who appeared to have about four wives in it, and that it had three hundred and seventy-five pages and no pictures.

Anyway, the composition prize always interested us in the lower school, and it interested me especially once, because the subject was 'Wild Flowers,' and my cousin, Norman Tomkins, happened to be a frightful dab at them. When he

heard about it, Tomkins went instantly to Gideon, who lends money at usury, being a Jew, and said, "Look here, Gid., I'll sell you the 'Bolsover' prize for ten shillings now on the spot. As it's worth a pound, you'll make fifty per cent. profit." And Gideon said, "The profit would be about right, but where's the prize?" And Tomkins said, "I've got to write for it on Monday week; but it's as good as mine, because nobody in the lower school knows anything about wild flowers excepting me, and I can tell you the name of thirty-four right off the reel; so there's an end of it, as far as I can see." Which shows what a hopeful sort of chap Tomkins was.

But unfortunately Gideon knew the great hopefulness of Tomkins about everything, and also knew that it did not always come off. He said, "Who are in for the prize?" And I said, "First Tomkins, then Walters, then Smythe, and also Macmullen."

"There you are," said Tomkins. "Just take them one by one and ask yourself. If it was wild animals, or queer old customs, Smythe might run me close, or even beat me; but in the subject of wild flowers he is nothing. Then young Walters doesn't know anything about anything, and his English is frightfully wild, owing to his having been born in India. Well, that only leaves Macmullen, and Macmullen's strong point is machinery. He never looked at a flower in his life. When we went out of bounds on the railway embankment, he simply sat and watched the signals work, and took down the number of a goods engine that was new to him. And when he got up, I discovered that he'd actually been sitting on a bee orchis—one of the rarest flowers in the world! When I showed him what he'd done, he merely said, 'A bee orchis? Lucky it don't sting!' So that shows he's no use. In fact, when he hears the subject hasn't got anything to do with steam power, I doubt if he'll go in."

[image]

"WE WENT OUT OF BOUNDS ON THE RAILWAY EMBANKMENT."

But Gideon knew Macmullen better.

"He'll go in," he said. "His age is just right, and he won't be able to try again. He's not the chap to throw away the chance of getting a pound book just because the subject doesn't happen to be steam power. Besides, there's always time allowed to swat up the thing. I bet by Monday week Mac. will know as much about wild flowers as you do—perhaps more."

"Of course, as a chum of his, you say that," answered Tomkins. "But I've

made a lifetime study of wild flowers, and it's childish to think that Macmullen, or anybody else, is going to learn all I know in a week."

"He can spell, anyway," said Gideon, "which is more than you can."

In fact, Gideon didn't seem so hopeful about Tomkins getting the prize as you might have thought, and it surprised Tomkins a good deal. Gideon had a right to speak, because in his time he'd won this prize himself. When he won it, the subject happened to be 'Postage Stamps'; which was, of course, like giving the prize to Gideon, owing to his tremendous knowledge about money in every shape.

The time was July, and so next half-holiday Tomkins and me went into the country for a walk, for Tomkins to freshen up his ideas about the wild flowers.

He certainly knew a lot, but several things that I picked bothered him, and once or twice, I think, he was altogether wrong about them. He also picked a good many that he evidently didn't know at all, and carried them back to school to ask Mr. Briggs the names of them and anything worth mentioning about them.

Then, coming back through Merivale, who should we see but Macmullen, with his nose flat against the window of an old book shop there!

"Look here," he said, "there's a second-hand botany in here for sevenpence, and I've only got fivpence. I tried the man by showing him the fivpence all at once, but he wouldn't come down. Can one of you chaps lend me twopence till next week?"

He looked at the flowers Tomkins had picked as he spoke.

"D'you know many of them?" said Tomkins, knowing well that Mac. wouldn't.

"Only that—that nettle," said Macmullen rather doubtfully.

"It isn't a nettle," said Tomkins. But he was so pleased to see what a frightful duffer Macmullen really was, that he lent him twopence on the spot.

I thought he was rather a fool to increase Macmullen's chances like this; but Tomkins said, in his large way, that a few facts out of a botany book wouldn't help Macmullen now, especially if he didn't know the difference between sage and nettles.

"By Jove, I don't believe he knows the difference between sage and onions, for that matter!" said Tomkins.

Then Mac. came out with the book, and we all went back together.

It was frightfully interesting to see the different ways those four chaps went about trying for the 'Bolsover' prize. Tomkins got special leave off games, and spent his spare time in the lanes. He confessed to me that he was frightfully ignorant about grasses, and thought, on the whole, that it would be safer to leave them out of the essay. Macmullen told me that the whole subject bored him a good bit, but he thought he could learn enough about it to do something decent in a week, because a pound book was worth the fag. He was always pulling flowers to pieces, and talking about calyxes and corollas, and seed-cases and stamens, and other wild things of that sort. I asked Tomkins if it promised well for Macmullen to learn about stamens and so on, and how to spell them; and Tomkins thought not.

Tomkins said, "Briggs may very likely favour him, as we know he has before, owing to his feeling for everything Scotch, from oatmeal downwards; but, all the same, the subject is wild flowers, not botany. It's rather a poetical subject in a way, and that's no good to Macmullen. No, I don't think Mac. has any chance, though he did ask old Briggs to lend him the number of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* with 'Botany' in it, to read in playtime."

"I believe Briggs was pleased, though," I said, "for I heard him answer that Mac. was going the right way to work. Anyway, Mac. read quite half the article and copied some out on a bit of paper before he chucked it in despair."

Tomkins nodded, and I think he saw that it was rather a grave thing for Macmullen to have done.

"I might read it myself," he said. "I'm a little foggy between genera and species, and varieties and natural orders, and so on. Not that all that stuff matters. What you want is really the name of the wild flowers themselves and their colours and ways. Do you happen to know any poetry about flowers of a sort easily learned by heart?"

I didn't; but young Smythe, who was there, answered that he did.

He said, "What you say about poetry is awfully interesting to me, Tomkins, because I had thought the same. And I know many rhymes of a queer sort, and I can make rhymes rather well myself, and I had an idea I would try and do the whole of my composition in rhyme."

"Like your cheek," said Tomkins. "My dear kid, it will take you all your time to write prose. And what do you know about flowers, anyway?"

"I do know something," said Smythe, "owing to my father, who collects odd rhymes and things. It's called folklore. It includes queer names of plants and animals; also about remedies for warts, and the charms for curing animals from witches, and overlooking, and suchlike. I know some awful funny things, anyway, that my governor has told me, though they may not be true."

Tomkins was a good deal interested in this.

"Fancy a kid like you knowing anything at all about it!" he said.

There was only Walters left, but he was no good at all, and he'd simply gone in for it because his people insisted upon his doing so. I asked Walters if he knew much about wild flowers, and he answered something about cucumber sandwiches, which he had once eaten in large quantities owing to being forgotten at a lawn-tennis party. He seemed to think because a cucumber was a vegetable, and a flower was a vegetable, that a cucumber was a flower. He said that was all he knew about the subject, excepting that dogs ate grass when not feeling well. So I told Tomkins he needn't bother about Walters.

Tomkins, however, assured us that he wasn't bothering about any of them. He said that facts were the things, and not theories. So while Macmullen swatted away at his botany, and Smythe collected rhymes and offered anybody three links of a brass chain for a word that rhymed with toad-flax, and Walters merely waited for the day, and made no effort as far as we could see, Tomkins poked about, and went one evening out of bounds, with Freckles and young Corkey, into the famous quarry at Merivale Great Wood. They were chased, but escaped owing to the strategy of Freckles; and Tomkins felt the 'Bolsover' prize was now an absolute cert for him, because in the preserves he had met with an exceedingly rare flower—at least, he said so; and he believed that by mentioning it, and making a sketch of it in his paper, he would easily distance Macmullen, who did not so much as know there was such a flower.

As far as ages went, I must tell you that Tomkins was thirteen and two weeks, and Macmullen thirteen and seven months, while Smythe was ten and Walters merely nine and a half.

All four put on a little side about it the Sunday before, and a good many other fellows wished they had gone in, because the papers had to be written in the Doctor's own study, and there are some magnificent pictures and marble statues in that room such as are very seldom seen by the lower school.

I asked each one after breakfast on the appointed day how he felt; and Tomkins said, "Hopeful"; and Macmullen said, "Much as usual"; and Smythe said, "Sleepy, because I've been awake nearly all night remembering rhymes I've heard my father say"; and Walters said he had a sort of rather horrid wish that *his* father had died the term before, because he didn't think his mother would ever have made him go in for a thing he hated so much as this.

Two hours were allowed for the essay, and by good luck I happened to meet the four chaps just as they came out. So I got their ideas fresh on what they'd done. Curiously enough, all four were hopeful. Tomkins, of course, I knew would be, and probably also Macmullen, but Smythe and even Walters seemed to fancy they had a chance too. This astonished me a good deal. So I said to Smythe—

"How the dickens d'you think any stuff you can have done would be near to what my cousin Tomkins has done?"

And he said—

"Because of the rhymes. I was quite astonished myself to find how they came; and I also remembered a charm for nettlerash, and some awfully peculiar sayings just at the right moment."

And Walters also declared he'd done better than he expected to do. He seemed rather flustered about it, and wouldn't give any details; but he was highly excited, and inked up to the eyes, as you might say. He gave me the idea of a chap who'd been cribbing.

Macmullen looked rather a pale yellow colour, which he always does look at moments of great excitement, especially just before his innings at cricket. He wouldn't say a word to a soul until he'd gone to his botany book and read up a lot of stuff. Then he felt better.

As to Tomkins, he told me privately, as his cousin, that he had got in the names of no less than forty-five plants and seven grasses.

"That *must* settle it," he said. And I said I thought so too.

Mr. Briggs corrected the essays that night, and prepared some notes upon them for the Doctor to read when the time of announcing the winner came. We all stared jolly hard at Briggs during prep. the next day, and Steggles, who has no fear of old Briggs, asked him who had won. But Briggs merely told him to mind his own business.

After prayers the next day the Doctor stopped in the chapel, which was also a school-room, and told everybody to remain in his place.

Then he whispered to Corkey major, and Corkey went off, and presently came back with a very swagger book bound in red leather and having a yellow back with gold letters upon it.

The Doctor dearly likes these occasions; and so do we, because it means missing at least one class for certain. When he once fairly begins talking, he keeps at it. Now he had the four essays on the desk in front of him, and the prize; and then he spoke to Briggs, and Briggs led up Macmullen and Tomkins and Smythe and Walters.

They knew this was coming, and had all prepared to a certain extent. I noticed that Smythe had borrowed a green tie from Webster, and that Mac. had turned his usual hue at times of excitement. Walters was still inky, despite pumice

stone.

"We have now, my boys, to make our annual award of the 'Harold Bolsover' prize for English composition," began the Doctor. "Mr. Bolsover, whose name is now not unfavourably known to his countrymen as an ingenious fabricator of romance, was educated at this seminary. To me it fell to instruct his incipient intellect and lift the vacuity of his childish mind upwards and onwards into the light of knowledge and religion.

"The art of fiction, while it must not be considered a very lofty or important pursuit, may yet be regarded as a permissible career if the motives that guide the pen are elevated, and a high morality is the author's first consideration. Lack of leisure does not permit me to read story books myself; but I have little doubt that Mr. Bolsover's work is all that it should be from the Christian standpoint, and I feel confident that those lessons of charity, patience, loyalty, and honour, which he learnt from my own lips, have borne worthy fruit in his industrious brain.

"The work I have selected for the 'Bolsover' prize is *Gilpin on Forest Scenery*—a book which leads us from Nature to the contemplation of the Power above and behind Nature; a book wherein the reverend author has excelled himself and presented to our minds the loftiest thoughts, and to our eyes the most noble scenes, that his observance could record, and his skill compass within the space of a volume.

"For this notable reward four lads have entered in competition, and their emulation was excited by the theme of 'Wild Flowers,' which your senior master, Mr. Briggs, very happily selected. Wild flowers are the jewellery of our hedgerows, scattered lavishly by Nature's own generous hand to gladden the dusty wayside—to bring a smile to the face of the wanderer in the highway, and brightness to the eyes of the weary traveller by flood and field. None of you can have overlooked them. On your road to your sport—even in the very grass whereon you pursue your pastimes—the wild flowers abound. They deck the level sward; they smile at us from the cricket-field; they help to gladden the hour of mimic victory, or soften the bitter moment of failure, as we return defeated to the silent throng at the pavilion rails.

"Now, I have before me the thoughts of Nicol Macmullen, Norman Tomkins, Huxley Smythe, and Rupert Walters on this subject; and I very much regret to say that not one of them has produced anything which may be considered worthy of Merivale, worthy of Mr. Bolsover, or worthy of themselves. I do not overlook their tender years; I am not forgetting that to a mind like my own or that of Mr. Briggs—richly stored with all the best and most beautiful utterances on this subject—the crudities of immaturity must come with the profound and pitiful significance of contrast. No, no—I judge these four achievements from no impossible standard of perfection. I know too well how little can be expected

from the boy who is but entering upon his teens—I am too familiar with the meagre attainments of the average lad of one decade to ask for impossible accuracy, for poetic thought, or pious sentiments; but certain qualities I have the right to expect—nay, demand—”

Here Stegges whispered to me—

”Blessed if I don’t think he’s going to cane them!”

”Certain qualities Mr. Harold Bolsover has also the right to expect and demand. Do we find them in these essays before us? Reluctantly I reply, we do not. But in order that you may judge whether your head-master is unreasonable, that you of the upper school may estimate the nature of the efforts upon which I base this adverse criticism, I propose to read brief extracts from each and from all of them.

”The initial error of the boy Nicol Macmullen appears to be a total misconception of the theme he was invited to illuminate. He begins his essay as follows.”

The Doctor made a frightful rustling among Mac’s papers, and everybody looked at Mac. He had not expected this, and his mouth worked very rummily, and his head went down between his shoulders, and he showed his under teeth and stared in a frightfully fixed way at the boot of Smythe, who sat next to him.

Then Dr. Dunstan began—

”WILD FLOWERS.

”By Nicol Macmullen.

”The vegetable kingdom is a very large one. John Ray, a native of Sussex, did much to advance the study of it. He was born in 1628, and died in 1705. There was a history of plants written three hundred years before Christ. Linnæus was the man who invented the sexual system—a very useful invention. It is a stepping-stone. He first mentioned it in 1736. Seaweeds are also a part of the vegetable kingdom, but they have no flowers, and so may be dismissed without further mention. Also Algæ. Of leaves, it may be said that some fall and some do not. At least, speaking strictly, all fall, and this is called a deciduous tree; but not all at once, and this is called an evergreen. Glands occur in the tissue of the leaves, and they also have hairs. Buds also have hairs. The organs of plants is almost the largest subject in the vegetable kingdom, but I have no time to mention more than one or two organs to-day. The root descends into the soil, the stems rise aloft, and the flowers bud out at the ends of them. Mistletoe and broom-rape are called parasites, because they live on other trees, instead of being on their own.

”Coming now to flowers, we find that they may be divided into two main

families: wild and garden. We shall dismiss garden flowers, as they do not belong to our subject, but wild flowers are the most beautiful things in the vegetable kingdom. Especially honeysuckle and blackberries. Many others will occur to the reader also. The flower is the *tout ensemble* of those organs which are concerned in reproduction.”

The Doctor stopped and put down Macmullen’s essay. For my part, I was simply amazed at the amount Mac. knew, and I think everybody else was; but, strangely enough, the Doctor didn’t like it.

”From this point our author quotes verbatim out of the pages of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*,” continued Dr. Dunstan. ”As an effort of memory the result is highly creditable, and Macmullen will have acquired a great deal of botanical knowledge which may possibly be of service to him in his future career; but as an essayist on wild flowers he is exceedingly evasive, and his effort fails radically and fundamentally. The subject is obviously not one that appeals to him. There is no sympathy, no love of his theme; above all, no moral deductions. Macmullen’s mind has not been uplifted. He has, in fact, failed.”

Mac. didn’t seem to care as much as you would have thought. He told me afterwards he felt so thankful when the Doctor shut up about him and turned to Tomkins, that he forgot everything else but relief.

Tomkins became red when the Doctor picked up his essay; but it soon faded away—I mean the redness.

”Now here,” said Dr. Dunstan, ”we are met by an attempt of a very different character. The boy Tomkins appears to think that there is nothing more to be said about the flowers of the field than to utter their names. His prose lacks dignity; there is a feverish desire to tell us what everything is called. There is no poetry, no feeling. Vagueness, indeed, we have, but vagueness is not poetry, though to uncritical minds it may sometimes pass for such. This is how Tomkins approaches his subject. There is a breathlessness, a feeling of haste, as if somebody was chasing Tomkins along the road while he was making his researches. This, unless Tomkins has been guilty of trespass—an alternative I refuse to consider—is difficult to explain.”

The Doctor then gave us a bit out of Tomkins—

”As one walks down a country lane, one can often hardly see the leaves for the flowers. They burst upon the view in millions. The hedges are thronged with them; the scent is overpowering. Turn where you will, they greet the bewildered eye. They hang from the trees and spring from the earth; they twine

also—as, for instance, briony and convolvuluses. At a single glance I take in dog-roses; champions of several sorts, including white; shepherd's purse—a weed; strawberry, primroses, cuckoo-flower, violet, bugle, herb robert, and also other wild geraniums of various kinds. They are in a crowded mass, all struggling for life. Stitchwort, nettle, archangel, cock's-foot grass, clematis, dock, heath, furze, bog-moss, darnel, dandelions, daisies, buttercups of sorts, marshmallow, water-lilies, rushes and reeds, poppies and peppermint, also ferns—one sees them all at a glance. Then, as one hastens swiftly onwards—'

"I gasp for breath," said the Doctor; "I absolutely refuse to hasten swiftly onwards with Tomkins. At this breakneck pace he drags us through that portion of the British flora at his command. There is doubtless knowledge here; there is even reflection, as when he says, at the end of his paper, that wild flowers ought to make us thankful for our eyesight and for the lesser gift of smell. But, taken as a whole, we have no balance, absolutely no repose, no light, and no shade. There is too much hurry and bustle, too little feeling for the beauty attaching to English scenery or English prose; too eager a desire to display erudition in the empty matter of floral nomenclature."

So that was the end of Tomkins. He was frightfully disappointed; but he felt so interested to know what wretched chaps like Smythe and Walters had done that was better, that he forgot even to be miserable about losing until afterwards.

Then the Doctor went for Smythe.

"Huxley Smythe next challenges our attention," he said. "Now, here we are confronted with a still more amazing misunderstanding. Smythe appears to know absolutely nothing whatever concerning wild flowers; but he has seized this occasion to display an extraordinary amount of peculiar information concerning other matters. He evidently imagines that this will answer his purpose equally well. Moreover, he endeavours to cast his work in a poetic form—with results that have bewildered even me, despite my half-century of knowledge of the *genus puer*. I do not say that rhyme is inadmissible. You shall not find me slow to encourage originality of thought even among the least of you; but Smythe trusts too little to himself and too much to other rhymsters—I will not call them poets. He has committed to memory many verses of a trivial and even offensive character. He has furnished me with a charm or incantation to remove warts. Elsewhere he commits himself to sentiments that may be described as flagrantly irreligious. It is true he glances obliquely at his subject from time to time; but not in a spirit which can admire or commend. We have, for instance, these lines—

"Put yarrow under your pillow, they say,

You will see your true love the very next day.
 "For pain in the stomach an excellent thing
 Is tea made of mint and sprigs of ling'

"If you wash your clothes on Good Friday, someone
 Will be certain to die ere the year is done.'

