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Frontispiece.
BULLY FAG AND HERO

BY

CHARLES J. MANSFORD

Author of "Fags and the King"

ILLUSTRATED BY P. B. HICKLING

EIGHTH EDITION

LONDON

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BULLY, FAG, AND HERO.

CHAPTER I.
SHOWS HOW ROBERT CHALLENGE SPENT HIS FIRST DAY AT LITTLEBURY SCHOOL.

The sun was beginning to peep through the dormitory windows. At first his rays glanced coyly in, and withdrew as rapidly as they had entered, as if afraid to intrude upon the occupants. Finding, however, that the latter slept on indifferent to everything, the sunbeams began to play a game of hide-and-seek among two rows of white beds.

In the centre of these two rows a boy tossed uneasily from side to side. The sunbeams, which had selected his head as a rallying-point, lingered curiously upon the sleeper, for his features were strange to them in that dormitory. Perhaps they speculated with one another upon the nature of his dreams. That the dreams were interesting none of the sunbeams doubted.

The boy ceased to toss himself about, and a smile of satisfaction played about his lips, for Robert Challenge was many miles from Littlebury, blackberrying with his father in the copse at home. Somehow that cluster just above his head evaded all his efforts to seize it. His father began to laugh at him, and then laughed louder and louder, and then—peals upon peals of noise rang in his ears—clang! clang! Robert Challenge was awake, with the sound of a great bell ringing!
Too confused to remember where he was, Challenge tumbled hastily out of bed, and then saw the bell ringing only a few yards off.

Evidently there was no time to be lost, with that vile bell still dinning in his ears, so Challenge timidly touched the shoulder of his neighbour. The touch, however, gave way to a sprightly prod, and the prod to a series of determined thumps, before the object of his attentions condescended to open a pair of sleepy eyes.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he asked. "Well, just shut up; stow it, break off, will you?"

"But the bell's ringing, Evans. Don't you hear it?"

"It's only the getting-up bell, you goat!" murmured that youth, and promptly he turned over and went to sleep again.

Not daring to wake Evans again, and too prudent to follow his example, the new boy proceeded quietly to dress himself. With one or two exceptions, the occupants of the other beds unanimously disregarded the summons to rise.

While he was dressing, Robert Challenge had ample opportunity to survey his surroundings. The room was a long and spacious one, lofty and well lighted, for at the head of each bed stood a window, furnished with a thick curtain to exclude the draught, and running back in a recess, wherein the owner might stow whatever possessions were dearest to his heart. At either end of the room a stack of hot-water pipes-stood, and round these, when the monitor was absent, the mightiest few, on chilly nights, held a levée of their admirers. The rest of the furniture was of that methodical kind which is above description.

The waistcoat stage reached, Challenge was just struggling with a refractory tie, when the rasp of rings upon an iron rod stirred the surrounding sleepers into life. Looking up, Challenge saw the curtain drawn back from the cubicle at the far end, and a tall, white figure standing in the opening.

In a moment all was activity. Forms that a moment before
FIRST DAY AT LITTLEBURY SCHOOL.

had seemed wrapped in the deepest slumbers now sprang up hastily and on to the floor, while above the ejaculations and splashing of water the voice of the apparition rang through the dormitory—

"Six to be washing! One—two—three—four—five—six! Evans, come to me afterwards!" and the curtain rasped back again upon the rod.

"Just my beastly luck!" came in slow, deliberate accents from Evans, who was now rushing wildly about, endeavouring to borrow a sponge. "Old Slipsides never counted half so fast as that; he was something like a monitor!"

A tall, angular boy, with hair of a yellow tint, and a nose decidedly curved; such was Evans. Even when fully dressed he presented an unkempt exterior, for his collar was conspicuously smeared with ink, and his tie was ravelled and awry. The thick, badly-cut clothes he wore hung loosely upon his frame, while he planted his feet heavily each step he took.

As Evans sat next to Challenge at breakfast, it struck the latter that there was something attractive in his manner, and that his aquiline features were pleasant rather than otherwise.

Although considerably older than his fellow boys, Challenge had been assigned to the table of the Fourth Form, and he listened with curiosity to the babel of voices about him.

"Margarine's been training in the holidays; that's number seven, I'll swear!" cried some one, as a fat boy opposite stretched out his hand to the bread and butter once more.

"Oh, you don't get such feeds as this at home," cried another; whereupon there was a general laugh, in which Challenge joined.

A lively kick under the table reminded him that Margarine's attention was not wholly occupied with his plate. Challenge was still rubbing his shin when a big mug, half filled with milk, was thrust under his nose.

"Cow for Comber," came the laconic utterance of the holder.
Challenge only stared silently at the mug.

"Do you hear?—Cow for Comber. Be quick and take it, will you?" and the mug was deposited on Challenge's plate.

"Send it back again, and tell Comber to milk his own cows," sounded a voice in Challenge's ears, and, looking up, he saw Evans laughing till his sides shook.

Challenge was naturally of an inquiring turn of mind, and determined to solve the mystery before him. He felt rather thirsty too; here was some milk to replenish his own mug with. He tipped the one up that had been put on his plate, and poured the contents into his own. This done, he gave the empty one back to his neighbour, and politely thanked him.

The boys round looked astonished, while Margarine chuckled with delight.

"By gosh, you have got cheek! Won't you catch it afterwards!" said Margarine, with his mouth full.

Nor was ample confirmation of his words long wanted, for a black-looking head and shoulders craned forward from the line below, and a big fist accompanied its threatening nod.

"That's Comber," whispered Evans, "and he'll go for you afterwards. Just cut in at him when he does; he's always at it. He meant you to pass your milk down for him to drink; it's his game with new 'men.' He's a beastly bully, and——"

At this juncture the masters rose from their table on the dais, which event cut short further accounts of Comber's character, and deprived Margarine of his eleventh slice.

For the present, however, Challenge was secure from the machinations of his new-found enemy, for "chapel" and the morning's work followed closely upon the heels of breakfast, and for a time Comber was forgotten. It was one thing, however, to forget and another to be forgotten; and this the new boy was soon to learn.

Small for his years, and accustomed only to the ministrations of a private tutor, Challenge felt strangely out of his element
in the Fourth Form where he was placed. But Mr. Bright, the Fourth Form master, was soon convinced that, in the quiet boy with the dark hair and large, luminous brown eyes, he had found what his confrères would call a treasure. It did not, then, need the assurance of Evans that he had got on the "right side of old Freddy" to put Challenge at his ease.

The morning and afternoon passed quickly away.

At the further end of the playground of Littlebury School the fives courts stood, screening from the vulgar gaze a small piece of vacant ground in their rear. Many a sanguinary encounter had this corner witnessed, and in many a deed of prowess had it shared.

The school monitors winked an indulgent eye at a fight, holding the view that no more admirable way could be found for the shedding of bad blood. Instances were even recorded where the monitors themselves had been known to encourage the combatants.

On this, the first day of term, however, the playground was almost deserted; there were hampers to unpack, and lockers to annex and furnish; consequently there was only a small gathering of spectators when Evans conducted his protégé "behind the fives courts."

"You'd better get it over," Evans had said to Challenge; "take a leaf out of that chap Mahomet's book, and don't wait for the mountain to come to you. Comber is sure to take you there if you don't go of your own accord."

To this Challenge had agreed.

On arriving at the scene, he found that his mentor had prognosticated correctly. There was his enemy, swinging his arms to loosen them in their sockets. As the two came up Comber greeted them with a scowl. Not that he expected resistance; he was there to give the new boy a licking, and to teach him better manners. Comber's broad shoulders testified to his strength, as did his well-set limbs.

"Now then, new man, what did you mean by sneaking my
milk?" Comber asked, and he laid his hand on the collar of his foe.

Challenge made no reply.

"You won't speak, won't you? Well, take that!" and Comber hit the new boy a smart slap on the cheek with his open hand.

For what followed Comber was altogether unprepared.

Ducking his head suddenly, Challenge seized his persecutor by the knees, then, exerting all his strength, he pulled Comber towards himself with an upward motion, and then suddenly relaxed his hold.

So sudden and strange was the movement, that Comber had no time left for defence. Flat upon his back he fell, and a wiry hand instantly gripped him by the throat while a wiry knee dug into his chest.

"Now, you beast," cried Challenge, "get up and hit me again if you dare!" Challenge rose from the prostrate body of his foe.

The few spectators of the scene greeted this act with shouts of laughter and applause. But Comber, although a bully, was no coward; in a second he sprang to his feet again.

A dead silence followed, broken only by the hard breathing of the pair. For a minute they stood glaring at each other, Comber furious that he had been thrown to the ground by the new boy, and Challenge maddened by the bully's slap in the face. They seemed to take each other's measure, and then Comber flung himself heavily upon Challenge.

Once more had the bully of Littlebury reckoned without his host. In a second Challenge slipped agilely out of the way, and, as his enemy went to turn upon him, lunged viciously at the latter's stomach. The blow sped true, for, to the astonishment of the little concourse, now rapidly increasing as the news somehow spread, Comber received a thud that completely winded him.

While the bully staggered from the blow, gasping, his knees
were seized once more from under him, and he was flung a
second time heavily to the ground.

"Good! Hurray!" cried Evans, as the bully went
down.

"Well done, new man!" cried another boy, delightedly.
"What's his name, Evans?"

"Challenge," said Evans, laconically, as Comber rose to his
feet again.

"You're licked, Comber, at last!" jeered one of the small
boys, whom the bully made an inveterate fag of. "I don't fag
for you any more, I can tell you!"

Comber glared at the boy, but did not answer him—he was
too much engaged with Challenge. The bully gasped for
breath again, then he muttered, rather than said—

"I'm not done yet! I'm not licked! He winded me,
that's all. He can't fight fair. He hits below the belt!"

"Comber's right," said Tripp, a boy who was always in
trouble about something, and who wanted above everything
the fight to continue, so that he might see Comber get an out-
and-out licking, if the new boy could give it him.

"Give me five minutes to get wind in, and I'll fight it out,"
said Comber to Challenge.

Evans whispered into Challenge's ear, "Don't be such a
muff; he's nearly twice your size! What's the good of fighting
a big chap like Comber if you can't hit him where you like?
Go in at him now, and knock the bully out of him!"

Challenge put his fists down.

"You can't fight fair yourself," he said to Comber, "or you
wouldn't hit a chap half your own weight; but I'll lick you, or
you shall lick me. You can have your five minutes; but
' don't run away in the meantime!"

Comber fairly raged at the suggestion. He accepted his
antagonist's boon, however, and braced himself up for the
battle. The crowd grew larger and larger; the small boys
shivered almost when they thought how Comber would mill
Challenge eventually. It was plain to the bigger boys, too, that all the odds were in favour of the bully winning.

Evans took Challenge aside for a minute.

"Don't let him win," he implored. "Wind him again, or anything; but if Comber licks you after this, you'd better never have come here—he'll make your life a perfect pandemonium."

"I'll stick to him till he kills me, sooner than give in," said Challenge, "and I won't try to wind him with a foul again either. He shan't bully me, I say!"

Challenge walked into the ring again, where Comber was waiting for him. One of the smaller boys, out of sheer fright, ran off to Mr. Bright, who was the quietest and most popular master in Littlebury, to tell him that Comber was bullying a new boy.

The two combatants faced each other again, and some one in the crowd called "time"! It was the biggest event at Littlebury for many a long day.

Challenge pressed the bully his hardest. It was plain he meant to give him not a minute's breathing space if he could help it. But that time he fought perfectly according to rules.

Comber was wary; he made the most of his height, and getting a chance, dealt Challenge a stunning blow that sent him reeling to the ground. The new boy was on his feet in an instant. He dashed at Comber, and rained in blow after blow that fairly astonished the onlookers. They were too excited even to shout and cheer Challenge on. Except for the sound of blows, the piece of ground behind the fives court might have been deserted.

Comber, finding his foe pressing him hard, struck out furiously, but Challenge dodged his fist again and again. Then the bully, forgetting his defence in his mad wrath, lunged out with both hands. It was Challenge's opportunity. He struck Comber full in the face with his left, and then followed the blow up with a stinging right-hander.
THE FIGHT WITH THE BULLY.
Comber went down.

Those who were looking on found their voices suddenly.

"Bravo, new man!" cried one of the boys, as Challenge stood waiting for Comber to get up.

"His nose is bleeding!" "No, it's his head!" cried contradictory voices.

In the midst of the cries Comber got up, and held up his fists. He was badly hurt, but the bully was game to the last. Challenge went at him again, and flinging his left arm suddenly round Comber's neck, got his head in chancery.

When at last Challenge let go, Comber staggered away—he was beaten.

The cheering was tremendous. Comber went sulkily off to staunch his bleeding nose at the Chamber Court conduit, while Evans and another boy of the Fourth shouldered Challenge and carried him off in triumph.

Mr. Bright, who observed them, discreetly looked the other way as the boys went by with a shout. They shouldered Challenge all round the cloisters and quadrangles, singing snatches of "Dulce Domum."

The Seniors who saw the commotion asked what it was all about. And every throat that was singing or shouting gave the same answer—

"The new man's whopped Bully Comber! Hurray!"

This was Challenge's introduction to his first school. But it was only the beginning of stranger things. He was soon to be involved in a far more serious affair.
CHAPTER II.

COMBER MEDITATES REVENGE.

Tuesday and Thursday afternoons were devoted to half-holidays at Littlebury, and as a considerable amount of freedom was always given to the boys—or "men," as they styled each other—many were the ways and means of enjoying the respite from work.

After his defeat by Challenge, Comber kept very much to himself, partly because he was still angry at his failure to take down the new boy, and partly because the other boys kept their distance from him. A bully always has a following of small boys, to whom he is a hero, so long as he has the upper hand. But Challenge was so small compared with Comber, that the small fellows in the Fourth began to think that the bully was not worth fagging for.

It accordingly happened that when a splendid idea for some fun occurred to one of the Fourth, and the others decided to take the suggestion up, Comber was told nothing about it. At first the idea was kept to a select few, who were, when the time came, to make it known to the whole of the Form.

Comber knew well enough that some mischief was brewing, by the excited way in which the boys chatted in little knots about the quadrangle. He sounded the smaller boys, but none of them could or would let him into the secret. All they acknowledged was that it was Evans' idea, and they were to be let into the secret as soon as the details were worked out.

Comber was bitterly chagrined at all this. It was the first
time the bully had not been consulted and allowed to have a say in the doings of the Fourth Form.

On the Thursday afternoon which followed the commencement of the new term ten or a dozen of the chief boys of the Fourth Form left the school in twos and threes, having arranged to meet in the woods near. They were absent for some time, and when they returned Comber was leaning against the side of what was known as the middle gate, apparently absorbed in reading a paper.

Comber was not so busy but what his keen eyes detected something very peculiar about the boys as they sauntered in, a few at a time. Every one tried to look perfectly unconcerned, and virtuously innocent of guile, as they passed the bully.

What attracted Comber's attention most was that every boy walked as if he had a stiff leg. After the first few had gone by him, the bully began to ponder over this strange circumstance. Challenge and Evans returned together, and were the last of the boys who walked lame. Comber was up to most school tricks, but this one puzzled him. He soon hit on an idea that explained why the other "men" walked lame.

"They've got a stick each, hidden in their right trousers' leg," was Comber's correct conclusion. What was the stick for? He was quick at making plans; a few minutes afterwards he discovered that the "men" had all gone to their dormitory.

He wanted to find out what was going on, but he knew if he went straight up to the dormitory he would be accused of spying. Indeed, if whatever was being schemed came out, he knew he would be accused of telling it to the monitors. Comber was not necessarily a sneak, but he wanted to find out; if he got a chance to catch Challenge in something he would be able to keep the whip hand over him by threatening to divulge the plot and the names of those implicated in it.