"Whence Huxley Smythe has culled these pitiful superstitions I know not,"

continued the Doctor; "but he appears to be a veritable storehouse and compendium of them. They remind me only too painfully of a certain tiger's tail, though that incident is closed, and I desire to make no further mention of it. Had our theme been folklore, or those crude, benighted and indelicate fancies still prevailing among the bucolic population, Smythe must have conquered, and easily conquered. It is not so, however. He has chosen the occasion of the 'Bolsover' competition to reveal no little fantastic knowledge; but its lack of appropriate and apposite qualities effectually disposes of his claim. I will give you a last sample of his methods. *A propos* of absolutely nothing, on page four of his dissertation, Smythe submits this impertinence. He appears suddenly to have recollected it and inserted it in the body of his work, without the least consideration for its significance or my feelings.

"There was an old man who lived in a wood
 As you may plainly see,
 And said he could do more work in a day
 Than his wife could do in three."

The Doctor looked awful sternly at Smythe.

"This fragment—from some coarse old ballad, I suspect—is thrust upon me, as one might brandish a club in the face of an unoffending citizen. Smythe must chasten his taste and study the rudiments of logic and propriety before again he ventures to challenge our attention with original thoughts. Silence! Silence!" thundered the Doctor in conclusion; because Smythe's stuff made Steggles laugh out loud. Then several other chaps laughed, and in trying not to laugh, Wolf minor choked and made a noise, like a football exploding, that was far worse than laughter.

"There remains the effort of Rupert Walters," went on Dr. Dunstan. "He is the youngest of the competitors, and I find but little to praise in his achievement; yet it indicates a shadow of promise and a shade of imagination. Indeed, Mr.

Briggs at first suspected that Walters had availed himself of secret and dishonest assistance; but this, I rejoice to know, is not the case. Walters has yet to learn to control the discharge of ink from his pen, and in matters of orthography also there is much to be desired for him—a remark which applies to all the competitors save Macmullen—but he possesses a dim and misty nucleus of feeling for the dignity of his native tongue. There is in his attempt a suggestion that at some distant date, if he is spared, and if he labours assiduously in the dead languages, Rupert Walters may control his living speech with some approach to distinction. I select his most pleasing passage.”

The Doctor regarded young Walters over his spectacles for a moment with a frightfully encouraging expression that he sometimes puts on when things are going extra well. Then he read the pleasing passage, as he called it.

”Often, walking in the country far from home, you may see the briars falling over the sides of the lanes, and the may trees white with bloom. They look lovely against the blue sky; and a curious thing is that the distant trees also look blue, and not green, by reason of distance. Near at hand, yellow and red flowers may be dotted about; but when you look along the lane, you only see haze, which is beautiful. If there is a river flowing near by, it is also very beautiful indeed, especially with water-lilies on it. And clouds are lovely too, if reflected in a sheet of water beside which yellow irises spring up, and their foliage looks rather bluish. If a trout rises, it makes white rings on the water.”

”Now, here,” said the Doctor, ”is a humble effort to set down what the eye of this tender boy has mirrored in the past. I need not tell you how he spells ’irises,’ or ’curious,’ or ’beautiful.’ The fact remains that he has distanced his competitors and achieved the ’Bolsover’ prize. Come hither, Rupert Walters. Let me shake your hand, my lad!”

So that was the end of it, and Walters seemed more frightened than anything. But he took his book, and the matter ended, and the four chaps had their essays back, with Briggs’s red pencil remarks on them, to send home to their people.

The extraordinary truth only came to me three days later, when I happened to be having a talk with Walters and looking at his prize, which was duller even than most prizes. I said—

”How the dickens did you remember that trees look blue seen a mile off?”

And he said—

”I didn’t remember it. If you’ll swear not to tell, I’ll explain. I shall be rather

glad to tell somebody.”

So I swore. Then Walters said—

”I was just sitting biting my pen and drawing on the blotting-paper and casting my eyes about and wondering what on earth to say, when I saw right bang in front of me a great picture—a whacker—full of trees and a lane, and water and hills, and every mortal thing, even to the flowers dabbed about in front. Well—there you are! I just tried to put down what I saw. And I did it only too well, if anything. Of course, in a sort of way, it was cribbing; but then, of course, in another sort of way, it wasn’t. Anyway, you’ve sworn not to tell—not even Tomkins; so of course you won’t tell.”

And of course I didn’t.

THE CASE FOR FOWLE

No. VII

THE CASE FOR FOWLE

I

It’s awful difficult to understand why some boys are liked and some utterly barred. I’m nearly sixteen now, and I’ve been at Merivale for years, but still I can’t see it. All I know is that the chaps most boys like, I don’t, and the very few chaps I like, nobody else does. At first I thought it was hampers and asked my mother to send me extra large ones, which she did; and such hampers as mine were never seen before in any school, I should think. But the boys ate my water-melons and peaches and many such unusual things, just as if they were the wretched windfalls that Masters gets from his father’s orchards, or the feeble home-made jam and common or garden cakes that come to other fellows on their birthdays. Then the very chaps that guzzle my rare things pretend afterwards I’ve tried to poison them, and so on; and young Gregson, who once ate half a bruised pineapple of mine that was a bit off, got ill; and after that only certain chaps would take the things I offered. And nobody once, all the time I’ve been here, has ever offered me as much as a dry biscuit out of their beastly hampers.

I pointed this out to Travers, who, though no friend of mine, always appeared to have more sense in a general way than most fellows; and he said—

”You sneer so at chaps. You always make it so jolly clear your hampers are the best in the world, that naturally they think you wouldn’t care about their things. Besides, Steggles did offer you three ripe pears, for I saw him do it.”

”Yes,” I said, ”he did—just because he knew they were over-ripe and thought to score off me. I knew why he had done it, and told him so.”

”Then he offered them to me,” said Travers, ”so I can tell you that you are quite wrong. I took them and ate them on the spot, and they were perfectly good, decent pears. For once in a way Steggles was quite straight and meant no harm at all.”

Well, I saw after a bit that it wasn’t hampers, or anything of that sort; and then I thought it was games. But I wasn’t going to make a fool of myself at footling games for anybody, and I always did get out of them when I could. However, it wasn’t altogether games either, though certainly more games than hampers. Still, there were chaps who didn’t play games any better than me—such as Richards, who always went to matches and was keen about games, though useless himself, and Ford, who made peculiar knots in rope, and Jameson, who drew pictures in the chaps’ Latin grammars of the remarkable things mentioned in syntax. Then another great thing, showing what mean beasts most boys are, is the fact that if certain masters like certain boys, then other boys also like them.

Once, and only once, I got jolly friendly with a master who was very much disliked indeed by everybody else. I mean Browne. I never found him bad at first, and he used me a good bit in many ways and nearly always gave me full marks. But he changed frightfully over the business of the blackboard, and it happened like this. You see, as Browne thought well of me, he confided in me a bit out for walks; and I confided in him; and he asked me a lot of questions concerning a lot of boys; and, as I hated them all, I told him what he wanted to know. He was frightfully obliged and said I was a power for good in the school; and also said that such a boy as I am, without silly ideas about sneaking, may be of the greatest use to masters if he really has the welfare and interest of the school at heart. He also gave me a knife and seemed pretty sure I should win several prizes at the end of the term. In fact, we got very friendly and I certainly did him a very good turn by helping him to understand why some boys didn’t like him, and telling him what they said about him behind his back. He was greatly obliged to me, and used the things I told him, and scored pretty badly off some chaps as a result. It rather surprised them to find how much he knew; but it didn’t make them like him any better. Then they began to try and score off him, and finally, owing to an unfortunate accident, I got mixed up in it.

Steggles did an unusual thing to young Frost. Steggles had borrowed the

matron's scissors to cut his toe-nails, which were turning in and tearing his toes and making them pour with blood. And after he had used them and shortened his toe-nails by about half-an-inch or so, he kept them and told the matron that he had lost them. Then came young Frost, who was a sort of relation of Trelawny, who was at that time easily the best-liked chap at Merivale.

Well, Steggles got young Frost up into the gym. alone, as he thought, and told him it was the rule for new boys to have their hair cut close to their heads, because they often brought infection to Merivale in that way. So he cut all young Frost's hair off; and I was there, hidden in a corner reading a grown-up novel that I had found in Browne's room. Because Browne, as a great favour, used to allow me in his study to see the remarkable things he has there—chiefly on the mantelpiece, including photographs of well-known actresses, said to be signed by themselves. So I saw Steggles cut off Frost's hair, and I did not know Steggles had seen me, but he had. And he made me swear not to tell, which I did; but knowing that an oath is not binding when the good of the school is involved, I told Browne about it, and he took the credit to himself over it and taxed Steggles with it. Of course Steggles denied it, and it couldn't be proved, because young Frost had a rotten idea it would be unsportsmanlike to sneak. So it came about that Browne couldn't do anything without getting me into a row, and accordingly nothing was done to Steggles. But Steggles did a lot to me, because of course he knew I was the only person who could have told Browne the truth, as young Frost hadn't.

Then a rather clever beast called Macmullen wrote a piece of poetry with rhymes, and after about twenty copies of this poetry had been sent to me anonymously written round picture-postcards, Macmullen got Travers to print it up on the blackboard just before Browne's mathematical lesson came on.

So when he arrived, there it was staring at him; and it was so exceedingly well printed that he could not possibly tell who had done it.

*There is a young sneaker called Fowle
Who ought to be made to howl,
For the things that Browne knows,
Which you would not suppose,
All come from that blighter called Fowle.*

I wanted to rub it out before Browne came, but of course the chaps wouldn't let me.

Browne read this carefully and took such a long time looking at it, that Steggles said he was learning it by heart. Then he picked up the duster and

slowly rubbed it out. He made no remark whatever, and for the time being the score rather missed fire on Browne. But it didn't miss fire on me, because the next day, when I was passing his study, Browne called me in and asked me about it. He said—

"Who wrote that piece of impertinence on the blackboard yesterday?"

And I said—

"Macmullen invented it, sir, and Travers printed it up; but I don't know who told them there was a sort of understanding between us."

Then Browne was greatly enraged and said—

"How dare you say there is any understanding between us, Fowle? Such impertinence I never heard! What do I know about you and your affairs, excepting that you are deservedly a very unpopular boy! And I'll thank you not to bring any more of your mean tales to me. A tale-bearer is an odious thing; so remember; no more sneaking, or it will be very much the worse for you!"

I was so astonished that I couldn't do anything but stare.

"Now be off about your business," said Browne, and I went.

That shows pretty well what Mr. Browne was, I should think. The beastly ingratitude of the man seemed to me the most extraordinary thing that had ever happened; and after that I never could do right with Browne, and he sided against me and never would listen to me, even when I had to tell him things in self-defence.

I could easily show again and again that I was in the right and other chaps were in the wrong, or masters too, for that matter; but it was not much good trying to convince people with the whole of them against me. There was always a proper religious reason for the things I did, and though sometimes they looked queer until explained, I always could explain them. But after I got to be hated, nobody would so much as stop to listen to the explanations—not even the Doctor.

Everybody said he was just and fair, though an old footler; but I know very well he wasn't, owing to the time when Corkey minimus dropped a shilling in the playground and I found one there. Well, how could I know that because Corkey mins. had lost a shilling and I had found one, the one I had found was bound to be the identical same shilling that Corkey had lost? I shall always say it was frightfully unfair to me to order me to give up the shilling as the Doctor did, and then jaw me before the whole school.

Once my father said to me, "Always act from high motives, Roger," and I always did; but nobody ever gave me any credit for doing so; and when I told the Doctor over the affair of Gurney's tame white rabbit, which I found wandering alone in the playground after dark and killed with a cricket stump, for fear that it should starve to death, and was seen doing it by Gurney, who came to look for it—when I told the Doctor I had done this from the best motives and not because

Gurney had taken me down in class the day before—he said that I was deceiving myself and told me that Satan had put it into my heart to kill Gurney's rabbit. Really I had only done it out of fear that a poor dumb creature would suffer; and yet the Doctor misunderstood me in such a wicked and spiteful way, that he caned me and made me dig a grave and bury the brute in front of the whole school as a punishment.

As to my feelings, which are frightfully keen, nobody cares a button about them and I have to do things, simply in self-defence, that I should never do if I was treated fairly. Even Tin Lin Chow when he was here had a better time than me, and I could tell you a lot of things you wouldn't believe in the matter of tortures, simply invented by Steggles and others in order to be applied to me. Steggles has invented two sets of tortures called 'mind tortures' and 'body tortures'; and the mind tortures are babyish, but the body tortures are well worth avoiding. So I always pretend the mind tortures are the worst, whereas really only a fool would care for them, as they mean nothing to anybody who is religious.

But what I meant to tell you was a fair case of the sort of things that happen to me and I have to endure. I was told that I was to be tried by court-martial, and I said "Why?" and Trelawny, the champion fighter of the school, put the case before me.

He said—

"It is well known in the lower school that you have got up more fights between kids than any other chap."

He then mentioned seven fights which he had written down.

"Now," he said, "did you or did you not arrange those seven fights?"

He had a lot of witnesses present and so I said—

"Five of them I arranged, because I wanted to see if—"

He interrupted me.

"You go about asking chaps if they give one another 'best,' and when they say 'no,' though they may be perfectly friendly, you go on at them till you work up a fight."

I denied it, and he said, "You can reserve your beastly defence for the court-martial. I've only got one more question to ask you at present, namely, Have you ever fought anybody yourself?"

And I said—

"No, Trelawny, I never have, because it would be contrary to my opinions."

Then he merely said I was a sticky and noxious worm that wanted poisoning with rat poison, and that nothing more need be said before the court-martial.

II

Well, the court-martial, though held by the sixth, was grossly unfair, and the thing they decided to do was simply cruel bullying in a superior form. To begin with, Macmullen, who is the champion speaker at our debates, was the leading witness against me; whereas I had nobody to speak for me, because though I was told three days before the trial to get somebody to speak for me, of course nobody would; and I had to stick up for myself, which was a thing I never could do. So I went down, and the fools pretended to prove that I had arranged hundreds of fights and been second at scores. And yet, somehow, I had never fought a single fight myself from the time I came there. Dozens of kids were called to witness at the court-martial that I had given them 'best' rather than fight them; and many were much younger than me, and one, called Foster, was only eleven, though certainly he was a great fighter, and many boys of fourteen had to give him best in the long run, though not till after they had fought him and been licked. Well, just because my religious opinions kept me from fighting anybody, and especially Foster, they called me an insect and a coward and a disgrace to the school and so on. Then Trelawny, as the head of the court-martial, gave a verdict and I was sentenced to have a fight, whether I liked it or not. Inquiries were made and finally the court-martial found a chap called Andrews, who was in my class and whose age was just one week less than mine. This Andrews and me they decided must fight; and when it was known, everybody wanted to be second for Andrews and nobody wanted to be second for me. Trelawny said we might have a week to train, and then the court-martial broke up. It was a brutal bit of work altogether, and I found rather an interesting thing, which was that Andrews felt quite differently to the affair to me. I talked to him privately as soon as I could, and pretended it was all rot and laughed at the whole thing. But he said it wasn't rot at all as far as he was concerned. He was a new boy and rather keen to make friends and be well thought of; so he considered this a jolly good opportunity and began to train as well as he knew how. I saw at a glance that he could lick me, for I'd never learned fighting and hated hurting anything, I'm sure, always; and I argued a good deal with Andrews about it. He said that his father had told him that a chance to make friends and distinguish himself would be sure to come. And Andrews said no doubt his father was right, and that the chance had come and that he was going to distinguish himself as much as he could on me.

Well, of course I saw what had to be done. Just at that time I was rather unfairly hated by Dr. Dunstan, because of an affair in the playground. There was a fir-tree in it at one corner, and I had found that turpentine came out if you cut notches in it. Well, into this turpentine I stuck live ants and then burnt them

up with a burning-glass. It was nothing; but old Briggs, the writing master and natural history master, discovered me doing it and must needs make a ridiculous fuss. He told the Doctor and the Doctor made a ridiculous fuss too and turned against me and hated me. So Dunstan was out of the question, and there was only one other master I could tell, and that was Monsieur Michel, the French master. But he was weak and useless in an emergency like this; so finally I decided that the proper person to approach would be Andrews himself.

That much was pretty easy to decide, but then came the question what to say to him, and I was helped in this matter by a very lucky thing. It came out in class that Andrews was an absolute flyer at geography, and though not as good as me—me being head of the class in that subject—still he jolly soon got second to me and stopped there. I am a tremendous dab at geography myself; and if I knew as much about other things I should be in the sixth; and if a good many things I know—especially about religious saints—were regular subjects in school, instead of being barred altogether, I should also be in the sixth.

And finding out the greatness of Andrews at geography gave me the idea I wanted, which happened only just in time; because the day I spoke to him was a Wednesday and the next Saturday was the day we had to fight.

I said—

”Aren’t you looking forward to Saturday?”

And he said—

”Yes, I am.”

And I said—

”So am I, because I’m in training too; and I find that I fight tremendously well, and I’m only sorry I hadn’t to fight a lot sooner.”

But I couldn’t deceive him with this, for a moment; so I soon changed the subject.

I introduced prizes and said that the Doctor was particularly keen about the subject of geography and always gave the best prizes for that.

”I know,” he said, ”and I should have had a jolly good chance if it hadn’t been for you.”

”You would,” I said. ”In fact, but for me you would be a snip for it.”

We talked a bit and then I said—

”I wonder if your father would rather you made your mark by fighting me, or by winning the geography prize in your first term? Of course, to win any prize in your first term is a great score for a chap.”

He said that he hadn’t thought of it, and after I pressed him a lot, he admitted that there was no doubt the prize would suit his mother best, but he thought very likely if he won a fight it would suit his father best.

He said—

"My father's a soldier, and I'm going to be one; and so, naturally, fighting is more in my line than geography."

But I doubted this, and, in fact, I proved that a mere fight was nothing, whereas geography was a great deal and at least as much use to a soldier as fighting—especially after he had lost a battle.

Finally he said that I might be right, but that it didn't much matter as I was bound to win the geography prize, and he was equally bound to lick me next Saturday.

Then I made my great offer.

I said—

"Look here; I'm not afraid of fighting, or anything like that; but I've got religious objections to it and, in fact, though your father might like you to fight, my father would get into a frightful bate if I did. Really it might be jolly serious for me, and it would not matter to my father in the least whether I won the fight or lost it."

Andrews said that had nothing to do with him; so I went on and explained how it might have a great deal to do with him.

I said—

"You see, if you lost the fight, your father would very likely be very sick about it, and instead of getting rewarded, you might get nothing; whereas, if the fight fell through and you merely said firmly you had no reason for fighting me, and were not going to do it just because you were ordered to, and then went and won the geography prize, that would be a much greater score for you."

He admitted it might be, but didn't see how he could beat me at geography.

Then I said—

"If you refuse to fight me, you shall get the geography prize, because I need not put down anything like all I know and can boss a lot of questions purposely."

He said—

"It would please my mother and might do me a lot of good with my grandmother."

And I said—

"It certainly would; and next term, if you still want a fight, I'll easily arrange one for you with somebody else, and then you can make it all right with your father."

He said—

"Will you solemnly swear on human blood that you will boss the geography paper and let me get the prize?"

And to show him how much in earnest I was, I took out my knife there and then, and he pricked his finger and I pricked mine, and then I swore that I would let him have the geography prize, and he swore that he would refuse to fight me.