Comber went upstairs to the dormitory whistling, as if he did not know any one was there. He threw the door open, and came upon Challenge and Evans.
"What do you want, Comber?" Evans asked.

"Can't a fellow go into his dormitory without having to answer questions?" Comber asked savagely.

Just then a low whistle caught the boys' ears, and Evans stood out of the way to let Comber pass.

The bully glanced keenly round, but could see nothing of the sticks. The other boys were apparently changing their boots, as it had been a muddy walk which they had taken.

As soon as he could Comber went out of the dormitory, and, as there was still a good half-hour left, he sauntered into the street. Just as luck should have it, Tripp, the boy who had been Comber's most servile fag, was sauntering back to school, having been on a visit to his aunt who lived in town.

Tripp saw Comber coming, and being possessed of a pair of sharp heels and a sharper tongue, cried—

"Hallo, bully! How did you like Challenge's fists?"

In an instant Tripp ran past Comber, making with all speed for the school. Comber meant to regain his power over the rest of the boys, even if he had been beaten by the new comer. He had a pair of stout legs, and a second after he was in full pursuit of Tripp, whom he caught up with and seized from behind.

Comber shook Tripp by the collar of his jacket like a terrier shakes a rat, until at last the small boy was purple in the face. Then he let go the fag's coat collar, and caught him by the wrists.

"You young beggar," cried Comber, "I've a good mind to give you the worst hiding you've ever had!" He twisted the boy's arms till the water started in Tripp's eyes. "There, you little savage! will you ever call me a bully again?"

Tripp was suffering excruciating pain, and being terribly afraid of Comber, began to whine.

"Say you are sorry you called me a bully!" commanded
Comber, as he gave the boy's arms an extra wrench that Tripp thought had almost twisted them out of their sockets.

"Don't—oh, don't, Comber! I'm sorry! Oh, you're twisting my arms out!"

Comber gave Tripp's arms a further wrench, calculating to a nicety how much further he dare go with the torment.

"Say you'll fag for me harder than ever," persisted Comber.

"I'll fag—oh, let my arms go! Comber, you're screwing them right round! I'll promise anything!"

Comber did not release his hold.

"There are some sticks hidden in the dormitory; I want to know where they are, and what they are going to be used for—do you hear?" he cried.

"I'll find out. Do let go!" cried Tripp, as he moaned with pain.

"You won't say I asked you anything, and you won't tell any one I met you. Say so, you little beggar, or I'll give you another wrench!"

"I won't say a word!"

Comber gave the wretched boy's arms a final twist that made him scream with agony. Then he released him, and savagely kicked him from behind with such force that Tripp turned a complete somersault in the road. He got up quickly, however, for fear his enemy might make another onslaught.

Tripp ran back to Littlebury, while Comber sauntered slowly there as if nothing had happened.

Tripp said nothing to the monitors, but fagged assiduously for Comber from that day. His whole moral fibre seemed to have been destroyed by those few minutes' agony. He spied, he fagged, he lied for Comber till the other boys, seeing the bully's power over Tripp, began to fall into their old way of cringing to him.

When the next half-holiday came every boy, except Comber and Tripp, who had not previously got a stick went to the woods and cut one. How the other boys managed to keep
their secret from these two was remarkable, but certain it was they did so. 

Tripp, who was on the watch for Comber that afternoon, went up to the dormitory, when the others had left it, and hunted with the utmost care to find the sticks. He looked under the bedsteads, then between the beds and the mattresses, up at the beams overhead, to which he climbed, in case the sticks were laid on them, for they were wide—but he did not find them.

Tripp watched his opportunity and spent hours in the dormitory, determined to win Comber’s approbation by finding the secret out. He felt the walls, peered into cupboards, tried the heavy curtains, thinking fancifully that they might be thrust into the hems of them; but still he did not find the sticks.

Comber bullied and fagged him worse than ever. When Tripp reported his non-success to the bully, the latter turned upon him and vowed dire penalties if Tripp did not find out the hiding-place within two days. So Tripp listened to snatches of Fourth Form conversation, whenever he got the chance, but could make nothing of them.

On the very day that Comber fully meant to thrash Tripp unmercifully the youngster went up to him in the quad and said in a low tone—

“I’ve found the sticks!”

Comber started in surprise.

“I’m going up to the dormitory,” said the bully. “Follow me in a few minutes cautiously, and tell me all about the matter.”

At Littlebury things were managed on rather free-and-easy lines; no notice was taken of a boy going to his dormitory whenever he liked. Most boys had treasures in the window recesses facing the beds, and it was supposed they went there to get them, as indeed the boys did frequently.

Comber was waiting for Tripp.
"Now, you little beast," said he, "where are the sticks? Out with it!"

"Come and see, Comber, for yourself!" Tripp answered, proud at the discovery he had made.

He led the way across the dormitory to where Evans' bed stood.

"We'll have to risk being caught at it," gasped Tripp, who suddenly began to be afraid of what he was about to show to Comber. Wheeling the bedstead on its castors from where it stood, the fag showed the astonished bully a loosened plank. In a second Tripp raised the plank, and, as it was a wide oaken one, it revealed a large hole.

"The hole seems to go all under the floor," said Tripp, watching the door nervously. "I went down it and found all the sticks stowed away there."

Comber suspected that Tripp was lying.

"If that's so, you little beggar, go and get me one of the sticks to look at."

Tripp hesitated, but catching the bully's eye, saw he was not to be trifled with. He slipped down the hole and went under the flooring of the dormitory. Just as he did so, Comber heard some one coming up the stairs. Instantly he thrust the plank in its place and wheeled the bedstead upon it. Then he went over to his washstand and began to wash, just as Evans came into the room.

Bully as he was, Comber was just a little afraid of what would happen if he were found spying on the others. So he wiped his hands on the towel, and ignoring the fact that the wretched Tripp was under the flooring, calmly went down the stairs!

Evans suspected nothing, and soon left the dormitory. Tripp, with one of the sticks in his hand, went to the hole, only to find the plank replaced, and on trying to lift it from beneath, discovered to his horror that something heavy was upon the plank, which resisted all his efforts to raise it.

Tripp was a boy of weak nerves and less than average brain
power; he conceived the idea that Comber had played a trick upon him, with the intention of leaving him there to die! He wrung his hands in despair, as he thought of the rats that were known to run about under the floors of the school, for Littlebury had been built more than five hundred years before. Tripp moaned and cried, he called out, but heard no response. At last, having quite lost heart, he knelt down and said his prayers, and then stretched himself on the dust above the next ceiling, to wait for death.

"Now, you little beast, look lively and get out of it!" suddenly cried Comber's well-known voice, as he moved the plank about two hours after Tripp had been imprisoned.

The latter started up, and Comber dragged him through the hole.

"That beast of an Evans came up," explained Comber. "However, nothing worse has happened to you than the loss of your tea!"

Tripp thought the loss a heavy one, glad as he was to get out. He showed the stick to Comber, who made him take it back and put it with the rest. Then Tripp got out once more, and the plank and bedstead were replaced without further mishap.

The events of that afternoon had so shaken Tripp's nerves that he could not sleep when the monitor ordered "lights out!" when bedtime came. He lay tossing about, little thinking that fifty anxious hearts were waiting impatiently for him to go to sleep.

At last Tripp fell off into a doze. One of the boys thereupon slipped out of bed and listened to the fag's irregular breathing, while another watched Comber. The latter was evidently sound asleep; when Tripp's breathing became a little more regular, the two boys stole like spectres to the other boys' beds and gently touched them.

Some one lit a bull's-eye lantern, which he used in summer for attracting moths to his window, and, aided by the light
which the lantern gave, the boys hastily but noiselessly dressed.

Everything had evidently been skilfully planned. The boys acted as if they had rehearsed their several parts over and over again, for while some of them lifted the bedstead bodily, one of their number got down the hole and soon brought the whole pile of sticks, which eager hands seized. Meanwhile, others took the sheets from their beds and knotted them together, after twisting them so as to form a long rope. Evans produced a stout cord, plaited to give it still more strength, and soon made one end of the sheet-rope secure.

Challenge went down the rope with a rush, and when he reached the ground, the rope was hauled up, and the sticks, tied in a great bundle, were lowered. These he left on the rope to steady it, and then, one after the other, the boys slid down to earth. With the exception of Comber, Tripp, and the monitor, who was fast asleep in his curtained-off recess, the dormitory was deserted.

The last boy, as he reached the ground, must have fallen, for a distinct sound was made by his body, while half a dozen voices muttered—

"Muff!" "Butterfingers!" "Goat!" "Kick him!"

The sound of the falling body woke Comber, who stared about the dormitory sleepily, and then became aware of a draught. Now, Comber hated fresh air at the best of times, so he got out of bed to close the offending window. To his surprise, he found the sheet there! He glanced round at the dormitory—the beds were empty!

Comber went from bed to bed, making the same discovery, then he glanced out of the window and distinctly saw the forms of boys stealing along in twos and threes so as not to attract attention, for the hour was late, and it was bright moonlight.

Comber determined to make sure, by a second inspection, that all the beds were empty. This time he discovered Tripp.
The bully had only to wake the monitor, and the whole of the boys would have been caught at whatever their enterprise was. He woke Tripp instead, by putting one hand over the boy’s mouth to stop him from calling out, and then twisting his arm, which was Comber’s favourite amusement.

Tripp sat up in bed.

“Don’t speak, you little beast!” commanded Comber; “or the monitor will hear you,” he added, whispering into the boy’s ear.

Tripp nodded that he understood, and Comber took his hand away from the boy’s mouth. Quickly Tripp received his orders.

“Go down the rope at once, follow them, and let me know what happens.”

Tripp made a motion as if to take off his nightshirt, preparatory to donning his clothes.

“There isn’t time for that,” said Comber; “go as you are!”

“It’s frightfully cold,” shivered Tripp, alarmed at the idea.

“Then be quick, or I’ll warm you before you start!” whispered Comber, fiercely, and he caught Tripp’s wrists.

“I’ll go—which way?” asked Tripp, in frantic haste to avoid the torture.

“They went towards the woods,” whispered Comber. He could not resist giving Tripp’s arms one unmerciful wrench; then he let his fag go.

Tripp got to the window recess, seized the sheeted rope, and swung himself to the ground, clad only in his nightshirt, and a pair of trousers which Comber reluctantly allowed him to don.

Comber watched the fag as he ran across the open quad; then, as the boy disappeared, he went to bed again, but, much as he hated the draught, he did not venture to close the window.

Hardly had Tripp gone and Comber got into bed, when the monitor, who had also been awakened by the sound that woke Comber, and who had been wondering what caused it, took it
into his head to get up and see. He lit the candle which stood by his bedside and went through the dormitory. He was as much surprised as Comber had been; he found every bed, except that occupied by the bully, was empty.

Jackson, the monitor, was one of the worst specimens of his kind. He might never have been a boy himself, judging from the severity with which he viewed the slightest departure from the rules of Littlebury. Some of the boys hated him even more than they did Comber. Like the rest of the monitors, Jackson had a great deal of power in his hands; unlike the rest, however, he invariably abused his position.

Jackson peered about, with the candle in his hand. The draught made the candle flicker, so he soon discovered the open window and the sheet. He examined the sheet-rope, then went to where Comber was lying in bed feigning sleep.

Comber shammed very well, for he deceived Jackson, and that was a very clever feat indeed. Jackson put his hand on Comber's chest, and felt him breathing at regular intervals. Whatever was amiss, Comber was not in the secret. Jackson felt at that moment as if the only fellow in the Fourth who was honourable and true to his school was Comber.

After his discovery, Jackson went back to bed. He drew his curtain a little aside so that he could see the boys when they returned from wherever they had gone, and then he put the candle out.

Meanwhile, Tripp, shivering with cold—for it was at the commencement of spring term when Challenge went to Littlebury—followed, as best he could, the boys he had been sent to spy upon.
CHAPTER III.

MIDNIGHT IN THE WOODS.

Tripp, following the boys at a convenient distance, saw them stop at some stables which lay on the road leading to the woods.

The boys were evidently expected, for on some one giving a low whistle the stable gates were cautiously opened, and a man, with a swinging lantern in his hand, came out. He held the lantern high up, scrutinizing with it the faces of the boys who stood there waiting.

Most of the boys had, however, gone on; but Tripp, who got over the palings on the other side of the road and crouched down where he could hear distinctly, saw, through a chink, that the light of the lantern fell on Evans, Challenge, Margarine (whose real name was Margarson), and three others, but he could not distinguish the features of these latter.

“You must mind him, sir,” said the man, touching his forelock to Evans as he spoke; “he's skittish to-night. It's the guv'nor's fault; he will feed the hosses on oats. It's food as is too 'eatin' for hosses, that's my idear! Mind this, when you come back give the owl screech, and I'll take the hoss in in a jiff.”

Tripp saw Evans put something into the ostler's hand, heard the man say something about him being a regular gentleman, and then, to his surprise, Evans sprang upon the horse's back and went galloping up the road; but the horse's hoofs made no sound whatever!
The other boys, who were left, made all haste to follow Evans, while Tripp, still keeping along the close fence that hid him, ran as well as he could, considering that his attire, although scanty, kept catching in the brambles. By the time Tripp came to the end of the park fence, which led to the woods, his nightshirt was torn almost in tatters.

Tripp watched the boys as they followed Evans. It was as clear as day, so brightly did the moon shine, and the shadow of horse and rider was flung large and grotesque upon the turf beneath the horse's hoofs. Once he reached the turf Evans got down and did something to the animal's hoofs; Tripp fancied he removed some swathings from them, which would account for the lack of sound previously when the horse galloped up the road.

The boys rapidly crossed the stretch of turf, and then made a detour to avoid the Black Cadger's house. This house, which was so named because tarred, was the residence of the chief keeper of the woods. The boys called him Cadger because of his meanness. The woods themselves were alive with birds and butterflies in the summer, and many a capture did the "men" of Littlebury make in these woods, in spite of the head-keeper. The other keepers found it convenient to wink at the boys' incursions, as sundry coppers and screws of tobacco occasionally changed hands. But the Black Cadger seemed to hate boys. Whenever he got the chance he reported them, and as he had a good eye, in spite of his years, he was always able to pick the delinquents out without difficulty.

"The beastly Black Cadger has gone to roost without doubt," remarked one of the boys to Challenge as they went by.

"Black Cadger?" asked Challenge.

"Yes, Lord Dunsandle's head gamekeeper, you know. We've had a feud on with him for long enough. He fairly hates us ever since Knowles, who's a monitor now, dressed him down."
"What did Knowles do?"

"Enticed him out one afternoon and then six of us caught him and put him under his own pump. He hollered like a lunatic. But he's paid us out ever since; it's my idea he won't be civil till he gets another turn. The very next time he splits on one of us we'll organise a regular spree—— Good Scott! here he comes!"

Tripp, who was following by dodging from tree to tree, saw the figure of a tall, burly keeper, gun in hand, and heavily bearded, crossing towards the boys. Evans saw him, too, and, turning his horse, rode full at him.

It was well for the keeper that he got out of the way. He dodged the horse agilely, then stood still.

"What are you doing here, and at this time of night?" the Black Cadger asked.

"There's enough of us to give you the worst hiding you ever had, if you're not civil," replied Evans, who, as a rule avoided threats. But the Black Cadger had got many a small fellow a swishing, and Evans knew it.

"Where are you going? Do you know you are trespassing?" the Black Cadger still persisted.

"We are going where we are going," answered Evans, enigmatically, "and if you are wise you will neither follow us nor spy upon us."

Something in Evans' voice made the Black Cadger answer more civilly——

"Well, boys, there, you can't do much harm in the woods, so I won't hinder you. I've been sitting up waiting for poachers; there's been a lot of snaring going on lately. However, I'm going in."

To the boys' complete surprise, the Black Cadger went towards his house, opened the door, shut it, and disappeared from view.

"The Black Cadger's coming to his senses at last!" cried Margarine.
"And time, too!" answered Evans, shortly, from the horse.

The boys then went on their way.

Little did they know that the Black Cadger soon followed after, or that Tripp, shivering with the cold and with chattering teeth, was spying into their project

The spot at which Evans reined in his horse, and where all the boys rapidly collected, was a large open space bordered by trees. It was a glade in the woods, and was perfectly level. Beside it a footpath to Andover ran, which was a shorter cut than the main road.

Evans soon drew his "men" up in single file, arranging them carefully. Littlebury was famous for its volunteer corps, so that most of the Fourth Form fellows were emulous to enter it, and accordingly drilled assiduously on the two half-hours devoted to that purpose weekly.

As to Evans, he was determined to enter the regular army later on; his father was an officer, and Evans met so many military men when home for the holidays, that drilling had become to him something more than a mere pastime. Already in his mind he saw himself leading on a body of British troops against an overwhelming force of the enemy, and winning victory by sheer force of pluck and tenacity.

But the object of this midnight drilling was not one of mere amusement; the Fourth Form had not left the dormitory on a cold night to drill in the woods without having very good reason, as Evans' short address to his "men" soon showed.

"Soldiers," he cried, as he reined in his horse before the centre of the line, "our honour has been impeached; our courage has been called in question. The force we have to meet consists of fully a third more than we muster, besides which every one of the enemy has an advantage in training and in strength. It behoves us, then, to carry out carefully the plan which our Council of War has arranged. Soldiers, have confidence in your captain, as he has implicit trust in you. To-night we will assiduously practise the
manceuvres which on this night week we hope to carry into success. Let him who is afraid fall one pace to the rear; the honour of which we are justly so proud cannot be trusted to his keeping!"

Not a word was spoken by the boys during this harangue; no one moved from the line when Evans had finished. It came as a surprise to them all to know that they had superior numbers to cope with, for already it was understood that the enemy was physically stronger, and moreover commanded by a militia officer.

Evans glanced with kindling eye at the still rank of "men" before him. He read success in every face turned towards him. As briefly as he could, Evans explained to them the plan decided upon, which indeed had entailed very careful thought on the part of those who had constituted the Council of War. It was evident that skill on the part of the Captain and the two whom he had appointed as officers under him, would go a long way towards winning in the projected encounter.

For the first half-hour the boys were practised in the proper use of the sticks they carried by way of arms. Most of them could use single-sticks very well, so that all that was needed was to teach them how to resist, in a body, an attack made upon them. Evans next divided his "men" into two companies, thus forming an attacking and a defending party.

The attackers charged with dash and spirit, while the others met them without flinching, giving vent to the cry which had been settled upon as one with which to rally together—"Steady and True!"

When the attackers and attacked had sufficiently shown their mettle, Evans re-formed his men into single line, and then made three divisions of them. One of these was posted in the rear as a reserve, the second was drawn up in single file, while the third occupied a position where it could be wheeled round upon the flank of an attacking enemy. Evans himself
commanded the main body, Challenge that which was to take
the enemy in the rear, while the reserve was headed by
"Chutney" Corrie, an Indian boy, who, with his twin-brother,
"Curry," was one of the funniest and at the same time one
of the most extraordinary of human mortals, as we have soon
to learn.

The whole manoeuvres were to terminate with a grand
march-past, and Evans had stationed himself in a position
convenient for this purpose. Just as he was admirably con­trol­ling his mettlesome steed, the scout posted in the rear gave
a loud screech like an owl. Some one had discovered them!

A minute after the scout came running in, almost breathless,
and fast upon his heels trod Mr. Bright, the master of the
Fourth Form.

It was the merest accident in the world which brought
Mr. Bright into the woods that night. He was of a romantic
disposition, and had been on a strange expedition of his own
to a spot some three miles distant. Although he could return
to Littlebury when he chose, he purposely avoided the open
road, for he was the subject of much chaff at the hands of his
colleagues, who generally spoke of him as "poor old Bright,"
which showed they knew he had something on his mind which
made him a most unhappy man. The boys, however, knew
nothing of this, and for the moment thought Mr. Bright had
come there to spy upon them. There was not a boy save
Comber in the Fourth Form who had not the utmost respect
for Mr. Bright.

As Mr. Bright appeared, several of those in the ranks forgot
military etiquette sufficiently to mutter "Sneak!" in a very
audible voice, a proceeding which Evans at once sternly
repressed.

The astonishment depicted upon Mr. Bright's face in the
moonlight was a study for the curious. Instantly he recog­nized Evans, as the latter sat his horse without a quiver of
a muscle.
“Evans, I am astonished that you should be guilty of leading in such a questionable business as this!” cried Mr. Bright, as he saw all the boys carried a stout stick.

Evans did not reply. He considered that the occasion for which the boys had been called together was one which fully justified his proceedings.

“I say,” continued Mr. Bright, “I am astonished—nay, I am grieved—at this escapade; for what alternative have I but to report the whole matter to the Doctor? and that means you will all be flogged! I suppose every boy in my Form is present?”

“Except Comber,” cried Challenge, anxious that his enemy should not be punished undeservedly.

“And his biggest fag, Tripp,” added Evans.

“Men of Littlebury,” continued Mr. Bright, “the flogging you will each get to-morrow will not hurt you more, physically, than you have been lowered in my respect for you by these proceedings to-night. In disgracing your Form, you have disgraced its master. Boys, go home—home at once!”

Without a word the boys marched in single file past Evans, saluting him as they went.

“Dismiss company!” cried Evans, as the last of his “men” went by.

A minute after the boys were making all haste back to their dormitory. The discovery and the knowledge that the Doctor would birch every one of them soundly quite spoilt for the time all the previous pleasure.

On one point they all were agreed that night: the Black Cadger had seen them, as they knew. He had afterwards left his house and gone off to Littlebury; hence the coming of Mr. Bright. They could not account in any other way for Mr. Bright’s strange appearance there. They were wrong; but their mistake brought about strange complications.

Evans rode off, while Mr. Bright, with his head down, walked back towards Littlebury. How devoutly he wished he
had returned by the road instead of by the path through the woods!

As he went along Mr. Bright saw something white flitting behind the trees. He was too strong-minded to believe in ghosts, but it certainly looked remarkably like one.

Determined to find out what the white, moving object was, Mr. Bright gave chase. A few minutes after he had seized the spectre. It was Tripp!

Tripp shook with terror. To be caught spying, and to be caught like that! He would be flogged by the Doctor, and afterwards tortured by Comber. He fell on his knees before the master.

"Oh, don't—don't touch me!" he cried incoherently, and then suddenly fell helpless to the ground.

Mr. Bright bent over the boy in sheer amazement. Tripp had swooned.

Mr. Bright hardly knew what to do with the boy for a minute. What was he doing there, and why was he not properly dressed as the rest of the Form had been? He tried to rouse the boy, but could not.

The master raised Tripp from the ground, and, carrying the boy in his arms, strode rapidly to Littlebury with him.

Once Evans had dismissed them, the boys' tongues were loosened, and many were the conjectures as to when they would interview the Doctor the next day.

"It won't be a monitor's job," said Chutney Corrie to Gammon, who was the vice-captain of the Fourth Form athletics. "I expect it will be too serious a matter for Jackson to handle."

"And a good thing too," added one of the other boys. "It's my idea that the Doctor can flog pretty considerably, but he knows when a fellow's had enough, and that's more than Jackson does. I'd sooner take a licking from the Doctor or a master any day than from Jackson; he's the biggest beast of a monitor I ever came across!"
"When Jackson was in the Fourth Form himself he used to get some frightful lickings—regular howlers," soliloquised another boy. "My brother was in the Fourth with him then, and he told me Jackson was the worst toady and coward he knew."

"I wish Jackson were in the Fourth now!" said Evans, fervently; "we'd toss him and Comber in one blanket."

"Comber's out of this scrape, anyhow," said Chutney Corrie. "My eye, won't it make him cocky to see us all licked, and to escape himself!"

"I'm glad that young Tripp isn't in it, too," said Gammon; "he's a weak little kid at the best of times. I wish he were strong enough to stand up to Comber when he's bullying."

The boys had reached the school by this time, and were forced to cease speaking. They stole like ghosts to the window where, to their great relief, the rope made of sheets was still hanging down. Just as the nearest boy took the rope in his hand ready to climb up hand over hand, Evans touched him. The boy turned round, and saw that some of the Form had gathered in a group a little way from the window. Evans beckoned to those near the window, and, wondering what was amiss, they followed him.

Evans spoke in a low but distinct voice, which all could hear.

"It's this way, men of Littlebury," their leader explained: "we've been practising for our affair with Mitchell's lot, and we've been caught. Very well, we shall have to pay f'r it to-morrow. That's all right as far as it goes, but it doesn't make our case any the less worthy of being carried out to its conclusion. I sent Mitchell's lot a challenge, and they accepted it. Well and good; we won't back out of it because we happen to get a licking. No one knows when the actual affair was to come off even now. Hadn't we better settle what we are to do afterwards?"

"My idea," said Gammon, "is this: let us take our whopping
calmly to-morrow, but we'll hide the sticks to-night in their usual place. Evans shall write to the leader at Mitchell's, and say something has prevented us from carrying out our challenge, but we mean to give them their meeting with us according to promise. It will all be forgotten at school in two weeks' time. Let Evans, then, postpone the affair by letter for one more week; that is to say, we will meet Mitchell's lot two weeks to-night, instead of one week, which can make very little difference to them."

Evans accepted the suggestion.

"Very well; I think that a good plan. Are you all agreed? Those who mean to carry this affair out, licking or no licking, stick up a hand."

Most of the boys held up both their hands, but no one dared to cheer the result.

"Now, men, up the rope and to bed!" said Evans, quietly.

The boys went towards the window once more, and one by one climbed into the dormitory. When a few were inside they hauled the others up, Chutney, Gammon, Challenge, and Evans staying to the last.

When Evans alone was left, he caught at the rope and was hauled up. He was within two feet of the window, when the rope broke.

Evans fell headlong to the ground and lay there quite motionless. The others were thrown into utter consternation. What was to be done?

Finally the boys made a second rope of sheets and Challenge was let down. He found Evans just recovering consciousness, and, fastening him to the rope, watched anxiously while the others hauled him in.

When Evans was safe, Challenge was hauled up and the window closed. The boy who owned the bull's-eye lantern held it to Evans' face while two of the others examined him. Chutney Corrie, who, in addition to his other qualities, claimed to be the dormitory doctor, examined Evans carefully.
His long thin fingers were passed carefully over Evans' body, the other boys having undressed the latter for the purpose of the examination.

When Chutney's verdict was, "no bones broken, but a bit stunned from the fall," every one uttered a sigh of relief.

Chutney attended to Evans, who was put into some one else's bed for the rest of the night, as his own bedstead had to be moved to put the sticks away.

When all the sticks were stowed in safety under the flooring, the boys wished each other a hasty good-night, and went quickly to sleep after disrobing.

There were two in the room who did not sleep though. The first was the monitor, Jackson. He saw the boys come in, and witnessed the scene round the bed where Evans lay. The latter soon fell into a restful slumber, while the monitor pondered over the strange hiding-place of the sticks, and wondered what they were for. He was completely mystified over the whole affair. He had thought it nothing worse than a raid on some one's garden at first; but, as he reflected, there is no fruit to be got from trees that haven't a leaf on them; moreover, the time of year was altogether against such a theory.

Jackson concluded at last that the sticks were for fighting purposes. He lay there wide awake, pondering how the Doctor would take the news, and whether the discovery of this night escapade, whatever it was, together with the sticks, would ensure him the opportunity of giving the ringleaders, at least, a sound swishing. Jackson was too full of pleasant anticipations to sleep; he certainly never supposed some one had caught the boys of his dormitory in the woods that night.

Comber was more awake that whole night long than even the monitor. He had sent Tripp to watch the boys, and his fag had not returned. Carefully as he had listened to every
whisper of conversation, Comber had not heard Tripp's name mentioned when the rest returned. What had become of the fag? Comber's heart beat violently. Suppose Tripp was lost in the woods, and found dead from cold and exposure? Would any one find out that the fag had been sent by him on that spying errand? Every one knew that Comber bullied him, and would be sure to question the former about Tripp's whereabouts.

Comber got into such a nervous, excited state of mind that he could lie in bed no longer. He got up and dressed himself, and then went to the window. He drew the curtain which the boys had closed and sat there watching for the fag. But Tripp came not.

It was horrible. Comber rehearsed to himself how Tripp would be missed, the search for him, the finding of his body, and lastly how the Doctor would say to him, solemnly, "Comber, you are morally guilty of murder!"

Comber shook with fear. He vowed if he got out of this scrape he would never bully another boy as long as he lived. And Comber kept his vow exactly as long as the night lasted, for when the morning came he began his old tactics. Even in the height of his fear, bullying had such a hold on Comber that he could not shake off his pernicious habit.

Mr. Bright, who carried Tripp in his arms, placed the unconscious boy on the couch in his room. There was a fire burning and a lamp upon the table. He made every effort he could to restore the boy to his senses by forcing a few drops of brandy between the fag's close-set teeth; but still Tripp gave no sign of life. Mr. Bright was thoroughly alarmed. He put the boy down on the rug before the fire and fell to chafing his limbs, trying to restore animation.

If Tripp had come to, Mr. Bright would have carried the boy quietly to his dormitory, and put him to bed. For the master's own part, he thought the boy had suffered enough without getting birched by the Doctor or caned by Jackson,
the monitor, whichever might happen. Besides, he was in an awkward plight himself. He made it a rule never to tell of anything that happened, if he could possibly help it. Mr. Bright argued that it was the monitor's place to find out these things; still, this was such a serious affair, he felt he must take notice of it.

At last, in sheer despair, finding Tripp still insensible, Mr. Bright went to the infirmary where the sick boys were isolated, and rapped on the door. After a few minutes, a head, enveloped in a huge nightcap, was thrust out of a window which was suddenly raised.

"Who's there?" asked a voice.

"I want to speak to you, Mrs. Myers," said the master. "Come down at once!"

"Is it fire or thieves?" asked "Mother" Myers, as the boys generally called her.

"Neither; a boy has been taken ill out of the Fourth Form dormitory," answered Mr. Bright, impatiently.

Mrs. Myers disappeared from the window, which she closed. A few minutes afterwards the door opened, and the two crossed to Mr. Bright's room.

When they entered, Tripp was evidently coming round. Mother Myers, who was a kind-hearted woman, and liked the boys, knelt down beside Tripp and assisted nature to her utmost, calling the fag "poor lamb," and other endearing epithets.

Under the combined care of the two, Tripp soon came to his senses and sat up, looking round him vacantly.

"Where am I? Where's Comber?" he asked, with a shiver.

Mr. Bright understood it all in an instant. Evidently Comber had sent Tripp to spy. He did not answer the boy's question, but drew Mother Myers apart.

"I found him in the woods watching some of the rest—I won't mention names. Do you think he can be safely put in
the dormitory?" Mr. Bright asked the last in an anxious tone.

"I think so; I'll see. So you were coming home through the woods—and late too, sir," said she, with a gleam of intelligence. "Where had you come from, sir?"

Mr. Bright avoided the question.

"Never mind that. I want to get young Tripp out of a scrape; can you manage it?"

Mother Myers thought the matter out.

"I'll take him to his dormitory," she answered; and, with Tripp in her arms, she left Mr. Bright plunged in thought.

The motion of being carried racked Tripp till he could bear it no longer, and he moaned with pain. Mrs. Myers stopped. It was of no use to take the boy and leave him like that. There was no help for it. She was sorry for Mr. Bright, for she liked him, as she did every living creature that she could sympathise with; but Tripp wanted nursing, and Mrs. Myers was quite determined for a time he should not be punished for his escapade, whatever sent him out at that time of night.