I felt that was a pretty good day's work, and so did he; but I felt it all the time, whereas Andrews only felt it in stray moments and, between whiles, was jolly savage with himself for swearing the blood oath. He was frightfully scorned for not fighting me, and the only thing that comforted him, and that only in secret, was that his mother and grandmother would be full of rejoicing in the holidays and richly reward him for winning the geography prize.

In fact, he kept on so obstinately about his mother, that I began to think about mine, and the sad grief it would be to her if I did not win this prize as usual. After a time I realized that I had actually put Andrews before my own dear mother, and I felt very shocked to think of what I had done.

The end of the term began to get nearer and nearer, and the exams. were going to begin soon. I tried hard not to think about geography and not to think about my mother, but Andrews found the only subjects that interested him were these subjects; and at last I simply had to avoid Andrews, because he kept on to such a sickening extent about what a score it would be to win it.

Very strange thoughts came over me during those days and I got more and more undecided as to what was right to do. There was my duty to Andrews, who, in a vague sort of way, had got the right to win the geography prize, and there was my duty to my father, who paid Dr. Dunstan a lot of money for letting me come to Merivale and naturally expected me to do my best; which I always did do, I'm sure. Then there was my duty to Dr. Dunstan; and to deceive him deliberately about my knowledge of geography was, of course, a very wrong thing to do. And, greatest of all, there was my own conscience, which is the 'still small voice' of the Bible. Besides, I'd been very careful to say that Andrews should have the geography prize, not that he should win it. No chap ever tried harder than me to do the right thing, and what made it so difficult was that my conscience and my duty to everybody but Andrews was on one side, while the stupid affair with Andrews was on the other side. Of course a blood oath is all nonsense if you are a Christian, and not in the least binding to a religious person. In fact, only savages believe in it at all. Therefore, as far as that went, I did not feel in the least bound to Andrews. If I had not been coming back the next term, I should have seen my way clearer very likely; but I was; and so was Andrews.

Somehow I couldn't decide till the actual day of the geography exam., and then, strangely enough, the paper seemed simply to have been made for me. I knew the answer to everything, and question No. 6 gave me a chance of saying some jolly good and peculiar things about Spain and the Holy Inquisition not generally known at all. Probably not a soul at Merivale but the Doctor and me knew them.

Somehow I felt it would be mean and wicked to pretend not to know all these things. My conscience simply cried out to me to do the paper as well as

possible and leave the result in Higher Hands, because if Providence meant Andrews to win, he would win. So I did my best, as I usually do; and when the result was put up it was found that I had beaten Andrews by one hundred and ten marks, and Andrews was a long way ahead of everybody else.

Naturally Andrews, not understanding what it is to have such delicate feelings as me, was a good bit annoyed; but I was ready for him, and though I did not tell of my secret struggles to do right, which he would not have understood, I did explain that I had acted from proper motives.

I said—

”I promised that you should have the geography prize, not that you should win it. You shall have it, and the minute I get it on prize day, I shall hand it over to you.”

But Andrews did not fall in with this, and I felt, somehow, that he wouldn’t. He said several revengeful things about next term; but he may be dead before then, and anyway, much will happen in the holidays to make him forget this affair, or take a better view of it.

I only mention the thing, in fact, to show how hard it is to make chaps understand you if you always try to do right as much as you can. I should clearly like to leave Merivale, but there seems to be no chance of it at present.

My father often says, rather unkindly, that nobody ever wanted honour and truth and decency and manliness licked into them worse than I do; but my mother, who always understands me much better than him, says that many of the best and most famous men in the world have looked back to their school-days with hatred and loathing; and so I must no doubt be one of them; because nobody ever hated boys and masters and school in general worse than me. It will be very different when I get away from them all and go into the world; because there I shall meet plenty of nice people who think the same as I do.

’CHERRY RIPE’

No. VIII

’CHERRY RIPE’

This is an awful rum story about the extraordinary cunning of a man generally known as 'Cherry Ripe,' from selling cherries; and to tell it right I must first explain about our cricket ground and a wood and a field. After the cricket ground comes a narrow wood, well known as the place for fights, and also wood-pigeons' nests, which breed there in great quantities. It is a long and narrow wood, and then comes a field, also long but not so narrow. This field is a very up-and-down field, with hollows in it, and at the bottom, in one corner, a drinking-place for cows has been arranged, where yellow irises grow in summer, and where most of our tame frogs come from. There is a clump of trees in this field, and a hawk once built in them; but Freckles found the nest and took the eggs, so the hawk did not build there again. After the up-and-down field there comes an old, rather broken wall, and inside the wall is the orchard and nursery garden of Cherry Ripe.

Needless to say his real name was not 'Cherry Ripe' but Jenkins—not any relation to the Jenkins at Merivale, though chaps who wanted to rot Jenkins always pretended that Cherry Ripe was his father, which much annoyed Jenkins. Because this Cherry Ripe was a fierce and a common man, and had been known to be dismissed with a caution for ill-treating a horse, and was no friend to us either.

He made his living by fruit and vegetables; and at the right season of the year sold cherries, of which he had many fine trees in his nursery garden. He also had apples and pears and gooseberries in great abundance. He also laid out large pieces of his nursery garden in spring flowers for market, and he grew onions and turnips and rhubarb, and many other uninteresting things.

We naturally went there to see how it looked from time to time, and he chased us a good deal over the field; but, when we were once in the wood, he was of course powerless. In fact, he never caught anybody in fair hunting except Chilvers, who was once down by the pond collecting waterman beetles in his shoe, having nothing else to do it with. But Chilvers had never been in the nursery garden in his life, and told Cherry Ripe so. Only he refused to believe Chilvers, and said that he was trespassing just as much in the field as he would have been in the orchard. Which, in its paltry way, was true. Chilvers then offered him a penny and an Indian coin for twelve waterman beetles; and all he did was to say "No cheek!" and box Chilvers on the ear and tell him to be off. So he made a bitter enemy of Chilvers.

This Cherry Ripe was old and ugly. He never seemed to shave, and yet his beard never seemed to grow. What there was looked a mangy grey streaked with brown. He wore an old hat that had once been black, but was now rather inclined to turn green, and he had glittering eyes, one of which watered. He had also a curious way of lifting up and down his eyebrows, which young Smythe said showed a bad disposition, and was common to gorillas. He had been heard

to laugh when picking apples with his daughters. But he never laughed at us, and when we took to calling him 'Cherry Ripe,' he hated us, and often shook his fist at us from a distance.

So we then felt something had to be done against him to score off him.

When this was decided upon, Steggles and Methuen and Pedlar and myself—me being Weston minor—and Chilvers went into committee, as it is called, and in fact we had a regular meeting. Many others wanted to join, but we felt five was enough, and we all had a jolly special private good reason for going into committee against Cherry Ripe.

Chilvers of course had been licked by Cherry Ripe, because to box one's ears is the same as licking one in a very insulting manner. Pedlar also had been insulted, and a good deal hurried twice by Cherry Ripe, when he found him catapulting quite harmlessly in his orchard in December, when of course there was nothing to take but vegetables; and Methuen and Steggles once meeting Cherry Ripe going the rounds with his cart and fruit and scales for weighing things, had politely stopped him and asked to buy two pennyworth of pears. And Cherry Ripe had the frightful impertinence to say that "No chap wearing them hats" should have so much as a spring onion of his growing, which was not only turning away business, but cheeking the school colours openly. So it seemed about time to do something, and we accordingly did. I may say that I had no particular grudge against Cherry Ripe, but I was well known at being better at wall-climbing than any chap who ever came to Merivale. Climbing had always been my strong point, and, as I was also going to be a missionary later in life, I kept it up, because you never know—not if you are a missionary.

The committee merely decided that as the cherry season was now near, we had better wait for it, and then, at the first opportunity, make a 'Jameson raid.' This is a particular sort of raid invented by the great Dr. Jameson of South Africa, and it consists of doing something so suddenly that nobody is ready. A Jameson raid is useless if the other side is prepared; it is also useless if you are not prepared yourself. The great thing is to be first, and also an important point is to commit the raid where and when it will be least expected. Therefore we gave it out, hoping that it would somehow get to Cherry Ripe, that we meant to make a raid on his young apples on Wednesday, being a half-holiday; whereas the truth was we were going to have a dash at his cherries on the Saturday. There was a cricket match on that day, and Steggles arranged details.

I won't say much about what happened, because the thing failed even more fearfully than Dr. Jameson's affair long ago. We were deceived in a most peculiar manner, owing to the deliberate cunning of Cherry Ripe; and afterwards, talking it over while we wrote two thousand Latin lines each, we came to the conclusion that there was a traitor at work. Naturally we thought of Fowle, but Fowle knew

nothing; besides, he was in the hospital at the time with something the matter with his knee.

To go back, I must explain that all went well until we got on the top of Cherry Ripe's wall. Then what should we see but Cherry Ripe up a cherry tree and his daughters down below! They were a long way off, and we saw at a glance that it would take Cherry Ripe about a year to climb down from his tree, even if he saw us. As for his daughters, seeing our ages were fifteen and upwards, except Chilvers, who was certainly only thirteen, but could run faster than his sister, who was seventeen, we did not fear them.

As Cherry Ripe was picking cherries, we went for the green gooseberries. I dropped down first in a very stealthy manner, that Freckles had taught me before he went home to Australia; then Pedlar and Methuen dropped, and then Chilvers. He fell rather awkwardly and smashed off a large purple cabbage, and was glad of it.

But Steggles stopped on the wall, for some private reason. He said afterwards, when taxed with treachery, that it wasn't so in the least; but that from the very beginning he had had a curious feeling when he woke up that day. It is the feeling you get when you wake up on a day that you are going to be flogged; and you have the same feeling, only far, far worse, on the day when you are going to be hung. All criminals know this. Steggles certainly shouted "Cave!" as soon as the horrible moment came; but when he did finally drop off the wall, it was on the other side. In fact, he escaped and left us to our fate. Nothing could be done to Steggles, but we never felt the same to him again.

What happened was this. We were just eating a few gooseberries rather fast, before settling down steadily to fill our pockets, when Steggles gave the alarm. But it was too late. Suddenly there sprang up from their hiding-places no less than three men—the youngest not less than twenty years old; and the eldest was Cherry Ripe himself. This so much horrified us, as we had seen him at the top of a high cherry tree two hundred yards away only a second before, that we lost our instinct of self-preservation and fell a prey to the enemy. We were all caught, in fact, except Steggles, and we were then marched down to Cherry Ripe's house, and then along the road, and so back to Merivale. His hateful daughters stood and sniggered at us as we were taken past them; and then we saw that the whole thing was a mean plot, and, in fact, a swizz. A swizz is a chouse, and a chouse is the same as a sell. It was a scarecrow in the tree and not Cherry Ripe at all! The scarecrow wore his green hat, and his daughters pretended to be talking to him. As Peters said afterwards, Sherlock Holmes himself would have been almost deceived by such a deadly plot. Afterwards we found, curiously enough, that we had collected exactly thirteen gooseberries before the crash came, which shows that thirteen is an unlucky number, whatever scientific people may say against

it.

Cherry Ripe brought us back to Merivale, and came to the front door and asked to see the Doctor. He gave his name as 'Mr. Jenkins, of the Merivale and District Fruit Farm,' and said it in a very grand tone of voice, as if he was somebody. But the Doctor, little knowing what was going to happen, sent out to tell Mr. Jenkins to walk in. Pedlar said he thought that the Doctor probably hoped Cherry Ripe had come with an advantageous offer to supply Merivale with green stuff at low prices; but of course this was not so.

Dr. Dunstan received us in his study, and he was much surprised to see Chilvers appear after Cherry Ripe, and still more surprised to see the rest of us come behind.

"And what may be the meaning of this deputation?" said the Doctor. "Perhaps you, Methuen, will explain."

But Cherry Ripe said that he had come to do the explaining. Certainly he told the truth, but he told it in a beastly mean way.

He said—

"There's times when a man has got to stand up for his rights, mister"—meaning the Doctor—"and this is one of 'em. These here young ribs be always driving my life out of me, and an example must be made. I was half in a mind to send for a policeman; but I thought as I'd give 'em one more chance for their parents' sakes, so brought 'em to you, because no doubt you be paid very well for larning 'em their lessons and keeping 'em out of mischief. I've two things against 'em, and one is that they bawl 'Cherry Ripe' after me morning, noon, and night, and take sights at me, and do many other rude things; and the other is that now, this minute, I've caught 'em red-handed in my gooseberry-bed, tucking down my fruit for all they were worth. That's trespass and it's also theft, and I don't want no more of it."

"Thank you," said the Doctor. "You have stated your case with a lucidity and force that does you no little credit, Mr. Jenkins. Now the accused and the accuser may freely speak, whilst I, as arbiter between them, reserve the last word, and I fear the last action also." His eyes roamed over to the corner where the canes were kept. Then he went on—

"Your indictment consists of three articles, and we will take them in your own order. You submit that these youths have insulted you, have trespassed on your private property, and have stolen your goods. Now, boy Pedlar, have you or have you not, at any time and in any public place, addressed Mr. Jenkins, of the Merivale and District Fruit Farm, as 'Cherry Ripe'?"

"Yes, sir," said Pedlar.

"Methuen?"

"Yes, sir."

"Weston?"

"Yes, sir."

"Chilvers?"

"Yes, sir."

The Doctor seemed disappointed, and Cherry Ripe smiled with a grim and scornful smile.

"To accost an honest purveyor of the fruits of the earth with words which, in the nature of his calling, it is necessary that he should himself loudly repeat at intervals—to do this is a senseless and offensive act," said the Doctor. "Nothing can be said in favour of it. No earthly benefit—not even the meretricious semblance of benefit—can accrue to the boy who bawls 'Cherry Ripe!' after somebody else. The operation shows a lack of mental balance that may make us fear for the sanity of the performer, and regard the probable course of his future with dismay and the liveliest foreboding. But now we are faced with accusations of a very different character. It is asserted that you four boys have gone out of bounds, and disobeyed me; that you have trespassed on another's private property, and so made of no account the laws of man; and, lastly, that you have taken fruit that did not belong to you—that you have broken the eighth Commandment, and thus shattered the sacred edict of your Maker!"

The Doctor worked this up, as only he can, till we saw what an immense number of laws we had broken all at once—like you do when you begin to play golf—and, of course, it was a very solemn moment for everybody. Even Cherry Ripe looked rather frightened. The Doctor rolled it out, and shook his finger at Cherry Ripe as much as at us. Then came the questions.

"Is this infamous imputation true, Edgar Methuen?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you, Harold Pedlar?"

"Yes, sir."

"Weston?"

"Yes, sir."

"Chilvers?"

Chilvers, like a little fool, tried to hedge against the future.

"Yes, and I'm very sorry, sir," he said.

The Doctor looked at us as if we were some new sort of animals, and he didn't know how we had got in. He gave a tremendous snort, and took off his glasses. Then he turned to Cherry Ripe.

"To attempt any analysis of my personal emotions at this juncture would be vain," he said. "In these cases introspection may well be left for a subsequent occasion. For the moment justice cries with trumpet tongue. And be under no apprehension, Jenkins, that justice will miscarry on this occasion. As an agriculturist—

—”

Here the Doctor forgot us, and talked like anything to Cherry Ripe about growing vegetables, and Ceres and Pomona and Horace and Virgil, and other well-known people out of school books. He fairly terrified Cherry Ripe, I believe. Anyway, Cherry Ripe kept creeping nearer and nearer to the door. Then, at last, he got in a word.

”Don’t be too hard on ’em this time, your honour. Just one, two, and another on the place that’s made for it.”

”Pardon me,” answered the Doctor, raising his hand. ”You now trench on my prerogative, Jenkins. The question of what is to follow may very well be left with the preceptor of these fallen boys. Have no fear for that. And to plead for leniency before the breaking of a Commandment is to admit a personal laxity of view that I, for one, am bound to deplore.”

Cherry Ripe had now reached the door, and I believe he thought that if he stopped another moment the Doctor would cane him too. So he began to clear out. But first he said—

”Well, good-evening, all!” Then he hooked it—rather thankfully. And we wished we could.

We got four on each hand, and two thousand lines each, and to stop in for two half-holidays. So that, as Methuen very truly remarked, was first blood for Cherry Ripe.

II

Of course, this was merely the beginning of the great anti-Cherry Ripe feeling, and next term we were planning a deadly revenge with regard to Cherry Ripe’s Kentish cobnuts, which were remarkably fine, when a great assistant came to our aid in the shape of Trelawny. This was that Trelawny who had such a terrible end in the matter of the protest of the wing dormitory. But many things happened first. He was fourteen, and a fighter from the beginning. All his relations were also fighters, and poetry had been made about one, who was condemned to death for magnificent fighting in historic times. This Trelawny, by the most curious accident, proved to know an immense deal about Cherry Ripe. And it came out that Trelawny’s father, who was a retired soldier and only a colonel, though Trelawny said that if justice had been done he would be a general at least, actually owned miles of land about Merivale, including Cherry Ripe’s nursery garden and the field.

"The beggar merely rents it from my father for so many pounds a year," said Trelawny. "Why, if I said a word to my father, I could have the man turned out altogether, and his daughters and everybody. I'll jolly soon teach him!"

This was a pretty good score for us, and we soon arranged to show Cherry Ripe that things were changed. Trelawny took to strolling about in Cherry Ripe's field as if it belonged to him; and, of course, as I pointed out to Trelawny, when his father died, though I hoped it would not be for ten years at least—still he had to—and when he did, the field and the orchard and everything would actually be Trelawny's own, to do what he liked with. He said it was so; and he said that he should jolly soon clear Cherry Ripe out, and build almshouses for old soldiers broken in the wars, when he came to have the ground. He wouldn't take nuts or anything. He said that was paltry; but he had a fixed idea that he ought to be perfectly free of the place, and he went on strolling about in it till at last Cherry Ripe surprised him down at the pond in the field. I was there, too, but Cherry Ripe didn't recognize me, which, no doubt, was lucky.

He seemed to have something on his mind, for he didn't get into a bate, but merely said—

"Now, you boys, you slope off to your playground—can't have you messing about here."

"Perhaps you don't know who you're talking to, Mr. Jenkins," said Trelawny in a frightfully grand tone of voice.

Then Cherry Ripe jumped.

"Lord, the sauce of your nippers now-a-days! Why can't your old gentleman over there teach you manners as well as figures and all the rest of it?"

Clearly he meant no less a person than Dr. Dunstan.

"My name is Trelawny," began Trelawny.

"A very fine name too," said Cherry Ripe. "Take care you never bring no discredit on it, there's a good boy."

"My father is your landlord," said Trelawny. "And I'll thank you not to call me 'boy'!"

Cherry Ripe was by no means so much struck by this as you might have expected.

"You're the Colonel's young shaver—eh? Well, I hope you'll turn out as sensible a man—though I do wish me and him saw alike on the subject of a new tomato house. However, everybody's a right to his own opinion."

Trelawny was fuming, like a train wanting to start.

"You don't seem to understand," he said, "that this very field we're in at this moment will be mine before long!"

"The Colonel's not ailing, I hope?" said Cherry Ripe very civilly.

I could now see that Mr. Jenkins was laughing at Trelawny, but, luckily,

Trelawny did not see this, or he might have taken some very desperate step.

"And I want to say further," went on Trelawny, not answering about his father, "that as this land will be mine sooner or later, I have a perfect right to walk on it when and where I choose."