So Tripp was carried to the school infirmary that night instead of to his dormitory—and Comber had lost his fag for a time. At six o'clock in the morning Tripp became so bad that Mrs. Myers hurried off for the doctor.

After examining the boy and pronouncing him in a very serious condition from cold and exposure, the doctor interviewed the head-master.

Matters were indeed in a bad way for every one. When the getting-up bell rang, every boy sprang from his bed and washed with alacrity.

A sense of impending evil hung over most of those in the dormitory, although no one openly showed the white feather. The more philosophic ones, like Challenge and Evans, made a good breakfast to fortify themselves for what was coming.
CHAPTER IV.

DOCTOR CHAPPLE'S DESCENT UPON THE DELINQUENTS.

ALTHOUGH he was much disturbed about Tripp's absence, Comber could not help smiling at breakfast at the other boys' astonishment when they saw the fag's vacant seat. At first, most of the boys thought Tripp had got up late, but soon they surmised some stronger reason kept him from his breakfast.

"Where's Tripp, I wonder?" said Margarine, who was cramming himself with bread and butter.

"If he'd taken your example he'd be lining himself with breakfast instead of funkling," said some one in reply.

"It's a bad thing to take a whacking on an empty stomach, isn't it, Margarine?" asked another, who had scarcely touched his own breakfast.

"It's a bad thing to play the fool with a man who can chaw you up, Gibbons," answered Margarine, landing out with his foot under the table. "If you can't eat your own whack, don't begrudge me mine, or I'll give you another dose when the Doctor's done with you."

"I'll see you don't though, Margarine," said Comber, who sometimes protected his fags, of whom Gibbons happened to be one.

Margarine scowled, but made no reply. He was too fat to have wind enough to fight much.

After breakfast and "chapel" were over, the boys went off to their Form-room. Evans was rather quiet, for his fall the previous night had bruised and shaken him somewhat badly,
but there were a few others in the Fourth Form who were pale from anticipation of the Doctor's descent upon them.

There was no time, however, to discuss affairs, for most of the men had some prep. that wanted looking up. Evans made it a rule always to do his work thoroughly, and Challenge followed his example. The bully, Comber, usually depended upon one of his fags for translations and vocabularies of difficult words. Hitherto Tripp, who was well up in the Fourth Form, had done this. As Tripp had not appeared that morning, there was no translation ready, of course, so Comber busied himself by asking the others for one.

One of Comber's other fags was about to give him a translation, when Chutney Corrie passed a sheet of paper along.

"There you are, Comber," said Chutney; "I got it out yesterday. It's a good deal better than Tripp could give you."

It certainly was—in the way Chutney meant it!

Comber knew that Chutney was a pot at classics, so he took the translation and scribbled it out on a small piece of paper, without noticing much what the words were about. When called upon to construe, Comber meant to stand up and read from the crib he had secured. It took Comber nearly a quarter of an hour to turn Chutney's scrawl into a sheet of writing which would comfortably lie in the text-book without being seen.

Meanwhile, a smile hovered round Chutney's face, which Comber was too busy to observe.

Among those whom Comber bullied, he was always careful to leave both Chutney and his brother Curry carefully alone. The fact was one of the two Indian boys was a splendid fighter, but which of the two it was no boy in the whole of Littlebury had yet fathomed.

The two boys were exactly alike, dressed the same to the most minute detail, their voices betrayed no difference, but the fact remained that one was said to be timid to an extreme, while the other was considered to be extremely courageous,
and always took his brother's part. The two boys, twins, were thus able to play just what pranks they wished on the rest. If Chutney gave another boy a licking, then Curry would go up and challenge the conquered one for the next day. If the defeated boy accepted the challenge, as the boys did when first the two Indians went to Littlebury, Curry was sure to thrash him the next day.

Every boy at Littlebury came to the conclusion that the twins changed places for the occasion, and, as no one liked fighting Chutney twice over, fagging the twins was voted out of the question. Moreover, as they were full of the wildest tricks, the rest of the Fourth Formers had to put up with these as best they could. Comber had had the regulation two defeats from Chutney and Curry, or, as he felt sure, both from Chutney, whichever he was.

Time after time had Comber gone for one of the boys, only to find he had somehow always struck the fighting twin. So the bully nursed his wrath, waiting and hoping to get his revenge out of one of the pair.

It took Comber by surprise, rather, to get a translation given him by Chutney, who sat by his side in the Fourth Form-room, provided the twins had not changed places. However, he knew the Indian boys were considered kind-hearted, and so he soon thought no more of the incident.

Precisely at the hour in came Mr. Bright. A thrill of excitement ran through the Form-room as the master took his place.

It was Mr. Bright's custom on entering the room to wish the boys "good-morning," but on this occasion he sat down in silence. Every one scanned the master's face eagerly. Had he told the Doctor?

There was nothing to be got by watching Mr. Bright's face, which was imperturbable. Every one, therefore, concluded that the Doctor knew, and that Mr. Bright was very angry about the affair. When Mr. Bright spoke, telling Comber to
commence construing, it was evident the master was very ill at ease.

It happened that the piece given as prep. had struck Chutney as having a comic side to it, and on the previous evening he had amused himself by turning the Latin extract into what seemed to him to be a very funny and foolish piece of English. It was this translation which Chutney had given to Comber, having, of course, a sensible one for himself.

Comber, when put on, stood up and read the Latin, the first line of which ran—

"Sit doctor boni; pigeat turpisque malique," which every public schoolboy would translate: "Let him be a teacher of good; let him be ashamed of what is base and bad."

Comber, to the open-mouthed astonishment of the whole Form, after reading the Latin said slowly—

"Sit, thou bony pig, like the Doctor thou art foul and wicked!"

The boys' mirth was uncontrollable. Chutney, who had laid the plot, simply roared with laughter, which the rest caught up, while Mr. Bright endeavoured in vain to obtain silence. When at last the boys ceased laughing, Mr. Bright addressed Comber—

"You seem to think, Comber, that the disgrace which has fallen upon the Form is an occasion to be turned into ridicule by giving such a translation as that to me, when you can easily see the events of the past night have annoyed me exceedingly. Very well, sir, write me out the whole of the first book of the Æneid!"

Comber subsided into his seat, while Chutney got up and gave the correct version, continuing for a few minutes without a mistake or false quantity, till a monitor came into the room and spoke to Mr. Bright in a low tone.

Mr. Bright nodded; the monitor went out of the room, and the master followed him, after giving the boys a piece of "unseen" to occupy themselves with during his absence.
Mr. Bright's departure was the signal for a wild scene of excitement.

"The Doctor's sent for old Freddy to tell him what we've got to suffer!" cried one of the boys.

"Mr. Bright's rounded on us sure enough!" volunteered another. "I hope the Doctor will have swished a dozen or two before my turn comes, that's all."

"You beastly sneak!" cried Comber to Chutney. "What did you want to give me a translation like that for, eh?" Comber shook his fist in Chutney's face.

"You shouldn't crib," answered Chutney. "What a mug you must be, Comber! Don't stick your fist in my face though, or I'll lick you behind the fives courts to-day, and Curry will do the same to-morrow!"

Comber, who was burningly anxious to know what had become of Tripp, thought there would be a chance to slip out of the room, and up to the dormitory. Some of the maids would be sure to be there bed-making, and he might find out from them, perhaps, what he wanted to know.

Comber stood up. "I'm not afraid to fight any one in the Form," he said aggressively. "You fellows had something on last night, and you left me out of it! See if I don't get square with you for that, that's all!"

Without another word Comber went out of the Form-room.

"What's he gone to do?" "Does he know anything?" "Comber is no sneak, even if he is a bully!" cried various voices, almost together.

"The Doctor will get our swishing over by night," said Evans. "To-morrow is a half; we'll meet in our House of Commons and settle who peached. It's either Mr. Bright, or else the Black Cadger came up this morning, and told the Doctor this time about meeting us. I dare say he brought Mr. Bright last night, and now he's told the Doctor, and the Doctor's sent for old Freddy to ask him what he knows about it."
“You’re right, old chap,” said Gammon; “it’s the Black Cadger who’s split, in my opinion. Wait till the swishing’s over, that’s all!”

“Tell you what,” said Chutney, as a sudden thought occurred to him. “Comber was very cheeky to us all just now; he’ll be back in a minute, let us pay him off as he comes in!”

For the sake of something to do, rather than to annoy Comber, half a dozen of the biggest fellows, after making a show of having done a little translation, put their heads together, and arranged something for Comber’s benefit when he returned.

The flooring of Littlebury, as may be expected in such an ancient Public School, was in a bad state. Only that day a form had been taken away from the front desk, and chairs placed there instead, as workmen were busy putting in some new pieces of planking. Near Comber’s chair was a hole of no great width. Over this a piece of blotting-paper was placed, looking as if it had fallen there by accident, and two of the legs of the chair were so arranged that they were simply supported by the blotting-paper.

It was a neat trap for the unwary, as a good many public schoolboys there had already discovered.

Not contented sufficiently with the anticipated revenge, Chutney and his brother Curry screwed some paper up into small balloons and poured ink into these. The toughness of the paper prevented the ink from soaking through for a minute or two.

The two boys made about half a dozen of these ink petards, and distributed them to those who were not afraid of the bully trying to revenge himself upon them afterwards.

“Some one’s coming; look out!” cried the boy who sat at the end of the second desk, as he heard footsteps in the corridor. He got up and shut the room door quietly.

“It isn’t old Freddy,” said Chutney; “he always jingles his keys!”
This was a reference to an act on the part of Mr. Bright, who used always to jingle his keys loudly before going into the class-room. This gave the boys a chance to settle down to work by the time the master came in, and saved a lot of impositions. It was one of the little things that won the confidence of the boys for their master.

"It's Comber, sure enough!" cried Gammon.

The door opened and instantly the boys sent the missiles—straight at the monitor!

"Good Jeremiah!" muttered Evans. "It isn't Comber; it's Jackson!"

Jackson, the monitor, with the ink streaming down his face, came into the room and glared round wildly at the culprits. He had been sent to take charge of the Form by the Doctor during Mr. Bright's absence. He was one of those people who think the rest of the world has nothing to do but plot mischief and turn the laugh against them.

"Evans!" cried Jackson, furiously, "stand up!"

It was one of the unwritten rules among Littlebury boys never to disobey a monitor or to be openly disrespectful to him. It was a position every boy hoped to attain himself one day, and no one ever thought of offering direct opposition to a monitor, however much the latter might abuse his power.

So Evans stood up. He, however, had not thrown one of the ink pellets.

"Evans, as head man of the Form, I demand from you the names of those who threw this ink at me. It was a dastardly outrage, and was evidently a planned affair."

Jackson spoke passionately, as he wiped the ink from his face with his handkerchief, with the consequence that his face became smeared all over. It was the hardest thing in the world for the boys to stop themselves from bursting out laughing at the appearance of the monitor.

"I'm very sorry—we are all sorry, Jackson, that the ink
touched you," answered Evans, respectfully. "I can assure
you it was meant for some one else."

"I didn’t ask you for whom the ink was meant; I asked you
who threw it," said Jackson, hotly.

"I am very sorry to say I can’t answer your question."

"But I say you shall answer me!" cried Jackson. "I
command you to do so at once."

"It is a point of honour with the men of Littlebury never to
peach on each other. You, as a man and monitor, Jackson,
must know that," Evans replied, quietly but determinedly.

"Very well, then," said Jackson, as he opened Mr. Bright’s
desk and took out a cane, which was very rarely used. "Come
out here, Evans, and I will see if I can’t persuade you to obey
my command."

Evans went out at once. Jackson lashed at him furiously,
but met with no resistance. Evans, in an ordinary way,
could have thrashed Jackson easily, but honour forbade any
resistance.

"Don’t you think that’s enough?" Challenge asked at last,
for Jackson went on cutting at Evans with all his might.

"What!" cried the monitor, "do you dare to interfere?
Do you dare to instigate a revolt in Littlebury!"

"I say Evans has had enough; he’s got to interview the
Doctor directly with the rest of us. If you are not satisfied
yet, let me take Evans’ place."

Jackson stopped in sheer amazement. Then he said—

"You are beginning very well as a new man at Littlebury.
Very good, I dare say you threw some of this ink at me on
purpose—come out, and I’ll teach you better manners to
monitors."

Evans went back to his seat, and Challenge stepped forward;
but just then the door opened again, and Mr. Bright came in.

"I think that will do, Jackson," said Mr. Bright, as he saw
the cane raised to strike Challenge; "the men of the Fourth
have the Doctor to meet."
Jackson entered into a long account of his wrongs, but was curtly answered. Moreover, Mr. Bright expressed no opinion as to what he thought of the matter.

When the monitor had departed to cleanse himself of the ink, Mr. Bright looked round and missed Comber.

"Where is Comber?" asked the master.

"He is not here at present," answered Evans, as speaker of the Form.

Mr. Bright made no comment, but resumed the lesson. A few minutes after Comber came in, with a face that was ghastly pale. The master guessed the reason of this; Comber had no doubt, he correctly surmised, made an opportunity to search the dormitory for Tripp.

Comber glanced at Mr. Bright, expecting to be questioned about his leaving the Form without permission.

Nothing was said, however, and the bully went to his chair. The moment Comber sat down, over went the chair, sending the bully sprawling backwards—and in the midst of the boys' choked laughter in came the Doctor.
CHAPTER V.

DOCTOR CHAPPLE.

The head-master of Littlebury, as he stood before the boys, who had risen on his entry, was a tall, dark man, apparently on the verge of fifty, his hair being quite grey.

Doctor Chapple had large, expressive, black eyes, bushy eyebrows, an aquiline nose, close-set lips, that showed great force of character, a square chin, and was clean shaven.

He belonged to the old school of head-masters, for, having been flogged and fagged himself when at school, and having come triumphantly out of his troubles, he thought the same training as his own must be good for every boy under his charge.

There were various legends current in Littlebury about the Doctor's swishing powers. On one occasion, to suppress what he considered was an incipient rebellion in a Form, he was said to have birched forty-three boys in one day. No wonder, then, that those concerned in the drilling in the woods expected to suffer a heavy penalty at his hands.

The Doctor saw Comber, as he lay sprawling on the ground, and at once called him out.

"Comber," he said, "how many times am I to impress upon you the fact that you are only two Forms from the Sixth, when it will be your proud privilege to be a monitor? My determination is to assist you to be an ornament to Littlebury, and I shall flog you till you are!"

Doctor Chapple spoke as if he were really promising
Comber a prize as an encouragement for good behaviour. Comber heartily wished he were already in the Sixth, where he might fag boys to his heart's content, as well as be beyond getting lickings at the Doctor's hands.

"Comber," continued the Doctor, "come out here."

Comber went slowly forward. He was angry with whoever had played him the trick, but still more so that he should appear at a disadvantage before the boys whom he still wished to bully. It looked as if he were going to be let down before his fags a second time.

"Comber," continued the Doctor, glancing at the bully from above his gold-rimmed spectacles, "what does this unseemly conduct mean? I came into the Form-room to investigate a most serious matter—one that possibly concerns human life—and this is the kind of behaviour I witness."

The Doctor was terribly angry; his voice shook with wrath. The boys were astounded. What was the Doctor referring to? Surely not to Tripp—for, remember, they knew nothing of the boy's adventure. Comber knew, however, and he grew white with fear. What he had morbidly conjectured when his weakest fag had not returned was apparently going to prove true!

"It was not my fault, Doctor," muttered Comber, and then he stopped. He knew if he threw the blame of his misfortune upon the other boys, he would be summarily tried in the House of Commons, and put into Coventry forthwith. Further, the elder boys in the Fifth and Sixth would hear that, by sneaking, he had broken the traditions of the school. Besides, the Doctor never encouraged tale-telling.

"How came you sprawling on the floor, then, sir?" asked the Doctor, sternly.

"I fell down; my chair caught in a hole," stuttered Comber getting more confused each minute.

"Very well; that will do, sir," answered the Doctor "Perhaps by the time you have written out the third book of
Euclid for me you will have learnt the art of sitting properly at your desk."

Comber understood. He vowed vengeance against the boy who had played him the trick, if only he could discover him. He went back sullenly to his chair, put it squarely on the floor, carefully avoiding the hole in the floor, and stood behind it, that part of the episode being closed.

"I have come, men of Littlebury," began the Doctor, turning to the subject of his visit, "to inquire into a very serious matter. One of the members of this Form, a small, weak boy, whom it should have been your care to protect, is lying in the infirmary, and I am afraid he is dying. What do you know of the matter?"

The boys stared blankly at each another, but no one answered.

"Am I to understand that the culprit refuses to confess?" the Doctor asked. "This poor child—for he is little more—was found by some one in the woods at a late hour, only slightly clad. It is clear that Tripp—"the boys started—"did not leave his Form-room dormitory so dressed of his own free will. Again I ask, who sent him, and what was he out for?"

Evans broke the strange silence which followed the Doctor's last question.

"Doctor," said he, addressing the head-master as the boys of Littlebury did by that title, "as the head man of the Fourth Form, I can safely say that no one in the Form asked Tripp to go, or sent him into the woods last night, so far as I am aware."

"You wish me to believe that the child was left out of your disgraceful proceedings last night, and therefore came to watch you; in short, that he was spying upon the men of his own Form?" asked the Doctor.

"I do not think that, Doctor," answered Evans. "I only know that we purposely left him out of our plans. If Tripp
came into the woods, he came of his own accord, or else at the
command of some one else. Who that some one else was, I
do not know."

"What men of the Form were not included in last night's
work?" asked the Doctor, thoughtfully.

Every one looked at Comber. If the bully did not acknow-
ledge this, no boy would have mentioned him. It seemed
that the finger of infamy pointed at the bully.

The Doctor saw the direction in which the boys glanced.
He turned sharply to the bully.

"Comber, were you, or were you not, concerned in the
affair in the woods last night?"

Comber's knees seemed as if they were going to give way
under him, as he opened his parched lips and replied—

"No, Doctor, I was not."

Doctor Chapple turned to Mr. Bright and whispered with
him for several minutes, during which the boys anxiously
pondered what was likely to be the Doctor's next question.
At last the Doctor nodded his head, apparently assenting to
some suggestion of Mr. Bright.

"Comber," said the head-master, watching carefully the
effect of his question upon Comber, "I want you to answer
me carefully. Think before you do so. My question is this:
Did Tripp go into the wood last night at your request; in
short, did you send him there to watch the other men of your
dormitory?"

Comber did not immediately reply, and the suspense was
sickening almost. Then he said, through his cracked lips,
slowly and monotonously, as if repeating a lesson—

"I was asleep when the others in the dormitory went out.
Whether Tripp went with them or not, I cannot say."

The Doctor weighed each word of this answer. It did not
seem to him to be definite enough. Perhaps Comber woke
after the boys went out, and was now parrying the question
put to him.
"Your answer, Comber, is not explicit enough," said the Doctor; "I want plain 'Yes' or 'No.' Did you send Tripp into the woods last night, or did he go at your suggestion?"

Comber had recovered his self-possession. In that moment he thought everything out. If he acknowledged that he had sent Tripp, and the boy was now dying, all was over with him. He looked directly into the Doctor's face.

"My answer, Doctor, is No."

Evans and the rest of the Form felt greatly relieved. They had left Comber out of their escapade, and by so doing they had begun to conjecture that he had become involved in this most serious affair. Each vowed now to himself that he would make friends with Comber, and do some part of the two impositions the bully had got that morning—so quickly does sympathy for the wrongly accused rise up in the breast of English boys!

"I ask this question of you all," continued the Doctor. "Did any man in the Form send or take Tripp into the woods?"

No one answered. The Doctor even seemed relieved. Mr. Bright, who remembered Tripp's incoherent mutterings, looked at Comber not unkindly. After all, bad as the bully was, it was a relief to learn from his own lips that he had not done this last act of tyranny.

"Men of Littlebury," the Doctor went on, "I was afraid, when I came into the Form-room, I should have to announce that it was my duty to expel every one who was at the head of this matter. Tripp's relatives have been sent for. The child is delirious; unless there be a change in him before night, the doctor says there is no hope of saving his life."

Comber, whose lie had for the time screened him, wondered if it would be better for him if Tripp should die. In that case, perhaps, his lie would never be found out; if Tripp got better he might be withdrawn from Littlebury, and then reveal to his parents the whole affair! Comber's lie hung like a millstone round his neck.
"I have now," continued the Doctor, "one more unpleasant task to perform. I understand that you were all, with the exception of poor Tripp and Comber, seen in the woods at a late hour last night, armed with sticks, and headed by Evans, who rode a horse. Will any one volunteer to tell me for what purpose this extraordinary drilling was carried on, and where those sticks are concealed?"

Every one was silent. By saying nothing, the boys thought to get a birching, and then be able afterwards to carry out their original plan.

"Since no one will volunteer the information, I am compelled to make this announcement," said the Doctor. "The whole affair has been found out. I understand that a serious conflict with the pupils of Hillside is contemplated. School escapades are all very well in their way, but fighting with sticks, and against such superior strength, can only lead to injuries, possibly grave, being inflicted on both sides. Indeed, instead of one boy's life being in danger, probably, had I not been warned of this affair, the result of a conflict between Littlebury and Hillside might have been serious, and even fatal to some of those engaged in it. Certainly, it would have been most damaging to the reputation of this ancient foundation."

Hillside, which Dr. Chapple had mentioned, was a large establishment situated about a mile from Littlebury. It was built on some rising ground, and was the most famous Army school for many miles round. It consisted of a large hall and the principal's house, besides class-rooms, built in one great block, while, at right angles to the main block, ran, on left and right, the pupils' quarters. That on the left was devoted to those pupils going up for the Army Preliminary Examinations, as well as the "Further," and these pupils numbered many more than those in the Fourth Form at Littlebury. One of the boys in the Fourth Form had been cuffed by a pupil of this Army school, for those who went to Hillside
looked scornfully upon the men of Littlebury. Evans, hearing of the occurrence, promptly challenged the whole of the pupils of Hillside who lived in this left wing. The result was, that after much expressed scorn and a lofty refusal to accept the challenge, Evans and one or two others had laid in wait for the offender and soundly thrashed him. This led to a reconsideration of the challenge. The right wing of Hillside was given over to Militia officers, up for training and preparation in the literary part of their examination, and one of these officers had volunteered to lead Hillside against the men of Littlebury.

It will be understood that in tendering the challenge the Fourth Form of Littlebury was acting with the utmost bravery, for even the combined strength of the Fifth and Sixth, would have been hard put to it to win in such an encounter. Army pupils at such establishments are usually a tough set, and in this case they meant to give the men of Littlebury a proof of their strength. On the other hand, Littlebury men felt that unless they took the matter up and won, the streets would not be safe for them, for these Army pupils seemed to be about at all hours.

"Then," continued the Doctor, who had paused while waiting to see if Evans would say anything as leader of the Form, "I have this to say: I absolutely forbid this encounter at any time. If it should take place, understand, I will expel every boy concerned in it."

The boys knew that the Doctor meant what he said. His threat was more than they were prepared for; they knew the projected fight was now impossible.

"I now finally ask," continued Doctor Chapple, "where are these sticks?"

Still no one answered.

"Very well, men," pursued the head-master, "even that secret I have discovered."

Every one stared at this last statement. Some one had
sneaked—for they felt Mr. Bright knew nothing of the hiding-place of the sticks.

"Not only have I discovered the whereabouts of these sticks, but I have had them removed. As you are aware, men, they were hidden under the flooring of the dormitory. I now come to the inevitable penalty."

The boys listened very attentively.

"I say," repeated the Doctor, "I come to the penalty of this serious and dangerous escapade. At first I had the intention of flogging the whole Form, excepting, of course, Comber."

Some of the boys' faces brightened at this statement. Perhaps they might not be among the number to suffer.

"I have made out a list of twelve, including Comber. This contains simply the names of the top twelve men in the Form. As Comber is not among the culprits, I must add another name to make the list exact. The thirteenth, then, in the Form, namely, Cartwright, will be included now."

Every one looked sympathetically at Cartwright; certainly he was much to be pitied.

"Beginning with Evans, the twelve boys whose names I will now read, to prevent misunderstanding, will come to me in order. I shall require each in the library for ten minutes. Afterwards those whom I have punished may go to the dormitory, where the matron will be found with some vinegar and brown paper for such as think they require it. Evans, come with me!"

The Doctor gathered up his gown over his left arm as he usually did, and went out of the class-room. Evans walked behind him, and in this way the two reached the library.

Comber, who had fully expected to be swished by the Doctor for being found sprawling on the floor, felt almost elated for the time, when he saw the boys, including Chutney, Challenge, Gammon, and Margarine, depart from the Form-room slowly after each other.
When the mid-day break came, Comber stood in the quad­rangle alone. The whole story of the escapade had leaked out, and when it was known that, with the exception of Tripp, the bully alone had not taken part in the affair, the senior boys practically cut him.

Something worse than this happened. Tripp's state caused considerable excitement throughout Littlebury, and Comber, catching snatches of conversation, pieced them together, and fancied they referred to him. Although he had denied any hand in the matter, he felt somehow that every one suspected him.

Whenever Comber got the chance he questioned the servants, and once he caught sight of the matron of the infirmary, Mother Myers. Comber hurried after her to ask if Tripp were better. She gave him a very short reply—

"No, sir; but we hope he will become conscious before he dies," and hurried away to her charge.

Comber knew if Tripp did become conscious all would be over with him. He hoped the boy would not!
CHAPTER VI.

THE MEETING-HOUSE ON THE MARSH.

After the castigation which the boys received, one thought was uppermost in their minds—how to discover who had told the Doctor of the meeting in the woods.

Some of the men of Littlebury were confident the Form Master, Mr. Bright, had done so; others thought Comber had played the sneak. This the bully denied stoutly, and his word was accepted. There were, then, only two others who could have let the affair out; the monitor—Jackson, if he had discovered it, and the Black Cadger.

No one thought of making any reprisals against Mr. Bright, but if one of the remaining two should be found to be the culprit, a sharp lesson would be read to him. In this difficulty, the boys determined to resort to a strange meeting-place they had on a marsh, which was facetiously called by the Seniors who knew of it the "House of Commons," to distinguish it from their debating club, which was held in the Great Hall, and which the Fourth Formers, with equal humour, called the "House of Lords."

On the day that a great meeting was called at this house, which Challenge, the new boy, was to see for the first time, Chutney and Curry, the two Indian boys, had planned a strange experiment on their own account.

Both the Indians were clever with their fingers; indeed, they seemed able to make anything with a knife and a piece of wood. Accordingly, they set themselves to work, and soon cut out some
wooden images of all those suspected. Including Mr. Bright's and Comber's, there were five of these images, and any one who had drawn the window-curtain aside that morning at the foot of Chutney's bed, would have been surprised to see how wonderfully these images were like those they were meant for. They were as finely done as wax models by the best modellers might have been.

Chutney and Curry, in making these wooden models, had no thought of amusement. They meant to detect the culprits, and in a very simple way. They procured some strong pins, and forced these into the images, after uttering some foreign incantations over them, taking care that the other boys should not observe their doings.

It was the belief of the brothers that the guilty party would at once begin to suffer from violent headache and other pains. By watching carefully, they would soon know if any of those at Littlebury became so afflicted.

As soon as mid-day came, Chutney and Curry stole up to their dormitory, and went to look at the models. It was expected that the one representing the guilty person would have moved a little from its place, owing to the pain supposed to be inflicted on the real person.

They were somewhat disappointed that this had not happened, and were looking closely at the models when the monitor, Jackson, who had followed them unawares, stole behind them, and stood watching what they were doing. To his surprise, he saw that the face of one of the models, which was adorned with several pins, represented his with the utmost accuracy. He slipped quietly away, and when the brothers had gone to dinner he went back into the dormitory and took his own model away, intending to show it to the Doctor. He thought the boys were as bad as they well could be.

After dinner Chutney and Curry discovered their loss. They said nothing to the others, but got close together and
held a whispered conversation, full of reprisals for Jackson, who, they shrewdly guessed, had stolen his own model.

The brothers soon had their plans made. The gymnasium, or "gym," was rarely used on half-holidays, so thither they went and laid such a plan as only their fertile brains could have hatched.

This arranged, Chutney swarmed up one of the ropes to the beam, and lay full length upon it, completely hidden from view. Curry thereupon went in search of the monitor, Jackson. He pitched some yarn to his victim, which caused the latter to go with him into the gym, where he stooped down, right under the beam, to examine something. The moment Jackson did so, Chutney, who was aloft, hurled down a very large and heavy mat, which the brothers had dragged up to the beam. It came down upon the monitor with such force that he was flung to the ground face downwards, completely covered by the mat!

In an instant Chutney dropped from the beam, and held one end of the mat secure while Curry held the other. The monitor tried to get up, but was so firmly pinned down that his struggles were useless. He tried to call for assistance, but only a choked whisper came from under the mat.

"Jackson," said one of the brothers, sweetly, "perhaps you won't mind passing that model you stole along under the mat. We know you have it in your pocket!"

Jackson threatened and implored by turn, but his two captors held the mat tightly, and he was powerless. Presently he got the model out of his pocket and pushed it from under the mat. But the brothers had not finished with him yet. They were both very angry with him for his recent assault on Evans, and certainly did not mean to be served likewise.

"Jackson," said the other brother, even more sweetly than Chutney had spoken, "you know it is a tradition at Littlebury that no one ever touches a monitor. We are not touching you; it's the mat, you know! Promise you will never say a word about this, and we will let you go."
Jackson, who was nearly suffocating, promised. His captors got up, carefully rolled the mat up, smiled pleasantly at him, and then carried the mat to where all the gym mats were kept when not in use.

The model was then re-adorned with pins, and placed with its fellows.

By that time it was necessary to make for the meeting-house on the marsh, whither the twins repaired, smiling as they went, but without any idea of letting the rest into the prank they had played upon Jackson.

"He won't steal again, Chutney," said Curry:

"I think we shall make Jackson a very good monitor, in time," replied his brother, sweetly.

Under the guidance of Evans, Challenge was then going towards the meeting-place. They stopped at the tuck-shop to buy something, and have a chat to Old Christmas, as the boys called the proprietor.

Christmas kept the recognised house of call which the Fourth Form patronised. The Fifth and Sixth professed to look down on tuck-shops generally, but some of them were not above buying pots of jam there, for Mother Christmas made it exceedingly well, as every old boy of Littlebury will acknowledge.

"The house isn't let yet, then?" asked Evans, as he made himself comfortable on the head of an upturned barrel.

"No, sir, not yet; and it's my belief it won't never let again," replied Christmas.

"What's he winking about?" Challenge asked Evans.

The latter, instead of replying, asked, "What's the latest kind of ghost you've got up there?"

Christmas put his long forefinger to the side of a large wrinkled nose as he answered—

"It's a walking ghost this time, sir. One that wisits; every bedroom punctually at twelve o'clock and one, and screams three times, 'Murder! murder! murder!' and then rattles every bone in its body before continuing its round!"
The old man chuckled, Challenge started, Evans bought some more tuck, said something civil to Christmas, and dragged his friend off.

"What was it all about, Evans?" asked Challenge, as they continued on their way.