"Agreed," said Cherry Ripe; "and as I'm renting the land, and don't like rude little boys poking about where they've no business, I've got a perfect right to pull their ears for 'em when I catches 'em. So that's settled. Now we know where we are. Be off with you both, or I'll begin this minute!"

Trelawny was as furious as a grown man. He turned a sort of colour like stewed fruit; but, of course, we had to go. There was nothing else we could do—for the moment.

"I shall write to my father about this, and you'll soon find out you can't insult your own landlord's son with impunity," Trelawny shouted, as we got through the hedge back into our wood.

"Can't do better. And tell him what I said," answered Cherry Ripe.

Then he seemed to forget us, and stood quite still looking into the pond. Evidently he had other things on his mind besides Trelawny; but Trelawny didn't think so, and believed that Jenkins was standing like that in a frightful funk to think of the dangerous thing he'd done.

"However, it's too late now; I shall write to my father next Sunday," said Trelawny; and he did, and he got a letter back.

We were rather keen to hear what his father was going to do about it, and expected he would read it out to us. But he tore the letter up small, and chucked it away, and merely said he was surprised to find his father didn't agree with him.

"But I'll make it clear that the man ought to be sacked when I go home," said Trelawny.

Funnily enough, though he'd torn this letter up so small and flung it scornfully away, we found out afterwards what was in it; because Peters, who hoped to be a detective of crime when he grew up, always collected anything with writing on it to decipher mysteries; and it was him who found out what Johnson's pet name at home was, and how many sisters West had, and other things not generally known. He said if a letter was once torn up and flung away, that it was public property for a detective; and so when Trelawny had gone, Peters collected the bits of his letter, and pieced it together after taking frightful trouble. It was a detective-like thing but not a sportsmanlike thing to do, and Trelawny, when he came to hear of it, challenged Peters. In fact, they fought, and Peters was badly licked. Still, the letter certainly was rather curious, considering it came from Trelawny's own father.

It read like this—

"DEAR TEDDY,

"I've got your letter, and I've dropped a line to Jenkins, directing him to give you and any of your friends a real good hiding every time he catches you on his ground.

"Your affectionate father, "TRELOAR TRELAWNY."

Of course, the thing couldn't be allowed to stop there. We were all on Trelawny's side, though his father wasn't. In fact, Pedlar and Methuen and me were rather vexed with Trelawny's father; and we told Trelawny so; and he said he was too. He said—

"We'll be revenged next term, as it is too late this. We must all think of a heavy score against Jenkins"—he never called Cherry Ripe anything but Jenkins for some reason—"and the best idea is the one we'll carry out."

And everybody interested in the matter quite agreed; but Steggle did not come into it, because Trelawny utterly barred Steggle from the first.

III

Next term the great idea of how to crush Cherry Ripe came to me out of the Bible. I let everybody speak first, and then, as nobody had said anything like as good, I said—

"We will do what the enemy did in the New Testament, and sow tares in his ground."

Everybody thought the idea fine but jolly difficult, and Chilvers asked—

"What are tares?"

I said I wasn't exactly sure, and Methuen said it was a sort of grass, and Trelawny said it was a parable. Anyhow, we didn't know where to buy them. Finally we decided not to ask for tares, but some sort of seed that would grow quickly, and get a deep hold of the ground, and ruin anything else for yards round. Unfortunately we didn't know much about wild things in general, and we asked Tomkins, who is our champion botanist, and he said "Willow herb." But there were no seeds about at that time of the year, it being February, and so Trelawny said—

”We will confide in Batson, who is well known to be the son of a greengrocer and seedsman.”

But it happened that Batson, who was the gardener’s boy at Dunstan’s, was leaving to better himself. However, there was just time before he went, and we let him into our secret score against Cherry Ripe, and gave him two shillings with which to buy some seed of some vigorous growing thing to sow in Cherry Ripe’s nursery garden and choke his vegetables when they came up. Batson said that he would do his best. He said it might have to be grass seed or clover, but he promised it should be a good choking thing.

Certainly it looked hopeful, because he soon brought a bag of seeds and said they were a kind of clover that, if once sown, could not be got out of the ground again without ploughing. Then came the question of the time, and we decided that next Saturday was the day. There happened to be a big game at football, but not a little one, so we were all free excepting Methuen, who kept goal for the first.

All went well, and when the match began to get exciting owing to hands being given against Bray in our ’twenty-five,’ Trelawny and Pedlar and Chilvers and I went into the wood unseen and got to the Cherry Ripe side of it. Chaps had been in his field a good deal lately, hunting for a very beautiful red fungus that was to be found in the hedges, on dead sticks, and Cherry Ripe had been a good deal worried by them.

Then came the first surprise of that day. There was a huge board stuck up in the field facing our wood with these remarkable words on it—

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+-----+
|           |
|  DANGER!  |
| BEWARE OF THE BULL! |
|           |
+-----+

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Our first step was to get back into the hedge. The field seemed to be quite empty, but there are many hollows in it, and a bull might easily have been sitting down quite near us. Or it might have been hidden in the cluster of trees in the middle. One thing was clear. It was not at the pond.

Trelawny said—

"This man is worth fighting. I'm glad he's got a bull, because it makes more strategy necessary for us."

And Pedlar said—

"And I'm glad too."

But I was not glad, and so I didn't say so; and as for Chilvers, he went further and openly said that he thought a bull altered everything.

It was about a hundred and fifty yards across the field from the wood to Cherry Ripe's wall, and it is well known that a bull can run three times as fast as a man and five times as fast as a boy.

I reminded Trelawny of this, and he said—

"I know all that; it is a question of strategy."

And I said—

"Yes, but strategy won't alter facts."

He thought a bit and said—

"You chaps stop here and I'll reconnoitre."

But Pedlar, who was nearly six months older than Trelawny, said he ought to reconnoitre too. Finally they both went to reconnoitre in different directions and came back in five minutes. Neither had seen the bull.

"There's no bull!" said Trelawny. "It's a subterfuge. Come on."

"Wait," said Chilvers. "I have a feeling it's not a subterfuge. Something tells me there is a bull."

Trelawny said it was cowardice, and Chilvers said it was a presentiment. Anyway, no time could be lost, and Chilvers was firm, so we left him. He was half inclined to come, but said that an uncle of his had once been gored by a buffalo, or some such thing, in America, and somehow he felt that this particular adventure would not suit him, though he would have feared nothing else. Of course Trelawny explained that this was no excuse, even if true. But though white and very worried, Chilvers was firm. He refused to follow, so we went alone.

We made a detour of the trees in the middle of the field and crept forward in Indian file. Fifty yards from the wall Pedlar whispered that he saw something red in a hollow, which might easily be a bull's back; so Trelawny said "Sprint!" and we threw off caution to the winds and sprinted. So we got to the wall in safety, and, as if to reward us for the effort, what should we see on the other side but a beautiful bit of ground all prepared for seeds! It was smoothed and arranged, and little narrow trenches had been drawn in it about an inch deep—evidently for seeds. It was frightful luck and playing into the hands of the enemy as Trelawny said. He instantly gave the word and we dropped. There was not a soul in sight—only a spade and two rakes, where the man who had been working

had left them.

"A commander always seizes any chance the enemy offer," said Trelawny. "Pour the seed pretty thick along the drills and everywhere else, then take the rakes and rake it all over until everything is quite smooth!"

So all Cherry Ripe's arrangements for planting seed were used by us to sow a particularly deadly sort of clover. We worked jolly hard, and in about five minutes the thing was done by me and Pedlar while Trelawny mounted guard.

Then the exciting work began and Trelawny shouted—

"Take cover! They're coming!"

But there was no cover, and so we all got back the way we had come, and just as Cherry Ripe and a man ran up from another part of the garden we reached the top of the wall and prepared to leap down. But luckily we didn't. In fact, even as it was we only just saved Pedlar and lugged him back in time.

The bull had arrived!

He was there, not more than twenty yards from the wall, and he was a whacker. He had an enormous body and head, and his forehead was curly, and his eyes fierce, and his horns rather short but very thick. A copper ring was in his nose, and his hoofs turned up rather curiously, like Turkish slippers. There was some hay flung down in front of him, and he was smelling it. He was evidently a large and fierce bull, and him being on one side of the wall and Cherry Ripe on the other made it a very tricky position for us on the top.

Trelawny said—

"This is critical!"

And Cherry Ripe said—

"Hullo, my brave chap, how d'you find your future property is looking? I hope you're pretty well satisfied?"

Trelawny said—

"This is a case for a parley."

But Cherry Ripe did all the parleying. We sat down on the wall, which was easier and safer than standing on it. We sat with our faces to Cherry Ripe and our backs to the bull.

"This is an ambushade in a way," said Trelawny. "In fact, we are rather scored off. In war we should be shot. Not that it would matter, as we have done our work.

"Now, my young shavers," began Cherry Ripe, "I see you've been very busy down here on your own account, so perhaps you'll just step off that wall and do a bit of work for me. You can take your choice. Either we'll all go straight along to your old gentleman, and see what he'll say and do about it, or you can step down here—all three of you—and set to work over a bit of weeding. Take your choice and be quick."

"We'll confer," said Trelawny.

Which we did do; and Pedlar and I thought one thing and Trelawny thought another. He said that it would be far more dignified to go back and suffer from Dr. Dunstan as an equal; but Pedlar and I had done that before, and we didn't care in the least about the dignity. We said that to do a bit of weeding for Cherry Ripe would be mere child's play to four on each hand and perhaps more, not to mention a few thousand lines chucked in, and a couple of half-holidays gone.

So Trelawny said—

"I'm out-voted in the conference."

Then he got down and we got down also.

Cherry Ripe seemed rather pleased at what we had decided to do, because I don't think he wanted to have another talk with the Doctor any more than we did. But he certainly had arranged rather a big job for us.

"You've got to pick it clean, mind you—roots and all," he said. Then he divided the bit of land into three with sticks, and it seemed to us that we had to weed about as much as a cricket pitch each.

"You shall have the biggest job, young master," he said to Trelawny. "And that's only right and fair, because you're such a big man and take such big views."

Trelawny did not answer, but he was evidently in a very proud frame of mind. He seemed determined to show Cherry Ripe something, if it was only how to weed.

We worked jolly hard, and Cherry Ripe kept us at it. Then in the distance went up three cheers, and we knew the match was over; and, from the sound of the cheers, it looked as if we'd won, because after a match we always cheer the enemy, and we always cheer him heartier if we've beat him—not intentionally, but still the sound is different.

"Now you can all nip back," said Cherry Ripe. "Better go the way you came—through the wood."

"And be killed by your bull, I suppose," said Pedlar. "Not likely!"

"We have accepted your terms," said Trelawny, "and if you are an honourable foe, you'll let us out by the gate."

"Better go through the wood," answered Cherry Ripe. "It's a lot shorter, and as to the old bull, you needn't mind him. He's my daughter's pet. He wouldn't hurt a daddy-long-legs, much less a nice young chap like you. Tame isn't the word for him. A pet lamb's fierce to him. Come on. I'll go as far as the wood with you if you're frightened."

All this was true. And when we got back into the field, Cherry Ripe scratched the bull's curly head and the bull almost purred. It was the mildest and humblest sort of a bull you ever saw, though so huge; and to see such an enormous and happy bull so close was rather interesting in its way. In fact, we

all gave it a pat, just to be able to say in after life that we had patted a monstrous bull.

"My youngest daughter often sits on his back," said Cherry Ripe. "This here bull has got a heart of gold, I do assure you."

"Another strategy," said Trelawny to me. "Certainly the man's cunning is frightful. I think I shall tell him about the seed—just to show him we've scored a bit too."

I advised not, but Trelawny was so stung by the way we'd been defeated all round by the wretched Cherry Ripe, that, as we were leaving him, he said—

"It may interest you to know that we've sowed that patch of your beastly ground under the wall with weeds of the deadliest sort. In fact, you'll never get them out again. So that's one for us, anyway."

"Well done!" said Cherry Ripe. "Where did you get the seed from?"

"That's our business," answered Trelawny. "Anyway, you'll find it out presently."

"Well," answered Cherry Ripe, "I know where you got the seed. It was from my good friend, Batson. And his boy be coming here to work next week. He's learned all your gardener at the school can teach him, and that wouldn't sink a ship. He brought the tale to his father, and his father brought it to me; and so I got the ground ready for you, knowing what a dashing fellow you are, and what a hurry you'd be in."

"More fool you then," said Trelawny.

"Not so fast. The seed you sowed was lettuce seed! Good-evening, my dears, and when you say your prayers afore you go to sleep to-night, you can all thank the Lord that you've done a bit of honest, useful work for once in your lives!"

* * * * *

We talked it over during prep., and Pedlar said—

"On the whole, we'd better keep this afternoon's work to ourselves."

And I said—

"We were overreached by superior cunning, and we'd better give Cherry Ripe best in future."

And Trelawny said—

"Wait! This, in a way, is a defeat. But I'll arrange a jolly good Waterloo for Cherry Ripe yet."

Meaning, of course, that he would be Wellington, and that Cherry Ripe would be merely Napoleon.

However, though I didn't say it to Trelawny, I doubt very much if he is

clever enough to score off Cherry Ripe till he grows up. Then, of course, Cherry Ripe will find him a bitter and relentless foe.

THE QWARRY

No. IX

THE QWARRY

If your parints happen to live in India, of corse holidays are not all they might be. Becorse India is too far off to go to often, and such relations as aunts and uncles don't seem much to care to have you if you are the son of an Indian soldier. But grandmothers always seem to want to have you; at least they do in the case of Travers; but his parints are ded. Anyway me and Morris have to stop at Dr Dunstan's for holidays, and so we have to be friends at those times. I am eleven and he is twelve and we are very diffrent, him being never knone to lose a conduct mark, and me being ordinry. I am called Foster and the hapiest day of my life was when I got ten shillings all at once, being my ninth birthday in a postal order from my father. The first fealing was one of shere joy, and the second fealing was that if it had been a pound it would have been better.

I remember the birthday only too well, though nearly two years ago, because immedeetly after getting the money I wrote to Mr Gammidge—the grand toy and games man—for some important things wanted by me and my chum, Smythe—him that cut off the Doctor's tiger's tail with such disasterous results. And by grate ill-luck that beest Steggles looked over my sholder and saw how I had begun my letter. I had asked Smythe how to begin it in a very respectful way, so as to please Mr Gammidge, and Smythe had said, "I should make it as friendly as you possibly can;" and I had said, "yes." Then I thort that as the friendliest letters I ever write are to my mother, I would begin it like that; and I had written down "Darling Mr Gammidge, I shall be very grately obliged by your sending me if you have time by return of post"—certain things. Becorse Mr Gammidge was quite as much to me as my mother in those days, if not more.

Well, the beestly Steggles saw this and set up a loud and hideous yell of

laughter which was very paneful to me and Smythe. And presently, when he had drawn the attenshun of many chaps to the letter, he told us on no account to send it, but to write in a firm and manly tone and *order* the things. He said when you are sending postal orders you have always the rite to be firm and manly; and when you are asking for them, that is the time to be affecshunite. So we wrote the letter again and merely said, "Dere Mr Gammidge," and sined ourselves, "yours truly, Arnold Foster and Huxley Smythe."

I must now return to Morris, who was left at Merivale with me during the grate summer holiday last year. In a way his luck was friteful although he had nowhere to go in holidays. Even his amusements were such that they turned into marks and plesed the masters, such as natural history; and his conduct marks were so exstraordinry that he never lost any at all without an effort.

In face he was nothing, being sandy-haired and pail with a remarkably small mouth and watery eyes. He had not much courage but was fond of chaps who had, and he liked me and Smythe more for our courage than anything. We tried without success to increese his courage, and he helped us a lot with work that didn't want courage but only intelleck, of which he had a grate deal.

It was reely owing to my courage that the adventure of the old slate quarry happened. You see the holiday competishun for that year was a colleckshun of insect life, such as beetles, moths and butterflies, and as Merivale happened to be a fine place for insect life in general, Morris determined to win the prize if he could.

When the Doctor and his family went off to the seaside, the last thing he said to me and Morris was this—

"Farewell, my dear lads. Persue all innocent pleasures and give no corse of offence during the vocation. The Matron will be at your service and she has the key of the libery. The playing field is also open to you, and having regard for the seeson I relax a little of the riggid discipline of time and place, of hours and bounderies, proper to the term. But I put you on your honour in this matter and feal that the chastening influenze of Morris will possibly serve to restrain the native exooberance of Foster. Lastly I have directed that the comissariat shall be ordered on a generous—nay, lavvish skale. Good-bye, my dear boys, and God bless you."

We said "good-bye," and I hoped that the Doctor and Missis Dunstan and the gurl Dunstans would have a good time; and the Doctor thanked me and said he was glad I had the grace to make that wish; and after he had gone, Morris said that he very nearly said "God bless you" to the Doctor, but staid just in time. And I said it was jolly lucky he had, for it certainly would have been friteful cheek to do it.

Then two cabs rolled away with the Doctor and his luggage and his family,

and me and Morris were left. We found what 'comissariat' ment at dinner, and I will say that the food was magnificent, and the Matron was a brick all through the holidays—very diffrent to what she is in term time; and she told us a lot about her private life, which turned out that she was a widow Matron with a son. And Morris said "Why don't you bring your son here, Matron?" And I said "Of corse, why don't you?" And Morris said "It would hurt the Doctor's feelings a good deal if he knew you had a son being educated somewhere else." And she said it was all right and the Doctor was as kind as any man could be, and that the son was working hard and was a very good son, being an office-boy in a lawer's office in London.

Then came the qwarry and my temptashun of Morris, which ended in Morris going to the qwarry.

The qwarry was certainly out of bounds, and it was when out of bounds in secret with Freckles and other big chaps that I found all the wonders of it. It was a stone qwarry in Merivale Grate Wood, and there were game preserves near by, where Freckles hunted and practiced to be a bush-ranger when he went home to Australia. But of course Morris had never seen the place, because he never went out of bounds at all, from fear and also from goodness, but cheefly from fear.

I said to Morris on a fine day in the middle of August—

"Have you got any draggon-flies in your collectshun?"

And he said—

"There are no draggon-flies in Merivale."

And I said—

"You're a liar."

And he said—

"Well, anyway, I never saw one."

And I said—

"In the old qwarry in Merivale Grate Wood there are billions."

And he said—

"They can't live without water to cool their tails."

And I said—

"Any fool knows that. There's a stream and a pond in the qwarry and the draggon-flies and blackberries and butterflies, including peacocks and red admirals, are all as common as dirt."

"It's a friteful pity it's out of bounds," said Morris to me, and I explained that, though out of bounds in term time, yet, owing to the Doctor's speshul words to us before he went on his holiday, every thing was free now.

Then Morris said—

"He put us on our honour."

And I said—

"I've got just as much honour as you for that matter. But my honour covers the hole of Merivale Grate Wood, and if your honour doesn't do the same, you'll loose the draggon-flies."

Morris thought over this a good deal.

At last he said—

"There's no doubt that Slade and probably Thompson minor will get draggon-flies in their collectshuns, owing to their living by swamps and rivers."

And I said—

"Do what you like, only it happens I'm going to the quarry to-morrow for the hole day, and Matron is going to make me sandwiches to take."

"If you honestly think it is an honourable thing to do——" said Morris.

"I honestly do think so," I said.

"I believe you're right," he said. Then rather a footling idea struck him.

"How would it be if we wrote a polite letter to the Doctor?" he asked.

"Not me," I said. "You may be sure that the Doctor, in his hard-earned vocation, doesn't want polite letters from me or even you. In fact, it might so much annoy him that he might change his mind all together and not put us on our honour at all, but merely say we were to keep bounds, which would be deth to me. Not that I should do it in any case."

So after a lot more rot and jaw about his blessed honour, Morris came, and the day was jolly fine to begin with, and we went well armed for sport in genral. He had his butterfly-net and killing-bottle—a beestly thing full of cemicals but merciful in its way, becorse when you put a butterfly in and shut down the cork the butterfly becomes unconshus without pane and dies pretty cumfortably. All the same, as Morris said to me while we watched a lesser tortusshell passing away, "deth is deth," and the killing bottle was the only part of natural history he did not care about. Before we got to the quarry he was wondering if the cemicals in the bottle would be strong enough for a draggon-fly.

I said—

"You've got to jolly well catch them first."

I had the sandwiches and a sling made of lether, which hurls a stone friteful distances. I had also got in secresy a packet of 'Windsor Pearl' cigarets and a box of matches. These I did not intend to show to Morris, because it wood have upset his honour again; but I had been a smoaker for years, having been taught by Steggles, and it seemed to me if I couldn't have a cigaret in the summer holidays now and then, I might as well give up smoaking all together.

There were tongue sandwiches, and bread and butter ones, and two hard-boiled eggs each, and two large lumps of carraway seed cake. It seemed a good deel to carry and yet not much to eat. I also took an india-rubber cup for water; but Morris said the water in the quarry was no doubt where the draggon-flies

lived in the first stages of their careers, and he doubted if we could drink it with safety. He litted nue that he would soon drink it whether it was safe or not.

[image]

AT ONE SPOT THE DESCENT WAS VERY PERILOUS.

There was only one way into the quarry and that was down a very steep and dangerous place. The opening into the quarry was all filled up and there were railings all round it to keep anybody from falling into it by night. Morris funked getting down for some time; then a draggon-fly actually sored past and so much excited him that he said he was reddy if I went first. I told him to see exactly what I did and then I went down. At one spot the dissent was very perilous owing to a huge stone that stuck out in the middle of the cliff. You had to curl over it and feal with your feet for a tree-root below, then, for one grate moment, you had to let go with your hands and cluch at a pointed stone on the right hand side. This stone was allways loose and wanted very delicate handling. To me, with years of practice, it was eesy; but I fealt sure it would be a bit of a twister for Morris.

He lowered down his killing-bottle and net and caterpillar-box, then he began to slowly dissend. But at the critikal moment he stretched for the pointed stone before he had got his foot on the root and all his wait came on the stone with the terrible result that the stone gave way. And when the big stone gave way, about a million other stones gave way also, so that Morris fell to the ground in an avvalanch of stones and the woods resounded with the sound. My first thort was keepers and my second thort was Morris.

He was alive and hardly hurt at all more than a spraned ankle. He went very white and sat down and shivered and felt his bones and limbs one by one. He said it was his first great escape from deth.

And I said—

”You may not have escaped all the same, becorse you’ve pulled down the cliff in your dissent, and that was the only way out of the quarry, and now there isn’t any way out at all!”

Which was perfectly true and not said to friten Morris. Getting out of the quarry was far far worse than getting in and wanted a nerve of iron, which I hadn’t mentioned to Morris till I got him safely in; but now he’d pulled down the place compleatly and left a naked precipice, and my nerve of iron was no good. In fact we were evidently going to have a grate adventure, and so I told Morris.

It certainly spoilt the day for him, becorse you can’t very well have a ripping good picknick if you don’t know how the picknick is going to end.

"It's a fine place for natural history no doubt," he said; "but we can't pretend we're going to have a good time now."

"We're going to have a long time anyway," I said.

He smiled in rather a gastlie way and said he hoped not, becorse the weather was changeing and it might rain later on.

Then I told him that wether didn't matter as there was a pretty dry cave where Freckles used to do his cooking of rabbits on half-holidays. Morris seemed glad about the cave. He rubbed his ankle and said, so far as that went, he felt pretty right. Presently he said—

"There are certainly red admirals here in grate quantities and also dragon-flies, but somehow I don't feel I've got the heart to kill annything for the moment, espeshully after what I've just eskaped myself. Deth is deth."

"You'll be better after food," I said.

But he wouldn't hear of food.

"We must face the possishun," he said. "Here we are in a quarry and we can't get out."

"Yes," I said.

"Very well. Then, there being no food in the quarry except what we have brort with us, we shall soon be hungry."

"Yes," I said. "I am now."

Morris went on trying to be calm, but I could see the more he explained the situashun the more fritened he got. His voice shook when he said the next thing.

"You can't go on being hungry for more than a certain time. After you reech a certain pich, you die."

"Yes," I said.

"Well, there you are," he said.

He figetted about with his killing-bottle and things, then made a hopeless sort of a sound like an engine letting off steem.

"We must consider meens of eskape," I said. "People come here sometimes, no doubt.

"Only boys out of bounds," said Morris faintly. "Oh, what would I give to see the face of Freckles peep over the top!"

"It's impossible," I told him. "Freckles is spending the holidays with some cousins in Norfolkshire. But there are often keepers in the woods to look after the game."

"Then we must shout at intervals, night and day—as long as we've got the strength to do it, said Morris.

"Before each shout we will eat a sandwich to increese our strength," I said. But Morris fancied half a sandwich would be safer.

I thort it wasn't much good beginning by starving ourselves. In adventures

nobody begins by starving—they end like that; but Morris, who has a watch, looked at it and said the time was only half-past ten and that, even if we were safe and within reach of food, we should not eat any for two hours and a half. But I said planely I could not waite that time and it ended by our dividing the food into two heaps of exactly the same size to a crumb. And I eat a sandwich boldly and fearlessly, but Morris shook his head and said it was foolhardy.

He took a very hopeless view from the first, and even thort that perhaps, when my food was all gone and his hardly begun, I should turn on him with the feerceness of starvashun and tare his food away from him. But I said, "No, Morris. What ever tortures I may suffer, I am a gentleman, and I would rather die a hundred times than take as much as one seed out of your peece of cake."

This comforted him rather. He put his hand on his chin and stared before him in a very feeble manner.

"Deth is deth," he began again.

"That's the third time you've said that," I told him, "and if you say it once more, I'll punch your head. Now, I'm going to utter the first grate shout, and I hope it may bring a keeper—not Thomas or Waxy West, for they are both very hard and beestly men, and very likely wouldn't rescue us even if they new we were here; but the under-keeper, Masters. He will certainly save us, and if he does, I'll give him my packet of cigarets."

I shouted six times; then I shouted six more times; then I told Morris to have a shot. But he made such a piffling, feeble squeak that you could hardly have heard him a quarter of a mile off.

"Lucky I can howl," I said, "or we should both be done for without a dout. Why, a lamb that has lost its mother would get up more row than that."

Morris was rather hurt at this. Me explained that he was making an Australian sound tought him by Freckles.

"It may not be loud," he said, "but it is a well-none sound in Australia and travel grate distances espeshully over water."

The menshun of water made us go and look at the pond. I was fritefully thirsty by now and drank some. It was grey in colour but clear when seen in my india-rubber cup and quite holesome to the taste. Morris doutd, but still he drank. I advised him to catch some draggon-flies and he said he would after the next time for shouting had come. We arranged that I should shout every half-hour, and Morris wanted to give me one sandwich from his store as payment for the exershun of shouting; but I skorned it and told him I would not think of doing so.

After the second shouting, which did nothing, used my sling a bit and neerly hit a bird, and Morris cought a draggon-fly and let it go out of pitty, and then he cought another and kept it to see if the killing-bottle would kill it. It did.

After about half a minute in the bottle the draggon was gone, and we shook him out and examined his butiful markings of yellow and black and his transparent wings, that had the colours of the rainbow on them when the sun fell on them in a particular manner.

Morris stroaked it in a sorroful way.

"It is out of its missery now. I wish me and you were," he said.

I said we hadn't begun our missery yet. I advised him to eat a sandwich and he did, but very reluctantly.

He said that water would keep life in the human frame for many weeks. He also said that he fealt, in a damp place like this, we might eesily get pewmonia. He wondered if I hadn't better shout every quarter of an hour. He also thort his watch was going far too slow owing to his fall down the side of the qwarry. The sun had gone behind some rather dark clouds and we couldn't be sure where it was.

The only thing that happened during the next hour was that the draggon-fly came to again, not being ded but merely incensible. It lifted a paw rather feebly to its forehead and evvidently had a headache. Then it took a step or two and shivered a lot. Somehow it grately cheered Morris the draggon-fly recovering. He sed it had come out of the jaws of deth and so perhaps we should. He gave it an atom of tongue out of a sandwich, but it was not up to eating, and turned away from it. Then Morris got it some water to wet its glittering tail. This certainly refreshed it and so Morris dashed a few drops on its head which refreshed it still more. At half-past two it rose and flew several inches and at three it disappeared.

By this time I had eaten all my sandwiches and drunk tons of water and was pealing my first hard-boiled egg.

Suddenly Morris had an idea. He had only eaten one sandwich and was of course famishing with hunger. He said—

"If you was to write a message and tie it round a stone and sling it into space, it might be found and red. Then a resque party would be arranged and we should be saved."

It was pretty good for Morris, and I took out my pocket-book instantly and wrote three messages. And he wrote three. He sed it was like men on sinking ships, who send off messages in bottles that are found many years afterwards in Iceland. And I said it was. Of corse we hoped one at leest of the six messages might be found pretty soon. Years afterwards was no good to us.

I merely wrote—

"Lost in Grate Wood Qwarry and unable to get out. Arnold Foster. Come at once."

And Morris wrote—

"At the point of deth in Grate Wood Qwarry. No eskape. Food neerly done.

A handsome reward will be given. William Arkwright Henderson Morris.”

I asked him how he new a handsome reward would be given, and he said he didn't, but that he felt it was a safe thing to say and might make all the difference to anybody finding the message. Then I shot off the six messages rapped round stones, and they easily flew over the edge of the quarry. I then shouted again and eat my first egg.

Just when it began to rain Morris had another grate idea. He said—

”Didn't you say something about a packet of cigarets some time ago?”

And I said—

”Yes, and I am glad you reminded me about them, becouse I just feal that one will do me a lot of good.”

Then I pulled them out and opened the packet and took one and lit it.

”It is very restful in such an adventure as this,” I told Morris.

Then he explained his idear. It is well none that when you are learning to smoak, your appetite is often spoilt for a time. Now Morris thort that if he smoaked, he would not want food, and so much valuable food might be saved, and life prolonged if necessary.

He said—

”To you, who smoak so eesily, no dout it is no good, but I have never smoaked, and if I took a cigaret and went through with it, it might turn me off eating for some time.”

This was true, but I pointed out a grate danger that Morris had forgotten.

”That is all right and I will of corse share my cigarets with you, and as there are twenty, that will be ten each,” I said; ”but I must seeriously warn you, Morris, that to a perfect beginner, like you, many things might happen besides merely a fealing against tongue sandwiches. You might be absolutely sick and then——”

”All the food in me would be wasted,” said Morris in a very tragick tone.

He turned quite white at this idea. He said it would be madness to do anything to weaken his system at such a critikal time, and I said so too. Then he asked me to go and smoak further off, because the very smell made him feal rather strange after what I had told him.

I smoaked three cigarets bang off and they only made me hungrier than ever. Then the rain became rather bad and at four o'clock we entered the cavern. At least I did, but Morris stood at the door ready to run out and shout if by a lucky chance anybody came in sight on the edge of the quarry. But nobody came and the next serious thing was that my voice began to get husky after so much shouting. Morris said it was the cigarets, but I told him it was owing to yelling all day every half-hour, which undoubtedly it was.

At six I went to sleep for some time in the cave and Morris did not wake me, because he said that I was gaining strength by it. When I woke it was getting

darkish and I thort it would be a good thing to make a fire. Morris thort so too and we made one reddy with a lot of ded fern that Freckles had put long ago into the cavern. We took the paper that had rapped up our lunch, and put it under the fern, and covered it with my coat to keep it dry; and after dark we lighted it, and it made a good blaze for a minute but unfortunately went out owing to the rain.

The rain, in fact, began to pour steddily and it was a partickularly dark evening. Morris became a simple worm after dark. He took a small bite out of a sandwich and said his prayers from end to end every half-hour. I had only got my cake left now, and it seemed to me better to have one good meel and have done with it than keep messing about like Morris was. So I finished my cake and tried to go to sleep again.

We found that water came through the roof of the cavern in rather large quantities, and Morris had a new terror. He said—

”If we can’t get out of the qwarry, then I don’t see how water can get out, and so, if it rains more than a certain amount, the qwarry will get full and we shall be drowned.”

Which showed what a footling state of mind Morris had got into.

Presently I sneezed and he said of corse that it was the beginning of pewmonia. Then he asked for a match to see the time and it was six minutes past ten. Then I shouted again at the cavern entrance without result.

He kept on asking for matches to see the time until there were only five left, and I said we must keep these for immergencies, and he said he supposed we must.

At last he went into a sort of sleep after shedding some teers and pretending it was a cold in his head. Then I lighted a cigaret and found much to my supprise that I was beginning to feal queer myself with a new sort of queerness quite new to me.

I woke Morris and told him that I was sorry to say I was ill; and he said he was undoubtedly very ill too and had been dreeming of his mother, which he only did when frightfully ill. He also asked me if I believed in ghosts and I said I thort I did. And he said he always did.

There were some awfully strange noises happening outside at this time, and I sakrificed another match and found it was neerly one o’clock. Then we went to the mouth of the cavern and listened to a peculiar creepy sound far off. The rain had stopped and a sloppy looking moon was coming up. Morris shivered.

”That might be the mournful yell of some wretched ghost,” he said.

”It’s owels,” I said, but he did not think so. He thort it was too miserable for owels.

It came neerer and certainly was not owels.

Then a thort struck me.

"It's a resque party!" I said.

We shouted with all our might and screamed and yelled, and presently there was an ansering yell and we fealt that with any luck we were now saved. Soon toarches gleemed through the trees, and there were sounds of human feet and langwidge.

I said to Morris—

"We are now saved, Morris, and if you are not going to eat your piece of carraway seed cake, I should very much like to."

And he said—

"You can eat everything. I have such a fealing of thankfulness to be saved, that I couldn't eat for the moment, empty as I am. Besides there will be supper provided."

A man shouted above us and I heard the hated voice of Waxy West.

"Be you little devils down there?" he cried out.

"Yes, we are, Mr West," I answered him very loud. "We're doing no harm at all—merely waiting quietly to be resqued. We only came for draggon-flies, and the side of the qwarry gave way unfortunately, or we shouldn't have had to trouble you at such a late hour."

He growled in rather an unkind tone of voice, and we saw there were two other men with him. Then they began to make arrangements for the resque and one was told to go and get a rope.

"If ever I catch you in this place again, I'll break both your necks," said Waxy West; and though this was rather strong, it comforted Morris in a way, becorse it showed that West hadn't found his messages offering a handsome reward. If there had been any question of that, he would have been polite and kringeing; but he was just as usual.

We found out, after, that Matron had got in a funk and gone to the big house, where the people belonging to Merivale Grate Wood live; and the people had sent their keepers in all directions to save us.

These keepers got a rope and made knots in it and lowered it down, and told us that we must climb up it. And I let Morris go first, which he did; and then I went up, and the keepers saw us home.

I told Waxy West that I should mention the subject to my parints in India and that I hoped they might send at least a pound to him, and he said it wasn't likely, becorse he'd done them the worst turn any man could. And he said that if I wanted to reward him, I would never go into Merivale Grate Wood again; and I promised I wouldn't go in again for a full month. Which he evvidently didn't believe.

There was fritefully good tuck waiting for us at school, and the Matron,

who had been blubbing, said a grate many rather unkind things while we eat it. But she promised not to tell Dr Dunstan and he does not no even to this day.

Morris didn't win the holiday competishun becorse, as he expected, both Slade and Thompson minor brort back draggon-flies. We might eesily have gone to the quarry again, after the month I promised Waxy West was over, but nothing would tempt Morris to go, though I bought ten yards of good rope for my own use. However, he paid me sixpence for getting him back his killing-bottle and his butterfly-net and his caterpillar-box, which were forgot in the excitement of the resque; and that was all to the good.

RICHMOND AND THE MAJOR-GENERAL

No. X

RICHMOND AND THE MAJOR-GENERAL

The fellows talk such a lot of absolute piffle about what I did, and tell such a frightful number of regular right down lies about it, that I have decided to write out the whole thing myself from the beginning, that the truth shall be known. There is nothing like truth really, and it is the only thing that lasts, and I am going to tell the truth fearlessly, because honesty is the best policy, however hard it may be at the time.

Well, after I gave up preaching to the chaps at Merivale, owing to the row about Browne and Stopford and all the unpleasantness afterwards, I felt that my occupation was gone in a sort of way; and it so weighed on my mind that I was one of the first to get German measles and one of the last to recover. I was shut up in the hospital and had a great deal of time on my hands for thought, and the more I thought, the more I felt that my preaching gift ought not to be wasted like this. I tried preaching to myself once or twice, to keep my hand in, and I found that I was clean out of practice and couldn't work up to "thirdly and lastly" without getting regularly tied in a knot. Then I tried to preach to the matron, and she said it was morbid and told the doctor (for I heard her through the door) that I was very low and taking a most unhealthy interest in religion. After which I had a

lot more most uncalled for and beastly medicine, and was isolated for three more days; because the doctor said it might be something else threatening. What was threatening really was my conscience. I was perfectly well and frightfully eager to be doing good in the world; and as it seemed simply useless to try to do any more good at Merivale, chiefly owing to that son of Belial called Stopford, I came to the terrific resolve of going. I decided to leave quietly. I thought on the last day of being isolated I would steal out into the world in a spirit of calm courage, and try to do good, and leave the rest to Providence.

I did nothing rashly, because it is well known that Heaven helps those who help themselves, and we must not throw all the burden on Providence, however much inclined we may feel to do so. We are given our talents to use, not to put under a bushel. I had ten shillings and a telescope, worth eight-and-six. I had nothing else but my volume of Skeleton Sermons. It seemed enough.

One is bound to be worldly-wise up to a certain point; and this is right and proper. If you have a mission, you must use the best means for carrying it out, and even money may be put to very proper purposes if it is spent with a high object. Besides, the labourer is worthy of his hire.

With my money I determined to use artificial means for getting as far from Merivale as possible. For ten shillings you can go an immense distance by train, though a half-ticket was no longer possible for me, as I was over twelve; but a train is far too public and I should have been discovered. Therefore I decided upon the simple plan of hiring a bicycle. The time was May and the evenings were long. Therefore I determined to hire the bicycle during the hour when everybody would be in chapel for evening prayer. Being isolated I could do this.

The eventful night was fine and warm. I slipped out unperceived, but I had taken the precaution not to wear my hat with the school colours, as that would have been instantly observed. So I went to my private box and took out my round bowler hat, which could not lead to detection. I then got over the hedge into the main road, because to have walked out of the gate by the lodge would have much decreased my chances of escape.

All went well. The people at the bicycle shop raised no difficulty, and for five shillings they let me have a machine for two hours—also matches to light the lamp. It was put into their minds to trust me, and I saw from the first that Providence was going to help me. The man even shortened the steps a little as I am unusually stumpy in the legs.