"Oh, it's a bit of a trick Old Christmas plays on every one who applies for the key of the house on the marsh. You see, it's convenient for us, and so we don't want it to be let. Christmas is to get ten shillings when the house does let, as he has the showing of it over; but we give him that not to let it if he can help it, and as we deal with him he finds it better to frighten people away. So he gets up all manner of ghost stories, and makes a point to tell them, especially to ladies. He also points out some stains on the stairs as the scene of a murder, and altogether frightens people completely from the house. He never tells these stories except on a promise of secrecy, so the owners find nothing out."

"Who gets the key?" Challenge asked.

"We never trouble about a key; we have a private way of our own into the house, and when we come out, we slam the back door, and no one is the wiser."

"How long have Littlebury men kept the secret of this house to themselves?" asked Challenge, who was evidently interested at the notion.

"Some years now, I believe; all the Fifth and Sixth know about it, and it's my fancy one or two of the masters do too, but no one ever pretends to. I don't think Doctor knows, though—that's the fun of the whole thing!"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, when the house was for sale some time ago, the Doctor advised a friend of his to buy it, little knowing that we men would take care to keep it untenanted."

Evans suddenly broke off, and bowed to some one.

"I say, she's pretty, if you like!" cried Challenge, admiringly.

"Yes, she is rather. I'll introduce you, if you like," added
Evans, "but not to-day, as we have something particular or in the House, you know."

"Thanks; but who is she?" asked Challenge, as he turned to have a final glance at the girl who had just passed.

"Oh," said Evans, with a laugh, "you'd better ask Margarine and Comber, and all the fellows in the Fifth and Sixth. If you want to know more, perhaps Lamb, the second master, can tell you; he's always mooning about when she's up at Littlebury matches. In fact, the whole crowd want her, it's my belief."

Evans' face flushed as he spoke, and Challenge was quick to notice it.

"It's my belief you are one of the crowd too, old chap," he answered.

"Did you see how friendly her bow was? Was it friendly or do you think it was more than friendly?" Evans asked quickly.

"I should say, more than friendly," answered Challenge.

The reply opened Evans' heart.

"Look here, old chap! you and I will be sworn friends. We'll call each other by our Christian names. What do you say?"

"By all means," answered Challenge. "Henceforth I'm Bob to you."

"And I'm Dick to you," replied Evans, pressing his chum's hand.

"Well, who is she? I see that she has fair hair, blue eyes, is a little younger than you are, is awfully pretty, and enough to take any fellow's fancy with that swell dress and hat. Come, Dick, out with it!" Thus spoke Challenge.

"Well, you are green!" laughed Evans. "Here you've been at Littlebury over a fortnight, and haven't heard of Connie Castleton yet!"

"I've heard of her, of course," assented Challenge; "but it never occurred to me that's who she is. Why, she's the Doctor's
adopted niece, and every fellow says she is in love with him. Even Margarine told me the other day she liked him."

"Margarine had better stick to his bread and butter, and leave Connie alone," said Evans, shortly.

"Oh, I meant no offence, you know, Dick."

"Of course you didn't," answered Evans, cooling a little; "but it's too rough, hearing fellows call your girl theirs when you know different. Look here, I'll tell you a secret. You won't let it out?"

"I'll be as silent as a gravestone."

"I've got Connie's photograph, and she's got mine, old chap. How's that?"

"You're the luckiest chap in Littlebury," answered Challenge.

"Here are the twins coming. I'm certain those two beggars change beds every night," added Evans, as Chutney and Curry came up.

"Look, new man," said Chutney or Curry, "there's Littlebury House of Commons." He pointed to the house as he spoke.

Challenge saw a house two stories high, standing gloomily among trees across a deep marsh. A path had been cut over the marsh to the house, which stood rather high, and was built of grey stone.

When they reached a broken gate, Challenge observed that all the windows of the house were fastened with shutters, that the garden was a chaos of weeds, and that not a building was in view of it. It looked so dreary and deserted, that Challenge could quite understand why people credited the ghost stories told of it.

"I believe it was inhabited by a miser once," said Evans, "and he let the whole place go to ruin. Yet the furniture inside will surprise you. Wait till you see the banqueting hall where we hold our meetings."

"How are we to get there?" Challenge asked.
For reply Evans pointed to a great tree, which projected one of its branches right over the roof of the house.

"Are we to climb up there?" asked Challenge, astonished.

"Yes, and we must be quick about it, too," interposed Chutney, and as he spoke he deftly swarmed the tree.

His brother went after him, and Challenge saw the boys pass to the roof of the house and disappear.

"Come on, Bob," said Evans.

And at his invitation Challenge swarmed the tree close after him.

When Evans and Challenge had clambered down the great branch, they ran along the roof of the house, to which there was a short drop, and then Challenge saw, to his surprise, an open trap door. The top rungs of a ladder were visible, and down the ladder the two boys went. They found themselves in a room which would have been devoid of light but for that which entered by the skylight and a half-opened door.

Going to this door, they entered a passage leading down a flight of stairs. The second passage was lit with lamps which the boys had brought with them, for no light whatever was admitted by way of the windows. The last tenant had not seen light for years, even by day, except that furnished by artificial means.

A boy stood at a door, and Evans having given him the password, he and Challenge were admitted. Well as Challenge was prepared to find the scene strange to him, he did not expect aught so strange as what now greeted his vision.
CHAPTER VII.

WHO WAS FOUND GUILTY.

Challenge found himself in the banqueting hall of the house on the marsh. The room was long and lofty, and lit by dozens of candles, thrust into candelabra, which hung from the ceiling or were projected from the walls.

Every window of the hall was closely shuttered, so that no light could be seen from outside. The furniture, which had once been of a most splendid description, was now decidedly the worse for wear.

Great mirrors, in heavy, tarnished gilt frames, hung upon the walls; pictures that were mildewed filled the spaces between; the great carpet was worn, and in several places torn.

It was not the appearance of the banqueting hall itself, however, that attracted the special notice of Challenge.

At the far end of the room the tables had been dragged into such a position, that two long lines of them ran parallel, while across the top end was placed a single table, behind which Evans sat as President; but at that moment, necessarily, the place was vacant. The chair placed for the head man of the Fourth Form had a tall, carved back, and seemed to be raised on a small platform.

On left and right, before the remaining tables, were seated the rest of the boys, evidently watching Challenge and Evans with some curiosity. Some few yards away from these tables sat three boys who were to play a curious part in the proceedings.
"We are divided into two parties," said Evans to Challenge, "known respectively as the Whiffs and the Nons, the latter name indicating those of us who do not smoke."

"I thought smoking was strictly against the rules, Dick?" asked Challenge, as, glancing towards the boys once more, he noticed that all those who sat at one table were smoking furiously.

"Oh, of course it's against the rules, we know, but that doesn't make much difference to many of us. It is just as much against the rules to go into the woods; it's against the rules to crib, to fight; in fact, to come here at all; but, you see, we break the rules in other respects, so there's no reason why some of us shouldn't break them in this. Some of the Fifth have a club of their own at a bit of an inn at Littlebury, and fine goings on there are there too, sometimes."

"But I don't smoke," said Challenge.

"Then you must join the Nons, that's all. Of course you'll get called goody-goody and other names by the Opposition; but, after the way you licked Comber, I dare say you can stand a bit of chaff."

Evans then beckoned to one of the boys, who took Challenge in his charge, while the first went to his seat at the head of the tables and sat down.

Challenge was conducted to the end of the parallel tables in full view of the rest, who listened to the President's remarks in silence.

"Robert Challenge is presented to this Honourable House as a new member, approved of by the President," said Gammon, the boy deputed to act as Challenge's mentor.

Some one sitting near Evans thereupon rose and asked, "Robert Challenge, do you wish to become a Member of this Honourable House?"

To this question Challenge was instructed to say "I do."

"Do you promise that you will hold all the secrets of this House as sacred; that you will neither reveal, nor cause others
to reveal, what takes place here, and that you will in honour bind accept and act upon the decisions come to by this most Honourable House?"

Challenge once more agreed.

"The proposed member having taken the oath, it is my duty to propose that he be accepted by us," said Comber, who was the leader of the Whiff party.

"And on the part of the Nons, I have pleasure in seconding that proposition," said Margarine, who, curiously enough, led the Nons.

The President called for a show of hands, which, being entirely in Challenge's favour, he was declared duly elected, amid a storm of shouting, cheering, and clapping, that made Comber turn pale with suppressed annoyance. The latter had been compelled to propose Challenge, but he was not prepared to witness the burst of popularity which greeted the new-comer.

The boy who acted as Speaker of this informal House, and whose father was a well-known M.P., then asked Challenge—

"To which party do you intend to give your services? We are divided, as no doubt you are aware, into two parties—one called the Whiffs, and the other called the Non-Whiffs, or Nons. But your adherence to one of these parties carries with it more than mere smoking or non-smoking. I will ask the leader of the Whiffs to explain the principles of his party, and then the leader of the Opposition will follow with his statement."

Comber got up with a very ill grace, and carefully looking away from, instead of at, his enemy, he said—

"In accordance with the custom of this House I will give you, Robert Challenge, new member, the policy of the Whiff party. Our claim is Liberty, our watchword Forward. We claim the right to smoke, to swear, to work or not, just as we please. We refuse to be bound by any rules; we
consider masters and monitors alike our natural enemies. We consider the time of youth a time for amusement; and pleasure, at any cost and any way attained, we make our consistent aim. To these principles, on behalf of my party, I ask your adherence."

Comber sat down and began to talk to his neighbour, Parkinson, one of the most vicious and detestable boys ever allowed to run riot in a public school. Parkinson was Comber's great chum; he had been twice expelled from other public schools, so he boasted, but of course this fact was carefully concealed from Doctor Chapple when admission to Littlebury was sought for him.

"I rise," said Margarine, "to tell our new member that the Whiffs are not worthy of support. They claim Liberty. Is that claim consistent with systematic bullying, which seems to be one of the eminent qualities of the leader of this Honourable House?"

Margarine asked the question with a good deal of suppressed energy, and some of those who sat on Comber's side, as his fags, and not because they really desired to, glanced sympathetically towards Margarine.

"I claim that Liberty, when it means bullying, is not true Liberty; if the new member wishes to put down bullying he must come to our side of this Honourable House. At present, owing to a certain reign of terror, we are in the minority, but we mean to be in the majority. Some of the Whiffs will, we hope, pluck up courage and join us one day."

"Hear, hear," came from several of Margarine's party.

"Our watchword is also Forward, but we add to it, Not Too Fast!" continued Margarine. "We refuse to smoke, we think swearing the height of folly, we believe in work at school, and we believe in helping to maintain the high reputation of Littlebury as our fathers did before us."

The Nons cheered furiously; the Whiffs drowned Margarine's words with cries of "Saints!" "Goody!" "Mamma's pets!"
"Baby!" "Chicken-hearted!" "Kids!" and various other expressions of disgust.

When silence was once more obtained, Margarine went on: "We acknowledge the justice of school rules, but at the same time we reserve the right to break them. When we are discovered we take the penalty, and there the matter ends. As to masters, we think some of them are not all they might be, but we have several good friends among them, one in particular—the master of our own Form."

"Good old Bright!" cried the Nons, breaking in; while the Whiffs retorted with counter-cries of "Freddy sneaked!" "We're going to try him!" "Down with masters and monitors!"

"I come now to the monitors, and the Nons' views on them," continued Margarine. "I have nothing to say in favour of the one we have; but that doesn't prove the system wrong. If it were not for monitors, some fellows I could name would openly ruin the rest of those weak enough to follow their vicious guidance." Margarine looked directly at Parkinson, who shifted uneasily in his seat. "I have now given the new member," said Margarine, in conclusion, "an outline of the Nons' policy. On his first day at Littlebury he set his face against bullying, and we welcomed him, as did a good many of the Opposition. I have finished; but before I sit down I must entreat the new member to remember that his support of the House will be best shown by coming to our side of it."

Margarine sat down, and the Speaker asked, "Robert Challenge, you are here called upon to declare yourself, Whiff or Non-Whiff. Which party do you intend to support?"

Challenge, who was a good deal surprised at all he had heard and witnessed, was silent for a moment; then he answered—

"Mr. President, I intend to sit on the Non-Whiff side of this Honourable House."
Amid frantic cheers from the Nons, and hootings, cat-calls, and ironic counter-cheers, Robert Challenge sat down beside Cameron, who was also a Non-Whiff.

Comber’s face was a study. He already hated Challenge; from that moment he determined, by fair means or foul, to ruin him, and get him expelled before the end of that same term. Had Challenge known how soon Comber’s intention would find its opportunity, he might have felt a little uneasy as he received the congratulations of the members of the party he had joined.

After the election of Challenge there was a short interval, during which the boys eagerly discussed, in excited groups, the next and important item of the meeting.

Evans soon took the chair again, and explained what was the business before the “House.”

The boys had formed a committee of their entire body for the purpose of investigating into the matter of the discovery of their plan concerning the intended encounter with Hillside.

At a request from Evans, one of the three boys who had been seated apart from the rest came forward.

“Frederick Bright,” said the President, “you are brought before this Honourable House charged with betraying the secret of the Fourth Form.”

The boy who personated the master, to Challenge’s surprise at such a novel proceeding, at once denied the matter. In voice and gesture he imitated the master of the Fourth Form admirably, and the Nons cheered his defence to the echo.

“My explanation, sir,” said the accused to the President, “is this: I had a perfect right—indeed, it was my duty—to report what I saw in the woods to the Doctor. I did not do so at once, but fully intended to do so before the day was over. Meanwhile the Doctor sent for me, and I learnt that the Black Cadger had reported what he saw, and also mentioned that I was there. I was, therefore, only questioned to
corroborate the man's statement, which I at once did. I knew nothing about the sticks; some one else must have discovered their whereabouts. I claim, then, not to be suspected of getting the members of my Form into disgrace, while at the same time I acknowledge that, had the Black Cadger not mentioned the affair, it would have been my unpleasant duty to have done so."

The boy, who had only made up this ingenious defence, strange to say, hit on the real facts of the case; for the Black Cadger had gone and told the Doctor all he had seen, and a little was added by him which he did not see.

There was considerable discussion on the Whiff side. Comber pleaded for reprisals on the master, while several of his followers stoutly objected. The result was apparent when the President called for a show of hands.

Out of the entire number present only eleven voted against Mr. Bright, the rest declared by their vote that the master had not been the first to make the escapade known.

"You are declared Not Guilty, Mr. Bright," said Evans, as President.

The decision was received with considerable applause on both sides of the House.

The second of the three boys, who represented the monitor Jackson, came forward, and was asked to plead.

"I claim the right as monitor to report any irregularity I observe," said he, mimicking Jackson.

"Sneak!" "Coward!" "Bully!" were some of the cries that greeted this statement.

"I did not report the matter to the Doctor, for I knew nothing of it. I did not know any one went into the woods; I was asleep the whole time," the boy personating the monitor added. There he was wrong, but to that the members seemed to attach belief. "What happened was this: one of the servants told me of a broken board in the dormitory; I examined it, and, finding a great hole there, I ventured to
explore this. I came upon a number of sticks. When the Doctor asked me what I knew of the affair, I said nothing till I heard the culprits had been armed with sticks; then I stated what I saw."

"Well done, Bootles!" cried several. The result arrived at was that nothing should be done to the monitor. A good many protested against this decision, but it was carried by a majority of eight.

The third and last boy came forward amid a perfect howl of execration. He represented the Black Cadger. His defence had been concocted by himself. The boy's real name was Wilson, who was nicknamed Sniggers.

"I hate boys," he said; "why shouldn't I? Ain't they young thieves, like poachers? Besides, haven't these boys of Littlebury put me under my own pump? Isn't it likely I should peach on them? What I mean to do is this: I shall always pretend to be friends with them—as I'm a little afraid of them, to tell you the truth—but secretly I will betray to Doctor Chapple everything I can find out about them. Drat the boys!"

"How do you know that the prisoner really can be relied on to speak the truth?" asked some one. "Who saw him go to the Doctor's house?"

Some one got up on the Whiff side of the House.

"I have asked the servants; three of them say he called there before eight o'clock on that morning, when several members of this House suffered at——"

"We know," hastily interrupted Gammon; "that's enough."

"I know also," said Margarine; "and if some of the gentlemen of this House had as much space to be licked on as I've got, you'd wish you were not quite so fat."

The boys cheered Margarine for this sally at his own expense, and then proceeded to vote.

"Guilty or Not Guilty?" asked the President.

"Guilty!" shouted every one.
A show of hands was called for. Every one voted against the Black Cadger.

"You may go," said Evans, sternly, to the one impersonating the Black Cadger. "On our next half-holiday you will hear from us, and it will be in no undecided fashion."

"What shall the sentence be?" asked one of their number.

After a discussion, it was decided to leave the sentence in the hands of a committee to settle and also to carry out—Evans, Comber, Chutney, Margarine, and Challenge, being chosen members.

The meeting then broke up. Evans and Challenge walked back to Littlebury together, while Comber, shaking off one of his satellites, went back alone, planning how to bring about the ruin of Challenge. He smiled quite pleasantly at times he felt that he had the game in his hands if he could only find the best way to play it.
CHAPTER VIII.

COMBER'S STRANGE CONDUCT.

"I say, Challenge," whispered Gammon during "prep." on the evening of the next day to that on which the House of Commons had met, "there's going to be a jollification to-night in the dormitory. It's Margarine's birthday to-day. He's got a whacking hamper come from home, and we're going to have a regular tuck in."

"It'll take a couple of hampers if we're all to get a feed, I should say," said Challenge, "especially if Margarine's going to do his duty, as he usually does, by the good things put before him."

"Talking is not allowed in prep. time," said Mr. Bright, at this juncture.

The boys went on with their work for a while, but soon began to whisper again behind their books.

"Margarine's kept the whole thing a secret till about ten minutes ago," continued Gammon, after the pause. "Here's the invitation; read it, and pass it on."

Challenge took the paper and read it. It was to this effect:

"Charles Margarson requests the pleasure of your assistance to clear a hamper from home. Four fowls, half a ham, a chicken pie, and pastry no end. Some friends have added their mite in the shape of enough to fill two more hampers if we had them.

"N.B.—The tuck in begins after chapel, and there will be a pillow fight. Jackson is unwell, so we will have a good old time. Come early, and bring good appetites."
Challenge smiled as he read the invitation, and passed it to Curry, who sat next to him.

As soon as prep. was over the chapel bell rang, and the Forms filed in to the service. The Fourth Form boys were thinking too much of the after affair to be very devotional, and Doctor Chapple, noticing the careless way in which they uttered the responses, lectured the boys for a few minutes extra, and then they were let off to the various dormitories.

The members of the Forms at Littlebury were expected to go to bed at ten o'clock, all lights being put out a quarter of an hour later. The Sixth Form usually stayed in the little studies they shared until eleven o'clock, if they wished to do so.

Jackson, not being well, had asked for a few days' leave to visit an uncle who lived some few miles from Littlebury, and who acted as his guardian, his parents being in South Africa. His absence every one thought would be a splendid opportunity for fun, while Margarine's lucky hamper, to which Evans and a few others had added additional luxuries, came in extremely well.

The door of the Fourth Form dormitory was scarcely closed before Margarine dragged the hamper from under his bed, and then, the rest of the good things being got out, the boys sat on the nearest beds and tucked in to their hearts' content.

When all had finished but Margarine, who was lingeringly eating his last cheesecake, somebody proposed a vote of thanks to the providers of the feast, after which Margarine was wrapped in a sheet and carried round the dormitory in triumph, being voted a thorough brick.

"Let's have a good fling to-night," suggested Evans. "As Jackson is away, no one is likely to interfere with us."

"I say, men, where's Comber and Parkinson?" asked Gammon, looking round suddenly.

Every one stared. Each one had been so intent on the contents of the hamper that the other boys had not been missed before.
"Parkinson's gone into Lawson's study," volunteered someone.
"That isn't allowed," answered Evans; "that can't be right."
"I know it's against the rules, but Lawson's about as bad a lot as Parkinson, only he's bigger and ought to know better. I fancy Lawson makes friends with fellows lower down in the school because he can't get on with the Sixth."
"They can't get on with him," said Gammon. "I know that Lawson has been invited to join the club which the Fifth Form has at the inn. I dare say he means to get Parkinson and Comber into it."
"I'd like to know what Comber is up to," muttered Evans to Challenge; "sometimes I see him looking at you as if he'd like to kill you. He won't tackle you again though, and perhaps, after all, he thought he'd sooner go to Lawson's study than come and have a fling in the dormitory. He thinks it looks bigger, you know!"
"What shall it be? What shall we do?" questioned several voices.
"We'll have tossing first, and then we'll have a right good old pillow fight—eh?" asked Margarine.
"Leave the tossing out," suggested a timid boy who didn't relish it very much.
"Yah! coward!" cried several; and without more ado they caught him, and in spite of his struggles got him into a sheet.
"Lie still," said Evans, "and you won't get hurt; if you struggle it's all over with you."
"One, two, three—heave!" cried Gammon; and up to the ceiling the boy went, but fell again into the sheet without being hurt.

Meantime, several who wished to avoid being tossed had hidden under the beds, but were ruthlessly hunted out and tossed.

The fun got fast and furious at last, the boys even tossing
two of their number together. One of these fought with the other in the air so as to fall into the sheet, with the consequence that he fell outside it instead, dropping on to the floor with a bang that made his limbs sore for a week after.

"Tell you what," suggested some one, "let's toss a big fellow. We've tossed all the small ones—who'll volunteer?"

"I will," said Challenge, who did not know what tossing was like. He soon learnt though, for he was tossed so vigorously that he struck against the ceiling and came down with a lump on his head, that made him careful about tossing others quite so high.

"Who's next?" several exclaimed.

"Margarine!" cried a number of voices.

"It's his birthday!" "He gave most of the tuck in!"

"He's too heavy!" pleaded his friends.

"I don't mind; I'm ready!" cried Margarine, and he got into the sheet at once.

Margarine was indeed heavy, as the boys found out who flicked him up in the sheet. If Margarine went up only a little way he certainly came down as if he had fallen off the top of a tall chimney. His weight drew the boys who held the ends of the sheet together, and as Margarine sank to the floor over they all went, one above the other in a heap, the rest of the boys roaring with laughter.

"Margarine was as soft as a cushion," said the one who fell on him first.

"And you were as bony as a skeleton; you've nearly winded me," gasped the boy who had fallen on him in turn.

"Come on, let's have the fight now," cried several.

"What sides shall we be?" asked Gammon.

There were several replies, but for a minute none seemed suitable.

"Tell you what," said Challenge; "we are not likely to have it out with Mitchell's set after all, so let us divide up and fight it among ourselves!"
“Hurray! that’s it!” cried several; and Evans was chosen to lead the men of Littlebury, while Gammon headed Mitchell’s supposed “lot.”

Every boy had disrobed, being only clad in a nightshirt, so that if any one came in suddenly they could jump into bed. Pillows and bolsters were seized and mightily wielded, and Mitchell’s lot were driven to the far end of the dormitory, where, after a heavy attack, accompanied by shouts of laughter, and no few hard knocks, they rallied and then bore down on their opponents. The dormitory was fought for, bed by bed, and then the party led by Evans was forced to retreat, being besieged in turn. In the midst of this onslaught, one of the pillows came undone, and, the case slipping off, all the feathers came out in a shower upon Chutney, who was belabouring Margarine with a bolster.

Just then the boy who had been set on guard outside the door threw it open and cried, “Cave! Cave!”

This was the signal that some one was coming, so every one slipped into bed, and when the door was opened, no one would have suspected that a minute before the candles which the boys owned had been alight, or that a most tremendous pillow fight had just been in full swing.

The visitor was Mr. Bright. He held his candle up, and looked round. Margarine and a few others snored absurdly loud. Mr. Bright’s eyes twinkled, especially when they fell upon a trail of feathers leading right up to Chutney’s bed.

“Are you all asleep?” asked Mr. Bright, ironically.

No answer. The master smiled grimly, and went off, shading the candle with his hand. He knew Jackson was away, and guessed how the birthday had been celebrated, for, being on friendly terms with the men of his Form, he had privately congratulated Margarine that morning.

The snoring was resolutely kept up for about ten minutes, after which it turned into a burst of laughter coming from sundry beds. Then some one, getting bolder, seized his
bolster, and feeling his way in the dark to Margarine's bed, belaboured that snoring youth till he jumped up and fought for the bolster with his assailant.

Some of the boys got the candles out from the little places behind the curtained window niches and lit them.

Then the battle began all over again, and the boys, feeling quite sure now of no further interruption, left off fighting on sides, and went for the nearest foe, the whole scene becoming one of indescribable confusion and merriment.

"Cave! Cave!" cried the boy who was watching, and then he added, "There are two coming; the first is Parkinson."

"Let's pay them out for cutting the feed," suggested Curry, whereupon several big fellows got behind the door. The moment Parkinson got inside, down went the bolsters on him, and he fell to the floor, while those who had smitten him danced and capered round him with delight. The others dragged Parkinson—who was not best pleased, but knew it was supposed to be fun, and dared not say anything—out of the way.

"Here's Comber," whispered some one; for Comber had not apparently followed closely after Parkinson.

Some of his fags thought this a splendid opportunity to strike him, knowing that he dare not retaliate that night, and as he habitually ill-treated them, it mattered little what he did to them privately the next day. Accordingly, one of the youngsters mounted upon another's shoulders for the purpose of striking Comber from above, the boys posting themselves with the others behind the door.

When the door was opened, half a dozen pillows rained down upon the new-comer amid shrieks of delight. A second after there was a wild stampede—Mr. Bright had returned and fallen a victim to the plot laid for Comber! It was the second time Comber had escaped a plot and some one else had been paid off by mistake.

So violently did the pillows descend, that Mr. Bright's
candle shot to the floor and went out. The others were blown out instantly. By the time Mr. Bright got his candle alight again, the boys were in bed, and as still as they could be. Margarine snored even louder than he had done before, a proceeding which proved so funny to several that they could not possibly stop themselves from laughing outright.

"The man who is snoring, and those who are laughing, come out of bed," said Mr. Bright.

Several boys accepted the invitation, rather reluctantly, it must be confessed, but Margarine's snores grew more trumpet-like each moment.

"Margarson, stop that snoring and come here," said Mr. Bright, peremptorily.

Margarine gave a snort that seemed to shake the bed on which he lay, then he breathed hard, drew a heavy sigh, and slowly sat up in bed, looking as innocent as possible as he said—

"Evans, old chap, are you awake? I've had an awful dream!"

Just then Mr. Bright approached Margarine, who saw the master's face looked angry. He got out of bed.

"I'm very sorry, sir; but it was my birthday, and we thought it was some one else."

Mr. Bright looked genuinely surprised.

"You confess that you meant to attack some one, then? I thought at first it was a mistake. I trust no men of Littlebury have absented themselves from the dormitory."

Margarine was bitterly annoyed with himself that he should have betrayed Comber's absence. Mr. Bright got out his watch.

"It is now a little after midnight," he said. "Men, go to bed at once. I must see how many are missing."

Mr. Bright made a tour of the beds; he merely glanced to see that each had an occupant, and passed on to the rest. A sudden thought occurred to Challenge. His bed was looked at first, so, while Mr. Bright was examining the others, he
slipped out and got into Comber's bed unobserved by the master. Challenge buried his head well in the pillow and Mr. Bright did not discover the trick played upon him then.

"Men," said the master, "understand that you must not get up again to-night, or I shall punish you all severely. Let there be no more disturbance. As to you, Margarson, you must write me an apology stating that what happened was an entire accident, or I shall report the matter to the head-master."

Mr. Bright turned to go. "Good night, men," he said, and every one echoed the good night as if he thoroughly meant it. There would be an imposition, of course, the next day, but it would not mean much—perhaps an extra drill; while every one felt that Margarine had been let down lightly, for he was certainly one of those who had wielded his bolster remarkably well when Mr. Bright had so unexpectedly reappeared.

Hardly had the master left the room, when the boys wished each other good night, and went soundly to sleep, thoroughly tired out and satisfied with the time they had had, although the termination had been a little awkward.

Next day Margarine, having written his apology, gave it up, making a much more effectual one when he did so. Every one thought that ended the episode—but Comber knew differently.

After leaving the dormitory that night, Mr. Bright went slowly to his room, and sitting down, began to think over Margarine's explanation, which had led him to believe that some one was absent, yet an examination of the beds had shown each to have an occupant.

As Mr. Bright sat there, he fancied he heard some one stealing past his door. He got up and looked out. No one was there. Not satisfied with his glance up and down the dark passage, Mr. Bright took up the candle from his table, and went in the direction of the sound. Following it, the master became aware that some one was ahead of him, and carrying a light.

The passages and stairs at Littlebury were notably awkward,
and whoever tried to explore them at night would be sure to stumble, so it was the custom with boys, who happened to be there later than they should, to run the risk of attracting any one with a candle rather than fall or stumble, which, without a light, must inevitably happen. It was at a corner of the passage where it turned at right angles that Mr. Bright saw the figure going on ahead, and carrying a candle. He followed cautiously, hiding his own light as well as he could.

When the boy reached the dormitory of the Fourth Form, he turned for one moment and held the candle up, to see if, by any chance, he were watched.

In an instant Mr. Bright stopped, blew out his candle, and drew away into the shadow of the stairs. He recognised the late-farer at once—it was Comber.

Satisfied that he had been seen by no one, Comber put his candle out, went into the then quiet dormitory, quickly undressed, and went to bed.

Strange as it appeared to Mr. Bright that Comber should be returning to his dormitory so late, and stranger still that he should be alone, had Comber's reason been known to the Form-master, it would have startled him indeed, for Comber had surely been on an astounding errand.
CHAPTER IX.

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

"Comber," Parkinson had said to his great friend, immediately after prep. that night, "I'm going to Lawson's study; will you come?"

"Yes, if I am invited," answered Comber; "of course I can't come without."

"Lawson told me to invite you," Parkinson went on, as the two made their way to chapel with the rest of the Form. "I told him you were no end of a good chap—far too good for the Fourth Form kids—and he wants to meet you."

"There's a tuck in up in our dormitory," said Comber, hesitatingly.

"Oh, of course, if you prefer old Margarine's mother's cold ham to Lawson's whisky and cigars, very well; only don't say I didn't give the message, 'that's all," remarked Parkinson, apparently without caring much, but all the while watching Comber's face closely.

"If there's anything of that sort going, I'm with you," replied Comber, and after chapel he joined Parkinson.

The two boys went to the study which Lawson and another Sixth Form boy occupied, the latter being named Stokes.

"Come in; don't knock, young shavers," said Lawson, patronisingly. He was seated by the fire, smoking a pipe. Stokes was studying at a table hard by.

Stokes looked up with no amiable countenance. He was reading hard for a classical scholarship, and was not at all
pleased to see that Lawson meant to entertain visitors, especially boys from the Fourth Form.

Parkinson, who was a small boy, introduced Comber, who seemed to be head and shoulders above him. Lawson was an exquisite; he dressed perfectly, and was said to be the wealthiest fellow at Littlebury. He wore a flower in his coat, and the room was adorned with vases of rare flowers, in spite of their cost at such a time of year.

Lawson just touched Comber's hand with the tips of his fingers, and then invited the two to be seated. Stokes looked up again from his study.

"I say, old fellow," he said to Lawson, in a remonstrating tone, "you know it's against Littlebury rules to have Fourth or even Fifth Formers in our studies. Besides, I want to work, and I can't if there's to be a buzz of conversation."