I gave him five shillings and set off. Pursuit would not begin till my supper was brought by the matron, and I had a clear hour before that time. Then I knew what would happen; because two terms before, young Watkinson, who was homesick, had run away and tried to walk from Merivale, in Devonshire, to Edinburgh, where his grandmother lives; but he had been taken by Mannering

riding that way on his bicycle, two miles out of Merivale. So I knew that the masters on bicycles and policemen on foot would soon be after me, and I intended to avoid the main roads and spend the night in some harmless and wholesome cowhouse on a bed of sweet meadow hay. Then in the morning I should rise, get a drink of milk and a little bread-and-butter from some simple and kind-hearted housewife, and leave the bicycle with her to be returned by train to the bicycle shop at Merivale. What would happen after that I left entirely to Providence.

A telescope and a rather fat book are awkward things on a bicycle, and they bumped me rather heavily, one on each side, as I started. So after riding a few miles I dismounted, slung the telescope over my back and buttoned the Skeleton Sermons to my chest. Though not comfortable, they did not bump, and I went steadily on my way. At a quarter to nine I lighted my lamp and well knew that Mannering and Chambers had started, and that many telegrams, including one to my father, had probably been sent off by Dr. Dunstan from Merivale. For the first time I considered what view my father would take of my action, and I was bound to feel that he might not care much about it. My father, though a good father to me, has never trusted as much in Providence as I could have wished; which is curious, seeing that he is not only a clergyman but also a rural dean. He wants me to go into some lucrative business, but I never will, for I have no feeling for it. My father thinks that money is everything, and I know well it is not. He said to me once that you can always tell a gentleman by his neckties and the cigars he smokes. Which is childish, because many perfect gentlemen never smoke cigars at all.

I got rather depressed after dark—entirely owing to thinking about my father. I also got strangely hungry and was beginning to wonder whether I had better try for some supper anywhere, or just leave nature to settle that. Then a most serious and unforeseen thing happened and the hind tyre of the bicycle went off with a loud explosion, like a pistol. I dismounted instantly. I kept my nerve and quietly considered the situation. For a moment it looked as if Providence was against me, but I could not be sure of this yet. I wheeled the bicycle to a gate and sat on the gate and considered. Then, far down the road I had come, I saw a light and instantly perceived that another bicycle was approaching at quite twenty miles an hour. To drag my bicycle through the gate into the field, to shut the gate, extinguish the lamp, and crouch in the hedge motionless and silent, was the work of an instant. The bicycle flew past and the man on it grunted with little grunts. It was, in fact, the well-known grunt of Mannering—a sound he always makes at footer and hockey. So I saw that Providence was still with me and felt very much cheered; because, if the tyre had not burst, I should have been quietly riding along not thinking of Mannering, and he would have overtaken me and all would have been over.

My resolutions were soon made. I left the main road, which was evidently now no place for me, and wheeled the bicycle down a lane near a farm. I felt that it would be necessary to my health to eat something before sleeping, but cared little what it was, and decided that I would just take the fruits of the earth—corn or a few turnips, or anything. In the morning I should mention it to the farmer's wife and ask her to change my five-shilling piece. For the change from my ten-shilling piece, after paying for the bicycle hire, was a five-shilling piece.

I now became conscious of the fact that the bicycle was a hindrance rather than a help. To leave it behind was, therefore, the work of a moment. But first I took a leaf out of my pocketbook and wrote on it these words—

"Kindly return this bicycle to the shop of Messrs. Jones and Garratt, bicycle works, Merivale, and all will be well. The hind wheel is punctured. The finder will probably be rewarded."

To show, however, that I was not careless for the bicycle, I may say that I went on till I found a cowshed, so that the machine might be dry and not suffer from night dew or possible rain. It was not the sort of cowshed that I meant to sleep in myself, being evidently used purely for cows, and having no fragrant, clean hay or anything of the kind in it; but it was good enough for the bicycle; so I left it there and went on my way.

There are very peculiar and creepy sounds to be heard in the country at night, and I heard them all. Everything, in fact, is quite different to what it is by day. Especially the colours of things. There was a watery sort of moon, and it made all the leaves on the trees look as if they were cut out of dirty white paper. And it made gate-posts and tree-stems look as if they were alive. I got a curious sort of feeling about this time and lit a match and read a couple of Skeleton Sermons. This put me absolutely all right, and I went to seek some of the fruits of the earth. But May is evidently a bad time for that purpose. In fact, there were simply no fruits of the earth to eat anywhere, so I had to trust to young leaves. Beech leaves are all right in a way, but you soon have enough. That was all I could get, however, and I washed them down with a drink from a brook, but unluckily slipped in while filling my bowler hat with water. Then the thing was to find a comfortable place with sweet, snug straw; and I crept down to a farmhouse; and, hearing me creeping down unfortunately upset a dog so much that it barked steadily for half-an-hour and woke many other dogs for miles round.

At last I found a poorish sort of shed which had no sweet, fragrant hay but

only a cart with sacks in it. The sacks had been used for guano. Still they were better than nothing, and I got into the cart and pulled the sacks over me, having first taken off my socks and hung them on the edge of the cart to dry. I slept, but not well, and when morning came I found myself deeply scented with guano and starving for food, but otherwise all right and still free. So I read a bit, and put on my socks, and set out boldly down a lane to the farm. But, after all, I did not go to this particular farm, because, instead of a motherly woman or some beautiful young girl standing at the door feeding chickens and pigeons, there were two men in a corner killing a pig, and the pig simply hated it; and to see this done on an empty stomach is very trying to the nerves. So I went hastily and boldly on, and at last found a quiet and humble cottage and a woman in it. I don't think she would have given me food for nothing; but when I said I would pay her a shilling for a breakfast, and showed her my five shillings to prove it, she met my views gladly and gave me three pieces of bread-and-butter, an egg, that was not laid yesterday, and some tea. Then she changed the five-shilling piece and gave me back four shillings.

Much refreshed and with nothing to trouble me but a cold in the head, doubtless owing to getting my feet wet, I went on my way. My idea was to get to Exeter and then boldly take my stand in the cathedral yard and try to begin doing good and arresting the careless passer-by, and leaving the rest to Providence. I did not know whether it might be possible to get to Exeter by lanes and footpaths over fields. Nothing happened except that I gave away two shillings in charity to a blind woman with four children. I also said a few encouraging words to her. And then, being now in the middle of a very lonely common covered with yellow gorse and white may, I came suddenly upon a man sitting under a bush smoking a cigarette. He was evidently not a happy man, being very ragged and with one laced boot and one elastic one. His hair was long, partly yellow and partly grey; his face was as brown as leather; and he had little rings in his ears. His clothes were faded and a good deal patched. He evidently did not mind what he wore. His eyes were blue and bright, but rather kind on the whole. There was a paper opened beside him. It was a bit of newspaper and contained bones and the sort of food you give to dogs. His nails were long and black, and some of his fingers perfectly yellow from smoking cigarettes.

I said—

”Good-morning! Can you kindly tell me the distance to Exeter?”

And he said—

”I'm going there myself after I've finished my breakfast. It's about ten miles from here.”

I thought very likely that Providence had thrown this rather unsuccessful man into my path for a good purpose; so I said—

"As we are both going to Exeter, we might perhaps walk part of the way together. Only I like the quiet lanes and field-paths best—not the high road."

He seemed to think the idea quite possible. He said—

"Can't be too quiet for me."

I said—

"I cannot tell you my history, but I may tell you this much: I am quite determined to do some good in the world."

He said—

"Funny you should say that. I'm just the same. I'm nuts on doing some good myself. In fact, I was sitting here this minute wondering what the dickens it should be."

I said—

"The truest way to make yourself happy is to set to work to make other people happy."

And he said—

"Righto! I've always stuck to that. And I've been so busy lately, trying to make other people cheerful, that I've got rather down on my own luck."

He offered me the remains of his repast, which I declined. Then I told him that I had two shillings and that, if he was still hungry, he might share my lunch with me when we came to some quiet inn. He thanked me heartily and fell in with this. He said he wasn't hungry but was suffering from an agonizing thirst. He said that thirst was a disease with him, also smoking; and I told him that it was a terrible mistake to become the victim of a habit; and he said he knew only too well that it was.

I improved his mind a good deal before we came to an inn, and then, not wishing to be seen, I gave him one of my shillings and told him to spend sixpence on himself and sixpence on me. I merely wanted sixpennyworth of good, wholesome bread-and-cheese; and I went behind some haystacks and waited for him.

He was a long time coming, and, when he did come, I was surprised to find how little bread-and-cheese he brought for sixpence. Me admitted frankly that it was very little; but he said the landlord was a hard man and he would not give a crumb more for the money.

While I ate, Marmaduke FitzClarence Beresford—for that was this friend's name—told me something of his life. He was a gentleman by birth and also by education. He had, in fact, been to Eton and Oxford and also in the army. He had won the Victoria Cross and been mentioned several times in dispatches. He had even shaken hands with the King and been thanked by the House of Commons for his services in the Boer War. But then, at the very height of his worldly prosperity, a bank had broken and he had suddenly found himself quite ruined

and penniless. Of course he had to leave the army, for in the position he had now reached, which was that of major-general, his mess bill alone ran into gold every week. A major-general has to buy champagne every day of his life, whether he drinks it or not. It is a rule in the British army and very important. But he said that nothing mattered as long as one tried to do good in the condition in life that one found oneself in. He said I was perfectly right to carry my Skeleton Sermons with me, and that the first thing he was going to do, when he had saved a little money, was to buy a volume himself. But, if anything, he was still more interested in my telescope. He said that it was good for five shillings and advised me to sell it. He explained that it was useless to me if I was going to devote the rest of my life to doing good; and of course this was true.

He said we had better stop where we were till dusk, and that there was a small town, two miles off, where it might be possible for him, as a favour to me, to get a friend of his to buy the telescope. So we sat a good many hours in this quiet field; and he smoked thousands of cigarettes, and I told him many things that it was useful for him to know; and he told me many things that it was not particularly useful for me to know, yet interesting. He was a well-meaning and religious officer, but he was rather soured, naturally enough, owing to the utter breaking of his bank and the loss of his hard-earned savings.

He admitted that I had made him see several things in a very new and different light, and then, towards evening, he said we might now start to sell the telescope. He said with a part of the proceeds I might get a fairly clean bed at the little town, and that he hoped, after a comfortable night's rest, I should be able to start refreshed and strong to do good at Exeter. I asked him where he was going to sleep, and he said in some ditch, because, for the moment, he was absolutely without means, having given away his last shilling to a poor tramp who was even worse off than himself. I told him he might be very sure that he would never regret that shilling; and he said probably not in the long run, but, just for the moment, as it was going to be a wet night and he had a bad cold on his chest developing into bronchitis, he felt a little weak and regretful. Then I said—

”You shall share this telescope with me, Major-general Beresford, and if you like to throw in your lot with me, we will take a humble lodging for the night and start to do good to-morrow.”

He said it was almost more than he had a right to expect; and yet it showed how wicked he had been to doubt Providence for a moment. He almost cried, and I cheered him up and told him to be courageous and hopeful. Then he said he would try to be; and then he went off with the telescope, while I waited just outside the small town behind a hoarding. The major-general had said that he should be about an hour, as a thing of this kind wanted a good deal of doing; but

he wasn't: he came back in twenty minutes, and he brought the telescope with him, and he was in a frightful rage and spoke several soldierly words that were not at all right to use for a man who wanted to do good.

Me said—

"The blighters won't let me pop it! They all want to know how I came by it! Dash their infernal impudence! Why, they'd have had the cops on me if I'd stopped to argue about it! You'd better take it yourself. But I'll be even with some of 'em yet, clash and bash them! I'll burn their very bad-word houses down about their ears before they're much older!"

In this dreadful way he went on for some time; then I tried to calm him down and told him he must not feel too much hurt because common, crafty men in shops regarded him suspiciously. I said—

"You evidently lost your temper with them, and that is never right or wise. It was your boots that made them doubt you. You ought quietly to have told them who you are, and about the King shaking hands with you, and the bank breaking, and so on. Then they would have understood, and if they had been Christian men, they would have sympathized with you and very likely have given six or seven shillings for the telescope."

He said, rather foolishly—

"Given six or seven grandmothers for the telescope!"

Then he seemed to grow suddenly suspicious of me and he asked—

"Where did *you* get it from anyhow? If I thought you'd sneaked it, I'd—"

"I got it from my Uncle Horace," I said. "He is an amateur astronomer and understands the stars."

"Well, I ought to understand three balls by this time," answered the major-general, though what this meant I have never understood myself to this day.

Then he began to make me rather uncomfortable, and I detected a good deal of vulgarity in him. But doubtless it often turns people vulgar and brutal to come down in the world, owing to having to mix with their inferiors and suchlike.

Now he began to ask me about myself in a very cross-questioning manner, and at last it seemed to me that I must tell him the truth. In fact, he kept on so about who I was and where I had come from, that it got to be a simple question between telling him the truth and telling him a lie. Therefore, of course, I told him the truth, and said that my name was Richmond and that I had lately changed my way of life by leaving school in order to do some public work in the way of goodness.

He seemed much surprised.

"You've run away from school then?" he exclaimed.

"Yes," I said; "but of course I am telling you this in the strictest confidence."

He quite saw that, and said that he regarded the confidence as a great com-

pliment to him. He became perfectly friendly again and said that, when a boy, he had run away from school also, and that most boys of spirit did so—in fact, nearly every boy who ever made much of a mark in the world began in that manner. I reminded him that he had been to Eton and Oxford, and he admitted it. It was from Eton that he had run away, but he had been subsequently captured and taken back.

"Now you have confided in me," he said, "I think I can really be of some practical use to you."

He guessed at the time and said, that if we put our best foot foremost, we ought to be in Exeter by midnight. I remember, curiously enough, wondering which was his best foot—the one in the lace-up boot, or the one with elastic sides. Anyway, we set off after I had shared my last shilling with him. This he changed into food and drink at a small public-house by the wayside.

"At Exeter," he said, "I am widely known and respected. When we get there, certain people will welcome me in a friendly spirit, and I am quite sure they will welcome you too. In fact, I can promise you a very warm welcome and a good night's rest."

"Will they take the telescope?" I asked.

"No," he said. "They are not people like that. When they understand the situation, they will be perfectly well satisfied with you as you are."

I was glad that the major-general had come back to this quieter and wiser frame of mind, and thanked him.

"I hope it may be in my power to do you a service some day," I said; and then, in his turn, he thanked me.

"You never know," he replied. "You may be able to do me a good turn even sooner than you think for."

He smoked thousands more cigarettes, and asked me about my home and my family. He was rather interested to hear that my father was a rural dean, and kindly hoped that he made a good thing out of it. I told him that I believed he did; but I explained to him that money was not everything—indeed, far from it—and that too much is a great temptation. He said that he had never had enough, even in his palmiest days, to judge; and I said—

"There are many precious things that money will not buy, major-general. You must admit that. It won't buy affection, for instance."

He sniffed and evidently doubted this. He said—

"It will buy all the affection I want—and a bit over."

Then the lights of Exeter at last appeared and I was frightfully exhausted by now and jolly glad to see them.

"Here we are at last, thank the Lord," said my companion, though not in a very pious tone. Then, at the outskirts of the town, we came to a building with a

light outside, and the major-general pushed me in in front of him—rather roughly, I thought. The inside was brightly illuminated with gas and, to my amazement, the building contained nothing but policemen. One of these was much astonished to see us.

"Hullo, Slimey Sam!" he said to my companion. "'Tisn't often you give us a call without a little help from behind!"

Then, to my horror, the major-general cast subterfuge to the winds and appeared in his true character.

"No," he said. "It took four of you blue worms to carry me in last time I was here; but this is just a friendly visit. I've been doing a bit of your work, in fact."

Instantly I perceived my position and made a dart for the door; but my faithless companion was too quick for me.

"No, you don't, my little man!" he cried out, and grabbed me by the collar as he did so. "This is the missing link," he said to the policemen, and they were much interested instantly.

"The boy from Merivale?"

"Yes."

Several policemen hastened to the telephone, and one hurried off to the main police-station of Exeter, and all was excitement, disorder and confusion. Slimey Samuel—for this was the real name of the treacherous and unfeeling man—told them the whole story in my hearing; but he omitted the part about not being able to sell the telescope, and the only thing that interested him personally was the question of the reward.

And really there is not much more to add, because what my father said, and what Dr. Dunstan said and did, and what Mannering said, and what the bicycle people said, and what the other chaps said when I went back, is none of it particularly interesting in a general way.

In fact, the only thing that would have been very interesting and that I should really like to be able to tell, is what Slimey Samuel said when he got his blood-money for giving me up to justice. He declared to the police in my hearing that it ought to be good for a hundred quid at least. But his nature was far too hopeful, and as a matter of fact he only got two pounds from my father and an offer of honest work. He only took the money; and I expect he felt rather bitter about it; and I felt rather bitter about it in secret also; because it seemed to show that my father did not put much value on me. Two pounds for a human life—let alone your own son—is really rather little. No doubt my father will go on thinking nothing of me till I am a man. Then, perhaps, the day may come when I shall be able to show him that, after all, money is mere dust in the balance against a son, who can do the sort of things I hope and intend to do, when I grow up into

manhood.

THE GOOD CONDUCT PRIZE

No. XI

THE GOOD CONDUCT PRIZE

I

Going through the school-room of the third, which is my own form, I chanced to see Saunders minor and Fowle there; and, just as I passed them, Saunders minor said that he wished he was dead.

This, from Saunders minor, was a bit out of the common, so I stopped and asked him why. He said—

"It's only a manner of speaking, Thwaites; but, all the same, I do, because of the Good Conduct Prize."

"Well," I said, "you're a snip for it; everybody knows that."

"Not now," he answered. "In fact, it's all up, and the silver watch and chain are gone."

Of course, when young Saunders talked about a silver watch and chain, he didn't mean Dr. Dunstan's footling Good Conduct Prize, which is always a book of a particularly deadly kind, such as *Lays of Ancient Rome*; but he meant the special prize his father had promised him if he won the highest marks for good conduct in his class. And he was simply romping home when this happened.

"Of course, it's that beast Foster," said Fowle. "I always hated Foster, and now, knowing he couldn't win by fair means, he made that peculiar face at Saunders just as the Doctor came in to say prayers last night; and Saunders laughed, not knowing the Doctor had actually come in; and the Doctor took off five conduct marks at one fell swoop."

"Foster must win now," said Saunders. "But it's a blackguard thing."

"And if Foster doesn't win, you will," said Fowle to me.

Curiously enough, this was true. I had been going rather strong on good conduct this term for private reasons. In fact, my father had promised me—not

a silver watch—but a flogging, or very likely two, if I came home again with a holiday punishment.

You must know that at Merivale there was a putrid system called 'holiday punishments,' and if you didn't get a certain number of good conduct marks in the term, instead of going home in glory with a good report, you went home with a holiday punishment. Well, owing to one thing and another, I had taken home a holiday punishment four terms running; and my father began to get rather nasty about it. As a rule, he is a sort of father who talks very ferociously but doesn't do much; therefore, when he actually does flog me, which happens now and then, it comes as a great and unpleasant surprise. And I felt, in the matter of the good conduct marks, that if I went back with another holiday punishment, he would certainly keep his word and flog me to the best of his power. Therefore, I bucked up in a very unusual way, and though miles behind Saunders minor and Foster, was miles in front of the others; and when suddenly Fowle said this to me, that if Foster also smashed up as Saunders had done, I must get the Good Conduct Prize in the third, I felt quite giddy. Needless to say, I had never taken home a prize in my life. In fact, it seemed almost too much. My people would never believe it.

Of course, if such a thing really did happen, it would be a frightful score off my father; but then there was Foster. He stood six clear marks ahead of me, and unless some awful catastrophe overtook Foster, it was impossible for me to catch him. Then it seemed to me as Foster, in the most unsporting manner, had made his well-known comic face that always forced Saunders minor to laugh, and so he had got ahead of Saunders by a paltry trick, therefore it was only right that Foster should be scored off too. Needless to say, I was quite prepared to score off Foster myself; but then, very likely that would end by smashing me up, so it seemed to me that the thing to do was to try and get some outside person to score off Foster, like he had scored off Saunders minor.

I thought a lot about it, but I couldn't see any way that was perfectly sportsmanlike. Then Fowle, who is not sportsmanlike but very cunning, said there was a way. I felt pretty certain his way must be mean and piffling; but for once he thought of rather a good way. At least, it seemed good to me.

"I can't do anything myself," Fowle said, "because the last time I was interested in a fight, you will remember, the result was very unpleasant for me; but all the same, in a case like this, there ought to be a fight, and very likely if you explained in a perfectly friendly spirit to Saunders minor that he owes it to himself to fight Foster, he will be much obliged to you, and so into training for it."

Well, I was bound to admit that for once Fowle seemed to be right. Because, if Saunders minor fought Foster, the marks of battle would appear on Foster, even if he won; and they would be noticed by Browne, who hates fighting, and always

takes off half the term's good conduct marks when he finds a chap who has clearly had a fight.

So I put it to Saunders minor.

I said, "I come in a perfectly friendly spirit, Saunders minor, and I don't want to put you to any inconvenience with Foster. But, as he's knocked you out of the Good Conduct Prize and your silver watch, which your father may never offer again, as they often change their minds, you have a frightful and bitter grievance against Foster."

"You may also add that Queen Anne is dead," said Saunders minor.

"I know," I said. "But the point is that I'm rather worried to see you taking this lying down. It isn't worthy of the third. We've always been a fighting form, and, in fact, you ought to resist this tooth and nail; and I'd be your second like a shot; and West, the champion of the lower school, would referee—to oblige me."

Saunders minor was a good deal interested.

"D'you think I ought to lick him?" he asked.

"I think you ought to try," I said; "and you might even succeed if you went into training, and had a bit of luck."

Saunders minor thought. He was a pale, putty-coloured chap, and when he thought, he frowned terrifically till his forehead got quite wrinkled and old. There was also a very peculiar vein on his temple you could see when he was thinking extra hard, but not at other times.

"The question is what I should gain," he said.

"Also what he would lose," I said. This was, of course, Fowle's idea, but it came in jolly handy here.

"What can he lose unless I lick him?"

"Well, the beauty of it would be," I explained, "that if you licked him, or if he licked you, it would be all the same as far as the Good Conduct Prize is concerned. If you knock him about a bit and black an eye or so, Browne will pounce upon him for certain, as well as you, and away go half his conduct marks for the term, and bang goes the Good Conduct Prize."

Saunders minor nodded.

"Did you think of this?" he asked.

"Yes," I said; "with help from Fowle."

"As a matter of fact, if this happened you'd get the Good Conduct Prize, Thwaites," said Saunders minor.

"It seems rather a wild idea," I answered, "but as a matter of fact I should—unless, of course, I come to grief myself before the end of the term. I've had to be awful keen on conduct this term, owing to my father, who has rather overdone it about conduct lately; and so I've been piling up marks in a small way, but of course such a thing as a good conduct prize is bang out of my line."

"Or any prize," added Saunders minor thoughtfully.

"Or any prize, as you truly say," I answered.

"Well, we've always been friendly enough," kindly remarked Saunders minor.

Needless to say I agreed.

"It would, of course, be a terrific act of kindness on your part to me if you knocked Foster out," I said; "and also it would be an act of justice to yourself; and also it would be what is expected of third form chaps."

"You speak as a fighter yourself," said Saunders minor.

"I am, of course, a great fighter," I said, "and have only once been beaten, and that by West, who is a champion and nearly two years older than me. But I believe you would be a very good fighter if you cared about it."

"I never should care about it," said Saunders minor. "But the point is Foster. Supposing he refuses to fight?"

"My dear chap," I said, "he couldn't. You've got a frightful grievance against him. The sixth, when they heard, would mighty soon make him fight."

"You'll second me, Thwaites, if it comes off?"

"Yes," I said. "Certainly I will."

Saunders minor began to think again, and his forehead became much furrowed.

"I'm just wondering, if I explained to my father about it, whether he'd still give me the watch if I succeeded in licking Foster," he said.

I told him that from what I knew of fathers like his it was very unlikely, and he'd better not hope.

"I have heard you say that your father is a clergyman," I said. "Don't buoy yourself up to think that he'll give you the watch if you lick Foster. Far from it. In the case of Morrison it was very different. His father always gave him half-a-crown if he went home with a black eye, and Morrison generally managed to do so; but then his father was a royal sea captain, and had commanded a first-class battleship. Your father is religious, naturally, and against fighting for certain."

It happened that just at this moment Foster and some other chaps, including his chum, Tin Lin Chow—commonly called 'Tinned Cow'—the Chinaman, came by, and Saunders minor, in the excitement of the moment, stopped Foster and spoke—

He said, "I've been thinking over losing the Good Conduct Prize, Foster; and as it was your fault, something must be done."

Foster said, "I've apologized. Nothing more can be done."

But Saunders minor said, "Much more can be done. In fact, I challenge you to fight; and Thwaites is my second, and West will referee."

Foster was much astonished at this.

"I'm bigger than you," he said. "It wouldn't be fair. I'm bound to lick you if we have a real serious fight."

"You might lick me, no doubt," said Saunders minor. "But I shall do a bit first: and I dare say you'll know what'll happen then."

"The only thing that can happen is that you'll have to give in," said Foster.

"Something else will happen besides that," answered Saunders minor. "However, you'll see. To-morrow week in the wood, if that will suit you."

He mentioned a half-holiday, and as the first had no match on, West would be able to referee comfortably, while everybody was looking at the second eleven match fixed for that day.

"Saturday week in the wood; but you'd better think twice," said Foster.

"I have," said Saunders minor.

And then Foster himself appeared to think twice. At least, Tin Lin Chow reminded him of something, and he came back rather mildly to us after he had walked away in a very cold and haughty manner.

"Look here, Saunders," he said; "would you mind putting off this fight till next term? I'm not in the least anxious not to oblige you; but for private reasons I would rather not fight this term."

"Yes, I know," said Saunders minor; "and for private reasons I rather would. You've knocked me out of the Good Conduct Prize when it was a dead certainty for me; and now—"

Foster went away to think; but, needless to say, his thinking didn't get him out of the mess. In fact, the fight had to come off, though Foster met Saunders minor three times before the day, and once actually sank to offering him a valuable and remarkable knife if he would put off the fight till the next term.

But Saunders minor jolly well scorned to do so.

II

What Foster did in the matter of training I don't know, but Saunders minor had rather bad luck. We sat together, and I gave up my meat at meals to him in exchange for his pudding. Well, of course, to eat all my meat as well as his own ought to have made him strong. But, unfortunately, it didn't. He seemed to miss his puddings frightfully, and his tongue went white the day before the fight, and he got a headache. The matron spotted him looking a bit off, and then a frightful thing happened, for the very night before the fight she made him take a huge dose of some beastliness, and of course, instead of being full of solid meat and

strength for the fight, when the time came Saunders minor was quite the reverse.

Needless to say, he gave up all hope, and at dinner wouldn't eat any meat worth mentioning, and wouldn't give up his apple tart to me, but ate it himself. He said he was bound to lose, so it didn't matter, especially as apple tart was his favourite food.

The time came, and those in the fight sneaked off to the great wood that runs by Merivale playing-fields, and everything went very smoothly indeed. Saunders minor had me and Saunders minimus for his seconds, and Foster had Tin Lin Chow and Trelawny. And West not only was referee, but he wrote a magnificent description of the fight, like a newspaper. He had read about thousands of proper prize fights in a book of his brother's at home; so he understood everything about it. And he and Trelawny rather hoped that Masterman, who is the editor of our school magazine, would put the fight in; and if he had, it would have been far and away the best thing that he ever did put in. But Masterman wouldn't, though he was jolly sorry not to. He said—

"You see, West, the people who read the magazine most are the parents, and they like improving articles about foreign travel and what old boys are doing, and poetry, and so on. If I published this fight, the Doctor would get into an awful bate, because it would be too ferocious, and very likely frighten the parents of future new boys away when they read it."

Certainly it was a very horrid account written as West wrote it; but as he most kindly let me have the description to copy, I shall write it out again here; because certainly I couldn't do it half so well as him—him being champion of the lower school, and champion of the upper school, too, when Trelawny goes.

This is word for word what West wrote—

"Description of the fight between Foster and Saunders minor, written by Lawrence Basil West, Esquire, Champion of the Lower School of Merivale, and brother of Lieutenant Theodore Travers West, Middle-weight Boxing Champion of the Army.

"The men came into the ring in pretty good condition, though Foster had the advantage owing to Saunders minor getting a set back in his training the day before the battle. The ring was cleared, and the combatants shook hands for

"THE FIGHT.

"Round 1.—Some cautious sparring ended by Saunders letting fly with the right and left, and missing with both. Foster then steadied his antagonist with a light blow on the chest. More sparring followed, then, with a round-arm blow, Saun-

ders got home on Foster's ear, and the men closed. They fell side by side, and on rising instantly prepared to renew the battle; but as the round was over, the referee (Lawrence Basil West, Esquire) ordered them to their corners.

"Round 2.—The men were very fresh and eager for business when time was called. There was some good counter hits, and then Foster received a prop on the nose which drew the claret. First blood for Saunders minor claimed and allowed. The fighting became rather unscientific towards the end of this round, and finally Foster closed and threw Saunders minor with a cross-buttock. Both men were rather exhausted after this round.

"Round 3.—Foster, using his superior height, landed with his right on Saunders minor's kisser. Then he repeated the dose, and in return caught it on the left optic. Some good milling followed, with no advantage to either side. Saunders minor got pepper towards the end of the round, and when he was finally thrown, his seconds offered to carry him to his corner; but he refused, and walked there.

"Round 4.—Foster came first to the scratch. Both cautious, and Saunders minor very active on his trotters. But he gave some good blows, and managed to hit Foster again on the left peeper. Foster in return landed with the right on Saunders minor's smelling-bottle, and liberated a plentiful supply of the ruby. A good round. At its conclusion, Thwaites and Saunders minimus wanted Saunders minor to give in; but as he was far from beaten, he very properly refused to do so.

"Round 5.—In this round Saunders minor was receiver general, and received heavy punishment. It was claimed that Foster hit him a clean knock-down blow, but the referee would not allow it. In the wrestle at the close Saunders minor got the best of it, and fell on Foster, much to Foster's surprise.

"Round 6.—Saunders minor was badly cut up in this round, and received heavy blows on the potato trap and olfactory organs. The fighting was very wild and unscientific, and both men fell exhausted towards the finish.

"Round 7.—Nothing done. Both fell exhausted.

"Round 8.—Some good in-fighting. Saunders minor got his second wind, and, making useful play with his left, landed on Foster's throat and his right eye. It was nearly a case of shutters up with Foster. They fell side by side with the ruby circulating freely. The sight of so much gore upset Saunders minimus, and he had to leave the ensanguined field. Fortescue took his place by permission of the referee. But the end was now near at hand.

[image]

"THE FIGHTING WAS VERY WILD AND UNSCIENTIFIC."

"Round 9.—Both very weak. Referee had to caution both combatants for holding. Nothing much done, except that Saunders minor lost a tooth, said to be loose before the fight.

"Round 10 (and last).—Foster came first to the scratch, and managed to get home on Saunders minor's forehead and left aural appendage. Saunders minor was almost too tired to put up his hands. He tried to fight, but nature would not be denied, and Saunders minor fell in a very done-up state. He was counted out by the referee, and Thwaites flung up Saunders minor's sponge in token of defeat.

"When Foster discovered that he had won, he shed tears. But Saunders minor, though defeated, was quite collected in his mind. The men then shook hands and left the field with their friends.

"Remarks—

"We have seen better fights, and we have also seen worse ones. Foster has some good useful blows, but he wants patience and practice. He is not a born fighter, but might improve if he took pains. He had much the best of it in height and weight, including age, being a good deal older than his redoubtable antagonist. Though defeated, Saunders minor was by no means disgraced. He put up a very good fight, and at one time looked like winning; but luck was against him. Saunders minor, however, might give a very good account of himself with a man of his own size, and we hope soon to see him in the ring again. He has the knack of hitting hard and getting away. He was very little marked at the end of the battle, whereas his opponent's right eye will long bear the marks of his prowess.

(Signed) "LAWRENCE BASIL WEST, Esquire, "Referee."

I read this to Saunders minor, and he agreed with it all, except the bit about being in the ring again soon. He assured me he did not care about fighting in a general way, or want to live for it, like West and me, but only now and again for some very special reason, as in the case of Foster. At any rate, though the loser, he had done all he wanted to do, and Foster had a caution of an eye that went on turning different colours, like a firework, till the very end of the term.

Such a wonderful, bulgy and curious eye could not of course be overlooked even by such a blind bat as old Briggs; and, needless to say, Browne jolly soon saw it. Then the truth came out, and that was the end of the Good Conduct Prize as far as Foster was concerned. He was frightfully sick about it; and when it began to appear that owing to these extraordinary things I, of all people, must

get the Good Conduct Prize, he was sicker still, and called it a burlesque of justice, whatever that may be.

Anyway, it actually happened, and when prize day came, it was a clear and evident thing that I, Thwaites, had got the Good Conduct Prize in the third form. The Doctor began to read out the name; then, evidently under the idea that he had got it wrong, stopped and whispered to Mr. Warren, our form master; and Mr. Warren nodded, and the Doctor put on a puzzled look. Then he dashed at it and read out my name, and I had to go up and get the prize.

"A pleasing and unexpected circumstance, Geoffrey Thwaites," said the Doctor. "To be frank, that you should achieve this palm of victory causes me no little astonishment; but I can assure you that my surprise is only equalled by my gratification. You have not forgotten what I said to you last term, and I hope this satisfactory amelioration of manners may, when we reassemble, be followed by a corresponding increase of scholastic achievement. It will be no small gratification to your father, Geoffrey Thwaites, to welcome you under these conditions, instead of with the usual melancholy addition of a holiday punishment."

Then the Doctor picked up the Good Conduct Prize with a sort of innocent, inquiring air that he always puts on when giving the prizes. He pretends to be frightfully astonished at the beauty and magnificence of each book in turn; which, considering he chooses them all himself, is fearful bosh, and deceives nobody but a few mothers, who sometimes come if their sons happen to have pulled off anything.

Now Dr. Dunstan picked up a tidy-looking book, as far as its outside was concerned.

"What have we here?" he said, as if he had just found a bird's nest. "Why, no less a classic than Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*! Fortunate boy! Here, bound in scarlet and gold, and richly illustrated, is a copy of that immortal work. Know, Thwaites, that in receiving the *Pilgrim's Progress* you become enriched by possession of one among the noblest and most elevated and improving masterpieces in the English language. Take it and read it again and again, my lad; and when you shall have mastered it, lend it to those less fortunate, that they, too, may profit by the wisdom and piety of these luminous pages."

Then the chaps clapped and stamped, and I bowed and took the book, and shook hands with the Doctor and cleared out.

Needless to say, my father was even more astonished than Dr. Dunstan. I came into his study to wish him good-evening when I got home, and he said, "Well, boy, holidays again? How have you got on? Don't—don't tell me there's any more trouble!"

"Far from it, father," I said. "I've got a prize."

"Good Heavens!" said my father. "You—a prize. What on earth for?"

"You mightn't think it, but for good conduct," I said.

"Good *what?*" cried out my father.

"Good conduct," said my mother. "I always told you there was a mistake. A beautiful, expensive-looking book with his name in it, written by Dr. Dunstan himself—the name I mean—not the book."

"Wonders never cease," said my father. Then he added, "Well done, capital! I'm more pleased to hear this than you've any idea of. You must keep it up through the holidays, though."

"If Saunders minor had won it, his father was going to give him a silver watch and chain," I said, just to see how that would strike my father.

"No doubt Saunders minor's father felt perfectly safe," said my father.

Which shows how people misunderstand.

However, my father was jolly decent about it; and, in fact, so was everybody.

My sister asked me if I should read the Good Conduct Prize.

"The pictures are ripping," she said. "Giants and all sorts of things."

"The pictures, as you say, are ripping," I told her; "but, unfortunately, the story itself is far from ripping."

"How do you know if you haven't read it?" she said.

"By what the Doctor told me," I answered. "It is one of the noblest and most improving masterpieces in the English language, so, needless to say, I've got no use for it."

TOMKINS ON 'TINNED COW'

No. XII

TOMKINS ON 'TINNED COW'

Tin Lin Chow was his proper name, but we called him 'Tinned Cow,' though he never much liked it, and said that his father would have made it hot for us if we had been in China. But we were at Merivale School in England, so we reckoned that Tinned Cow was near enough, that being good English anyway.

The chap was exactly the same colour as the stomach of the guinea-pig of Vincent Peters; and his father was allowed to wear a gold button in his hat,

so he said, that being a sign of a man who wrote books in China. He wrote Chinese books for a living, and when we asked Tinned Cow if his father could turn out stuff a patch on Henty or Mayne Reid, he said much better. But he had to confess afterwards that his father was only doing a history of China in a hundred volumes, or some such muck; so evidently he was no real good, for all his gold button.

When the kid first came to learn English and get English ideas—owing to his father having convinced himself that Chinese ideas were rotten—he rather gave himself airs, and seemed to think because he was somebody at Pekin he must be at Merivale; but the only person who made anything of him was the Doctor. He used to bring everything round to China—even arithmetic, and he evidently thought it was rather fine to have a mandarin’s son in the school. Especially as Tinned Cow had brothers coming on, who might follow. What a mandarin is exactly, Tinned Cow didn’t know himself; but he seemed to think they were about equal to dukes, which, of course, must be nonsense, because dukes can become kings in time, whereas mandarins can’t be emperors. In fact, the only mandarins I ever heard of till then were oranges.

He was a frightful liar, but good as a maker of kites. And Browne, the master in the lower fourth, said that both things were common to the Chinese character. For mere lies we had Fowle and Steggle, and others, even better than Tinned Cow, because his knowledge of English wasn’t up to lying without being found out for some terms; but at kites he could smash anybody. His kites, in fact, were corkers, and he taught us to kite-fight, which is not bad sport when there’s nothing better on. Chinese kites are very light, and all made of tissue-paper and cane, or bamboo, split up fine. For a cane, Tinned Cow had the beautiful cheek to go into Dr. Dunstan’s study, when he was reading prayers in the chapel, and rout about in the cane corner and steal a good specimen, and hide it in the gym. That was the first thing that made me like the kid. But he said it was nothing, and seemed surprised that I thought much of it. He also said that over the pictures in a huge volume of Shakespeare the Doctor had, was tissue-paper of such a choice kind that it must undoubtedly be Chinese, and that, if so, it was the best in the world for kites. He said that if I would allow him to be my chum, he would get several sheets of this paper in a quiet moment, and make me the best kite he had yet made. Well, I never guessed then what a Chinese kid really is in the way of being a worm; so I agreed, provided he made two kites and put my initials on them in silver paper from a packet of chocolate—the initials, of course, being N.T. They stand for Norman Tomkins—merely Tomkins now, but Tomkins major next term, when my young brother comes to Merivale.

The chap was so frightfully keen to become my chum (my being captain of the second footer eleven) that he agreed to the two kites without a murmur, and

stole the tissue paper and used the cane for the framework. So, rather curiously, the tissue paper from a swagger Shakespeare and a bit of one of old Dunstan's canes soared up to a frightful height over the school; and it happened that the Doctor saw it, and, little dreaming of what was soaring, patted Tinned Cow on the head, and greatly praised him, and said that the art of kite-flying in China was tremendously ancient, and that in the matter of kites, as well as many other more important things, China had instructed the world. Yet, when Fuller tried to sneak a quill pen for a private purpose, believing the Doctor was not in the study at the time, whereas he had merely gone behind a screen to find a book, Fuller got five hundred lines and the eighth Commandment to translate into Latin and Greek, and French and German. Which shows that to be found out is its own punishment, as Stegges told Fuller afterwards.

Well, I let Tinned Cow be my chum, and found him fairly decent, considering he was a Chinaman, for two terms. Then he began to settle down and learn English and football, and say that Merivale was better by long chalks than China. In fact, he rather hated China really, and said, except for toys and sweets and fireworks, that England was really far better. I may mention that his feet were small, but not like pictures, and he said that only wretched girls had their feet squashed in his country. He had a sister whose feet were squashed, and he said that she was pretty, which must have been another lie, because pictures show all Chinese women to be exactly and hideously all alike. But he had to admit that English girls were prettier, because Trelawny made him, and also said that he'd tattoo a lion and unicorn on the middle of his chest if he didn't. So he yielded; in fact, he always yielded very readily to force, though Fowle often tried, unknown to me, to arrange a fight for him. He had no idea even of doubling a decent fist, and said that only wild beasts fight without proper weapons. But once he took on Bray with single-sticks, and they chose a half-holiday and went into the wood by the cricket ground and fought well for two hours and a half; and a bruise on a Chinese skin is very interesting to see. Bray turned yellow, then blue, that deepened to black on the fourth day; but Tinned Cow, from the usual putty-like tint of his body, went lead-colour where Bray whacked his arm and leg. And Tinned Cow's bravery surprised me; but it was a draw, and he assured me that he didn't care a bit about being alive, and would have gone on hammering and being hammered until Bray had killed him if necessary. He said that in his country, when two chaps are going to fight, they begin by cutting frightful attitudes, and standing in rum and awful positions, and sticking out their muscles and making faces, like Ajax defying the lightning in the Dictionary of Antiquities. This the idiots do, each hoping to terrify the other chap, and funk him, and so defeat him without striking a blow. Tinned Cow said that most battles were settled in this way; and once, when Martin minimus called him a yellow weasel, he puffed out his cheeks

and frowned, as well as you can without eyebrows, and crooked his hands like a bird's claws and tried to horrify Martin minimus, which he did; but it was young Martin's first term, and the kid was barely eight years old.

Now I come to that little brute Milly Dunstan, the Doctor's youngest daughter. She didn't care much about Tinned Cow at first, for she always takes about three terms to see what a new chap's like; but after the mandarin in China had sent Dr. Dunstan a gift of some rusty armour and screens and old religious books—more like window-blinds than decent books—and a live Chinese dog with a tongue like as if it had been licking ink, then Milly, who's the greediest little hateful wretch, even for a girl, I ever saw, suddenly dropped Blount, whose father was merely a lawyer, and began to encourage Tinned Cow like anything. He didn't understand her character as I and a few other chaps did. Bruce and Mathers and Fordyce knew her real nature, because she had pretty well absorbed all their pocket-money for term after term; and so I told Tinned Cow that her blue eyes and curls and little silly ways generally were simply a whitewashed sepulchre, and certainly wouldn't last longer than a hamper from Pekin; which, I told him, he'd jolly soon find out. But there's nothing so obstinate as the Chinese nation; and if she'd asked him for his pigtail, I believe Tinned Cow would have chopped it off for her, though he would not have dared to go home to his father after that till he'd grown a new one.

It seemed rather a horrid thing, Mathers said, a Christian girl to encourage a chap the colour of parsnips, not to mention his eyes, which were like buttonholes; but that was only because Milly had chucked Mathers; and we all knew what she really was; and, as Steggles said, she'd have sacrificed her whole family for a new sort of lemon drop; and of course when Tinned Cow found out how mad she was after sweets, he wrote to China, to his mother, for the best sweets in Pekin; which she sent. But while he was waiting for them, the Chinese dog got homesick, or something, and bit the boot-boy and was poisoned painlessly. Still Milly stuck to Tinned Cow, and walked openly about the playing-fields on match-days with him. And silly grown-up women, little knowing the bitter truth, said it was just like Dr. Dunstan's dear little girl to encourage a poor lonely foreign kid; but we knew what she was encouraging him for well enough.

In fact, Tinned Cow had translated part of his letter home to me. It was in Chinese characters, and went down the paper instead of along, and looked as if you'd dipped a grasshopper in ink and then put him out to dry. But his mother evidently understood, and sent such sweets as were never before sucked in England—since the Christian era very likely. And Tinned Cow had also asked for one of his mother's precious rings for Milly; but this he didn't much expect her to send; and she didn't. So he bought Milly a ring from a proper ring-shop with three weeks' pocket-money; which, seeing that he had the huge sum of five

bob a week, amounted to fifteen shillings; and it had a real precious stone in it, though no one, not even Gideon, exactly knew what.

Anyway, Milly wore it at chapel, and flashed it at Tinned Cow when the Doctor had his back turned saying the Litany. And Blount said the flash of it was like a knife in his heart. Which shows what a footling ass Blount was over this wretched girl. I warned Tinned Cow, all the same, that he'd simply chucked fifteen bob away; because she'd change again the moment his Chinese sweets were finished. And she never gave back presents when she changed; as Millbrook had found to his cost, being an awfully rich chap, who gave her a bracelet that cost one pound ten—so he said. And when she threw him over and wouldn't give it up, Millbrook, who was certainly rich but a frightful hound, went to the Doctor. So he got his bracelet and left soon afterwards; and Milly, much to her horror, was sent to a boarding school for a term or two. But then old Dunstan, who is simply an infant in Milly's hands, gave way and let her come home again because she cried over a letter and splashed it with tears, or more likely common water, and told him that nobody in the world could teach her Greek but him. Which shows the cunningness of her. And many suchlike things she did.

Myself, though I despise all girls, I never hated one worse than this. The best a girl can be at any time is harmless; but Milly Dunstan was brimful of trickery, and, just because her eyes were accidentally blue, thought she could score off everybody and everything. Not that she ever scored off me. She knew that I barred her altogether, and scorned me in consequence, and called me "Master Tomkins" to make me waxy, me being only about four months younger than her.

She got his mother's pet name for him out of Tinned Cow, and called him by it in secret. Not that I ever heard it, or wanted to. And she also gave out that anybody calling him Tinned Cow any more would be her enemy; and one or two chaps were feeble enough actually to stop.

She utterly wrecked his character. Before, he'd been as keen as knives about sport and so on, and there is no doubt that he would have got into the second footer team next term if Gregson minor had passed his exam. for the army. But Milly Dunstan didn't care a straw about footer, though she understood cricket fairly well for a girl; and so Tinned Cow, like a fool, gave up all hope of getting on at footer, at which he promised to be some use, and went in like mad for cricket, at which he never could be any earthly good whatever. And that made another row, because Milly promised to walk twice round old Dunstan's private garden with Street, the captain of the third eleven (cricket), if he'd give Tinned Cow a trial in an unimportant match; and Street said "Right." And they went, during prep., and it happened that the Doctor, coming out of his greenhouse, caught them; and Street got five hundred lines; which naturally made him in such a bate, thinking it was a trap, that he refused to try Tinned Cow for ever.

I'm sure I did all I could, for, though I'd lost any feeling for him since he let this girl sit on him, still I was his chum once. And I tried to save him, and asked him, many a time and oft, why he let himself go dotty about a skimpy girl. And he said that it was her skimpiness he liked, for she put him in mind of his sister—only his sister was smaller, and, of course, had squashed feet. To see a girl who can walk about seems to be a fearful treat to the Chinese; so what they let theirs all squash their feet for, the Lord knows.

Tinned Cow confessed to me that Milly Dunstan was pretty sharp, and had been reading up all about China in one of the Doctor's books. In fact, he confessed also that she knew a lot more about China in general than he did. And some things she liked, and some she hated; and especially the marriage customs she hated; and she told Tinned Cow that unless he let her father marry them in a proper Christian church when the time came, it was off. So he promised; and he also promised, though very reluctantly, not to say a word about it to Dr. Dunstan until he got to be head of the sixth and the school. But he knew that at the rate he was going, he would never get there till he was at least fifty years old. And sons of mandarins marry very early indeed in their own country, so he said—as soon as they like, in fact—so Tinned Cow promised about getting to the top of the sixth reluctantly. Then he took to working and swatting; yet all his swatting only got him into the lower fourth in three terms. Then, seeing what a lot it meant getting into the sixth, and what a frightful hard thing it was, especially for a foreigner, to do it, Tinned Cow fell back upon the customs of his country; and his methods of cribbing were certainly fine and new. But they couldn't get him into the sixth, let alone to the top of it; and he tried still other Chinese customs in an arithmetic exam, and attempted to bribe Mr. Thwaites with four weeks' pocket-money—a pound, in fact—if he would arrange to let him get enough marks to go up a form. Of course, everybody knew that Mr. Thwaites had a wife and hundreds of small children at Merivale, and, though a sixteenth wrangler in olden times, was at present frightfully hard up. But what is a paltry pound to a sixteenth wrangler? Anyway Mr. Thwaites raged with great fierceness and took Tinned Cow to the Doctor; and as the Doctor hates strategy of this kind, he made it jolly hot for Tinned Cow and flogged him pretty badly. I asked if it hurt, being the first time the Doctor had ever flogged him, and he said the only thing that hurt was the horrid feeling that he'd offered too little to Thwaites. He said that in his country, and especially among mandarins, offering too little was almost as great a crime as offering too much, and that he deserved to be flogged on the feet as well as elsewhere. He said that his father was such a good judge of people that he always offered just the right sum; and he felt certain that in the case of Thwaites not a penny less than ten pounds ought to have been offered. It was the well-known hard-upishness of Thwaites that made him think a pound would do; but now,

seeing what a little way money seemed to go with a man, he felt about the only chap within reach of being bribed was the drill sergeant; and of course he couldn't help Tinned Cow to get into the sixth. Besides, the drill sergeant had fought in China in his early days, and he had a sort of warlike repugnance against Tinned Cow that would have taken at least several pounds to get over.

So things went on until the arrival of the sweets from China; and they were all right, though Tinned Cow told me that Milly wasn't as keen about them as he expected, or at any rate she pretended not to be. The truth is that some of the very swaggiest Chinese sweets take nearly a lifetime thoroughly to like; and by the time that Milly began to feel the remarkable splendour of this sort, she'd finished them. However, she was fairly just—for her, and didn't throw the beggar over before the taste of the last sweet was out of her mouth, as you might have expected. In fact, she kept friendly for a matter of several weeks; and then she began to get rather sick of his Chinese ways—so she said—and cool off towards him, even though in his despair he promised to become a Christian and get her idols and fireworks and many other curiosities that probably wouldn't have been sent even if he'd written home for them.

But Chinese chaps have quite different ideas to English chaps, owing to their bringing-up; and things we utterly bar and consider caddish, such as sneaking, a Chinese chap will do freely without the least idea he is making a beast of himself. I didn't know this, or else I should never have allowed Tinned Cow to be my chum, but at last I discovered the fatal truth; and the worst of it was that he sneaked against my bitterest enemy, called Forrester, thinking that he was doing a right and proper thing towards me.

This chap Forrester I hated for many reasons, but chiefly because he'd beaten me, by about ten marks only, in a Scripture exam, owing to knowing the names of the father and mother of Moses, which are not generally known. I always had a fixed idea, funnily enough, that Moses was the son of Pharaoh's daughter; and I said so, and I added, as a shot—for shots often come off, though they are dangerous—that Holy Writ was quite silent concerning the father of Moses. And the Doctor frightfully hates a shot that misses, so I had to write out the whole business of Moses fifty times, till I was sick of the very name of the man; whereas Forrester won the prize. Well, this Forrester kept sardines in his desk and ate them freely during Monsieur Michel's class. But one tin, already opened, he forgot for several weeks, owing to its getting hidden behind his paint-box and caterpillar cage. And these sardines—being rather doubtful of them when he found them again—he gave to Milly Dunstan's Persian kitten; and Tinned Cow saw him do it. Well, the kitten showed that Forrester was quite right to be doubtful about the sardines by dying. It disappeared from that very hour, and was believed to have gone next door to die, as cats are generally very unwill-

ing to die in their own homes, and always go next door to do so, curious to say. And Milly was in an awful bate when Tinned Cow told her, thinking it would please me; whereas, if anything could have made me get friends with Forrester again, it would have been to know he'd got this terrific score off Milly Dunstan. But her rage against Forrester was pretty frightful—especially, she said, because a boy whose strong point was Scripture could have done this thing; and she made Tinned Cow tell the Doctor; and such was his piffling weakness where she was concerned, that he did. But old Dunstan, who hated cats, and did not mind the kitten going in the least, said it was a case of circumstantial evidence—whatever that is—and the proofs of the cat's death were too slight, seeing the body couldn't be found, and also remembering a cat's power of eating sardines, even when a bit off. Then he turned against Tinned Cow, and told him that the character of an informer ill became any pupil of Dunstan's, and that to try and undo a fellow-student might be Oriental but was far from English, and so on—all in words that you can find in dictionaries, but nowhere else that I ever heard of.

Which showed the Doctor wasn't so keen about Tinned Cow as he used to be; and that was chiefly because Tinned Cow's younger brother was not coming to be educated in England after all, as Dr. Dunstan had hoped, but was going to Germany instead.

Anyway, when it was found out that Tinned Cow was a sneak—by birth, as you might say—chaps naturally flung him over; and Maynard refused to let the kid fag for him any more; and I, of course, told him that I was no longer his chum. He made a frightful fuss about this, and implored me to go on being his chum, and offered me a Chinese charm that had undoubtedly been the eye of a Buddhist idol in its time; but he was such an utter worm, and took such a Chinese view of things, that I had to refuse the charm and let him go. He was frightfully down about it, and slunk about in corners and offered to make kites for the smallest kids in the school—simply that he might have somebody friendly to him.

Then, when I think he was beginning to change his mind about England being better than China, the last straw came in the shape of a new boy called Vernon Vere—a chap of a good age—sixteen at least. He was the nephew of a viscount, or a marquis, or some such person, and he explained that with any luck he would be a marquis himself some day, because his only brother, though older, having shaky lungs, for which he was in the Canary Islands at that moment, might pass away and lose his turn.

I heard what followed from Corkey minimus, who was Milly's spy and carrier, for which he got a peach from the Doctor's orchard-house now and again in summer; but only ones that fell off. He told me that Milly received no less than three letters from Vernon Vere before he'd been at Merivale a month. And the third she answered.

So we knew that Tinned Cow was done for; and very soon he found it out himself, and then he turned several shades yellow and moped in the gymnasium for hours together, and lost all hope of doing any good at work, and sank down to the bottom of the lower fourth and spent all his spare time doing impositions. He went about like a dog that's frightened of being kicked; and many chaps did kick him, out of sheer cheerfulness, because he seemed as if he only wanted a kick to complete the picture. Then, one day, very civilly, he asked Freckles for his celebrated bowie-knife, that he goes bush-ranging with on half-holidays, and Freckles very kindly lent it, after Tinned Cow had promised not to cut anything harder than wood with it. Then Tinned Cow thanked him and went into the gym., saying that he only wanted to cut something soft. He didn't come back, and when the bell rang, Freckles and I—he being rather anxious about his bowie-knife—went up to the gym. to see what Tinned Cow was after. Suddenly Freckles shouted out from the shower-bath room, and, hearing him yell, I rushed in. And there was the wretched Tinned Cow in a most horrible mess. He'd taken off his shirt and given himself a dig in the ribs, or possibly two, and he was lying in a comfortable position bleeding to death. At least, so he hoped; and he begged us earnestly to mind our own business and leave him to 'salute the world,' as he said, without any bother. But we hooked it for Thwaites and Browne and Mannerling; and they came and carried him in; and ruined their clothes with Chinese gore.

Of course we all thought Tinned Cow was booked, and Freckles, knowing the deadly sharpness of his knife, said the kid must kick to a certainty if he'd used the knife with proper care. Yet, strange to relate, he didn't die, but lived; which seemed to show that the knife of Freckles wasn't nearly such a fine one as he fancied. But he said that it only showed Tinned Cow had lost his nerve, and funk'd what he was doing at the critical moment.

Two mornings afterwards Dr. Dunstan told us all about it after prayers.

"This unhappy Asiatic," he said, "this young Celestial, from the pagan fastnesses of his native land, despite months not a few of tuition in this our manly and civilized atmosphere of Merivale, has relapsed upon the degraded and barbaric customs of a great but benighted country—a proof of the natural cowardice and baseness of the human heart when unilluminated by the light of Christianity. The vain folly, which led him to his rash act is not for your ears. Let it suffice that Tin Lin Chow in a fit of mental infirmity, not to say active insanity, sought to deliver himself from imaginary miseries by the act of self-destruction—the 'hari-kari,' or 'happy dispatch,' as we translate it, of the Chinese. Thanks to fear at the crucial moment, or an ignorance of his own anatomy, or, as we should rather believe, the direct interposition of a merciful Providence that still has work for him to do, Tin Lin Chow failed of his fearful project and is now out of danger. For the rest,

I may inform you that your comrade, when fit to travel, will return to his native land, and I can only hope and pray that the traditions of Merivale, its teaching and its tone, will cleave to him and leave their mark upon his character.”

Of course the thing that was not for our ears was the reason why this little Chinese idiot had tried to kill himself. And that was because Milly Dunstan and everybody else had chucked him, but especially Milly. Anyway, his vitals healed up in a fortnight, and after six weeks or so had passed by, he was back at school again. But only for a few days. Then a ship sailed from London for China and, as Steggle very truly said, the only ‘happy dispatch’ that Tinned Cow got was a dispatch back to his native land. And probably he liked it better than England, when all was said and done; because the schools out there have got no sixth forms, so he told us. Therefore he’ll be all right very likely—and live to thank his stars that he didn’t kill himself after all. Though myself, I think he honestly tried and the fault was in the knife. Still, after two such sickening failures—I mean Milly Dunstan, and the attempt to hari-kari himself—I expect the kid won’t ever want to make friends with girls again, or try to gash open his stomach, but just lead an ordinary sort of life without fuss, like other people do.

I made it up with him in a sort of way after his attempt to kill himself failed; and he explained to me how he ought to have done it; but the details were no use to me, because I wouldn’t do it myself for all the girls in the world. Then Tinned Cow left, and he seemed sorry to go at the last moment; and he promised to send me some chopsticks and some chrysanthemum and other flower seeds of beautiful plants—knowing how frightfully keen I was about flowers—and materials for birds’-nest soup and other interesting things. But he never sent one of them; and I never thought he would, and didn’t count upon it in the least, because, once back in his own country, where everybody tells lies from morning till night, simply from the habit of centuries and centuries, owing to China being the birthplace of civilization, you couldn’t expect the beggar to keep his word.

And I expect nobody in this country will ever hear of him again. Not that that matters. But if I ever go to China, which I very likely shall do when I have time, I may look him up, I think—just to see if he got any good from coming over here. But I shouldn’t think he really did.

THE END

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