"Rules!" said Lawson, raising his eyebrows superciliously, "I do not understand their object. I shall shortly come into my property, and meantime I intend to make this confounded school as little of a bore as possible."

Lawson got up, and going to a cupboard, got out a decanter, which was encased in an unsuspicious-looking box. He produced his cigar-case, and having invited his visitors to smoke, poured out for each a glass of raw liquor.

"Drink it up," he said; and the boys, to make a brave appearance, did so at a gulp, with the result that Comber spluttered till Lawson's sides ached with laughing at him.

Stokes picked up his books and went out of the room.

"Perhaps you won't mind burning some brown paper when you've finished your cigars," said he, as he went; "I don't want it known that smoking goes on in this study."

"You youngsters mustn't take very much notice of Stokes," remarked Lawson; "he's a couple of years my senior, and thinks he is my mentor likewise. I hear you Fourth Form chaps have been going it lately; that's right, keep the ball rolling, you know. I've been elected a member of the Fifth
Form Spotted Dog Club, and dashed good fellows they are who belong to it. Would you two like to join?"

"It would give me great pleasure, I'm sure," said Parkinson, fawningly.

"I should be proud of the honour of having such a proposer," was Comber's answer.

"Very well, then, I'll see what can be done; you'll find it a much superior affair to that House of Commons you at present patronise. I intend to present the Club with a complete dinner service, with the initials 'F.F.S.D.C.,' on every article. I never do things by halves. Have some more whisky?"

The boys accepted the invitation; Comber this time was cautious, and only sipped his, leaving, indeed, the greater part of it, while Parkinson tipped his off like an old hand.

"Strange thing about that little beggar Tripp, wasn't it?" asked Lawson, who thought he ought to show some knowledge of the Fourth Form's doings, to impress his visitors with his interest in them.

"I see nothing strange about it," said Comber, trying to keep an unconcerned look on his face, although he was quite startled by Lawson's chance reference to Tripp. Since the latter's illness all Comber had heard was that he had passed the crisis, and was slowly getting better, but had not spoken to any one. Comber had been easy in his mind lately; he fancied Tripp would not divulge about him.

"Of course, I know that the general run of fellows suppose Tripp went off spying on his own account," said Lawson, between his whiffs, "but I know that one of the masters, at least, has a different idea."

Comber turned pale at this, but went on with the forbidden cigar, waiting for Lawson to say more.

"It's Mr. Bright's idea that some one was at the bottom of Tripp's exit in his fancy robe, you know. I heard him and the Doctor talking about it. They took no notice of me,
as I'm a Sixth Form man, and went on talking quite loudly."

"But what did they talk about? Whom did they suspect?" asked Parkinson.

"They mentioned no names, but I heard Doctor say he would visit Tripp in the infirmary, and try to get the secret out of him. I believe his idea is to go to-morrow morning and see the youngster."

Comber turned hot and then cold. Would Tripp tell? In the feeble state of his health, and perhaps feeling secure in the infirmary, Tripp would put the blame on Comber. Besides, there was his denial—he had told Doctor Chapple that he did not send Tripp out that night. Comber's old fears arose with tenfold force. The idea of getting revenged on Challenge was very secondary now.

While Lawson and Parkinson went on talking together, Comber contented himself with an attitude of listening. In reality he was planning how to get at Tripp, and stop him from telling the Doctor. A plan occurred to him. It was a desperate one, but Comber's need was desperate too. He determined to try it.

"It's nearly eleven o'clock," said Comber, rising. "I'm going. Thanks for the invite."

"You're not going yet?" asked Lawson. "The fellows will sure to be late in your Form; stop another half-hour."

"I think I'll go," said Comber, the more eager because he observed Parkinson was not yet coming.

"Well, if you like to be among the good little kids who are tied to school rules like babies to their mother's apron-strings, go by all means," said Lawson.

"Please let me go; it's naughty, naughty!" whimpered Parkinson, mockingly, at Comber.

But even that had no effect. Comber wished both of them good night, and then turned as if going to his dormitory.

A few minutes afterwards Comber retraced his footsteps
and was soon in front of the house used as an isolated infirmary.

Glancing up at the window where he had learnt Tripp was, Comber saw that a light was burning behind the window-blind.

A great root of ivy grew at the base of the house, spreading its branches all over the front. Comber measured with his eyes the distance between him and the window. He thought, if he had luck, and no one saw him, he could climb to the window. But what then?

Comber soon had his plans all laid. He felt in his waistcoat pocket for his knife. It was there safely enough, and with one swift glance to see that no one observed him, Comber caught at the ivy and began to draw himself slowly up and up.

It was a much more difficult task than the bully had expected, and each minute his fear of falling increased. Comber could find very little foothold, and had to support his body mainly with his hands, so that his arms began to feel the strain acutely.

Once he heard footsteps below, and glancing down, saw to his horror that Doctor Chapple was walking slowly along. Comber's heart beat fast as he tried to thrust his body among the ivy, hoping against hope that the Doctor would not see him.

Doctor Chapple went slowly on, with his head down, for he was apparently plunged in thought.

Comber, drawing a sigh of relief, continued to climb upward. At last he caught at the window-sill of the first bedroom, which latter was occupied by Mrs. Myers, and was immediately below Tripp's room.

Comber listened attentively, but could hear no sound within the room, which was in darkness. He crouched upon the narrow window-sill to get a short rest before resuming his difficult task.

As soon as he had nerved himself for the final effort, Comber
caught hold of a great ivy tendril, and once more began to ascend hand over hand.

If the first stage of his climb had been hard, Comber found the second stage much more so, for the leaves of the ivy were so large and numerous that they seemed to be thrust against him on their long stalks, while the stems themselves grew thinner, and clung tighter to the wall, so that Comber could not get his aching fingers underneath them.

By the time he reached Tripp's window, the bully was quite exhausted. He felt that had he had a few more yards to go he must have turned back.

Tripp's window-sill was a little wider than that of Mrs. Myers, and Comber crouched upon it with less fear of falling, although his heart thumped against his ribs as he realised that the most critical part of his errand was still to be accomplished.

Although the window-sill was a little wider than the other, Comber had to steady himself with one hand all the time, while with his free hand he felt in his pocket and drew out his pocket knife.

Strangely enough, the very knife which Comber was about to use had been the property of Tripp, the fag having received it as a present during his holidays, and, on returning to school and by way of propitiating his tormentor, he had presented it to Comber.

The bully pulled open the large blade with his teeth, and, then inserting it between the two frames of the windows, began to force the hasp back.

It was slow and difficult work, for had he pressed the hasp too hard it might have shot back with a snap, and the noise have aroused Tripp. Whatever happened in his perilous position, Comber devoutly wished not to be found there crouching on the window-sill.

Either the blade was too weak or the hasp too strong, for presently, to Comber's annoyance, the blade of the knife
snapped off. He withdrew it from the niche, and opened the second blade with his teeth as before.

Although this blade was smaller, still it seemed to be better made, for, with a little click, which Comber just heard, the hasp flew back.

The bully put the knife in his pocket, and then, with the utmost caution, raised the framework of the bottom part of the window. An inch at a time, and with many a stop between to listen, did Comber raise the window, but at last he had it half open, sufficient for his purpose.

The intruder caught at the blinds with his right hand, and, drawing them back slowly, he glanced into the room.

A small bed was placed in the far corner, and upon it Tripp was lying fast asleep.

Comber quickly got into the room, shut the window quietly, and then re-arranged the blinds so that nothing should look unusual from outside.

Just as the bully began to steal across the room towards the bed on which Tripp lay, he heard the sound of some one coming up the stairs. Almost paralysed by fright at his threatened discovery, Comber glanced swiftly round, and seeing a cupboard at the end of the room nearest to where he was, he slipped into it, crouching down under a shelf that ran across the top part of the cupboard.

Comber was just in time, for Mrs. Myers had come into Tripp's room to see if he were all right for the night, as was her custom to do with her charges before going to bed. She stood by Tripp's bed for a couple of minutes, watching the boy's heavy, regular breathing, then turned and went out of the room, putting the lamp out as she passed it, for it stood on a chest of drawers beside Tripp's bed.

Comber heard the bedroom door closed, but he did not dare to come out from his hiding-place for several minutes. At last he felt that he could do so without fear of discovery.

The bully felt in his pockets for a box of matches, which, a
"THE INTRUDER CAUGHT AT THE BLINDS WITH HIS RIGHT HAND, AND DRAWING THEM BACK SLOWLY GLANCED INTO THE ROOM."

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he belonged to the Whiff party in his Form, he always carried with him.

As noiselessly as he could, Comber struck a match and relit the lamp. Still Tripp did not wake.

Comber looked at his victim for a minute curiously. Tripp, at the best of times, seemed very small and delicate, but lying there, thin and wan after his illness, the child seemed more like a moulded image of wax, clad in a white garment, than a human being. One arm rested upon the pillow, and Tripp's head rested upon it in turn; there were rings about the child's eyes, while his hair, a mass of curls, seemed to stray idly upon the pillow, for it was much dishevelled.

The bully, however, had little thought of pitying Tripp; he had come there for a purpose quite his own, and he at once began to carry it out. He caught hold of Tripp's arm, and slowly twisted it till the pain thus caused made Tripp move and turn restlessly, as he unconsciously tried to free his arm from the intruder's grasp.

Comber, however, merely responded to this movement by twisting the boy's arm a little more, which action had the effect intended. Tripp woke up with a start. For a minute he stared about him, not knowing whether he was still in the infirmary or back in his dormitory again.

Once Tripp recognised his whereabouts and saw Comber bending over him, he fell into a violent fit of trembling. He cried out aloud, whereupon Comber promptly put his hand over the fag's mouth to prevent any further cries.

Tripp fell back on his pillows and cried bitterly. His illness had left him so weak that he had no power of self-control left.

"There, stop that snivelling," said Comber, disgustedly. "If you don't, I'll give you a wrench that will make you howl for something, instead of nothing. What's the good of my going to all the trouble I have in order to have a quiet talk with you if you're going to lie there snivelling and shaking, you little beast?"
Comber felt quite aggrieved at his reception, and, worst of all, he knew he thoroughly deserved the look of fear which had greeted him when first Tripp woke up.

The fag left off crying, and sat up in bed.

"That's it," said Comber, approvingly. "Now we can talk a bit, only not too loud, or Mother Myers will hear us, and then there will be a fine shindy, no doubt."

"What do you want? Why have you come?" gasped Tripp, watching the bully's hands, as he expected every minute Comber would give him one of his unmerciful wrenches.

"I want to know what you've said about that night in the wood; so out with it, every word, or look out for squalls," said Comber.

"I haven't said a word," muttered Tripp; "you know I never do, Comber."

"That's all very well; but suppose you get questioned—what are you going to do?" continued Comber.

"No one has asked me yet; and I shall be up and at school again in a week now," said Tripp, in reply.

"I didn't say any one had," retorted Comber; "but I said suppose you get questioned, what then? I mean if the Doctor asks you, what will you do?"

Tripp was silent. He must either tell a lie to screen Comber in that case, or tell the truth—and then he knew what Comber's vengeance would be like.

"I don't know—I can't tell! Oh, Comber, go away! I'm ill—I am, indeed! I don't think Mrs. Myers was right; I don't think I'll ever get better!" the fag cried.

Tripp had another fit of crying, while Comber sat and thought out the rest of his plan.

"It's my belief you're shamming," he said at last. "You always were good at waterworks, howling and snivelling for nothing. You will get well enough before another week, I bet. So you'd better make me this promise: you promise me you will never tell any one I sent you into the woods—not the
Doctor, not even your own people. Say solemnly you won’t—do you hear?”

Tripp looked round to see if there were a chance of escape from his tormentor, but saw there was none. He was so weak and ill that his moral courage broke down in a minute, for Comber suddenly gripped his wrists and began to twist them round.

“Let go! let go! I won’t tell any one; but I will if you don’t leave off!” cried Tripp.

The boy’s threat startled Comber, and he dropped Tripp’s wrists.

“That’s right. Now mind, you’ve given your solemn word. If you break it while you are here, I’ll make your life so wretched that you’ll go into consumption and die, like young White did a year ago. You know his gravestone is in that corner of the cloisters where all the Littleburyites are buried who die at school.”

It was one of the remarkable facts about Littlebury, that the honour of being buried in that corner of the cloisters was eagerly sought by parents should their sons die while actually at school.

Tripp nodded his head weakly. He did know it; many and many a time had he woke up at night, and fancied the ghosts of the boys so buried were coming back to the dormitory. White’s ghost troubled Tripp’s weak mind considerably, for White had been Tripp’s friend.

Comber had not finished his threat.

“If you tell about what happened to your people, either when you go home for holidays, or after you have left school, I’ll come and find you out, and I’ll get into your room, as I have done to-night, and I’ll kill you!” The bully spoke each word with an emphasis that convinced Tripp he meant it.

“Go away, Comber,” he begged, as he shivered at the sight of Comber’s wrathful countenance. “No one will get it out of me.”
“I don't believe you will say a word,” said Comber; “I'm sure you won't be such a silly now you know what will happen if you do. Of course, you won't say a word about my coming here to-night?”

Tripp declared he would not. Comber then unlaced his boots, took them off, and rose to go. During the conversation he had been seated by Tripp's bedside.

“Now, you little beggar, get to sleep, for I'm going to put the light out. And don't be a muff, but get well as fast as you can, if you want me to treat you decently. Mind, you've got to get well!” and with this final command, strange as it was, Comber went out of Tripp's bedroom and down the stairs.

Comber descended the stairs with the utmost caution. He found that the front door was not bolted. This fortunate circumstance he thought very lucky. He went out of the house, pulled the door carefully till it closed, and then made his way to his dormitory, as Mr. Bright had observed.
CHAPTER X.

PAYING OUT THE BLACK CADGER.

It was known to the boys of Littlebury that the Black Cadger lived alone in his house, his wants being attended to by the wife of an under-gamekeeper of Lord Dunsandle.

It was also known—and this latter fact was of greater interest than the former—that the Black Cadger generally took a nap in front of his fire each afternoon, for, as he usually assisted to watch for night poachers, the head gamekeeper was tired towards afternoon.

On the first half-holiday nothing was done beyond scouting and making the ground sure; on the following "Half" the boys chosen to wreak the Fourth Form vengeance upon the talebearer met in a glade in the wood.

The boys went separately, in order to prevent any one being suspicious that something more than usual was going on.

Evans was the first to arrive, being closely followed, however, by Chutney. Challenge followed a few minutes after, Comber came next, and Margarine, who had paid a visit to the tuck shop, came last, eating tarts out of a paper bag.

"Stuffing again!" said Evans to Margarine, with a laugh.

"'Live not to eat, but eat to live,'" quoted Challenge.

"Poor chap! don't envy him; look how awfully thin he is!" said Chutney. "I say, do you know that Margarine's getting so fat and big that he's becoming a perfect nuisance to the town?" he continued. "The other day Margarine's lace came
undo, and he put his foot up on the ledge in front of Christmas' shop to tie the lace up. Bothered if Christmas didn't rush out in a temper and want to know who had put his shutters up!"

There was a laugh at this joke made at the expense of Margarine, who had very large feet indeed. He did not join in the mirth, however, but went on solidly tucking into the tarts he had bought.

"Those who work deserve to eat," said Margarine, when he had emptied the bag of tarts, as he brushed the crumbs off his coat. "And now what's the first move?"

"I vote that we all get near the Black Cadger's house, and then two of us reconnoitre, to see if he is alone and asleep, as usual," said Evans.

"I will be one of the two," suggested Chutney.

"Don't leave me out in the cold," said Challenge.

So it was arranged that Chutney and Challenge should make the necessary observations, and the boys set off in the direction of the house in which the Black Cadger lived. When the boys got within a hundred yards or so of the house, Challenge and Chutney went off on their errand. They cautiously approached the window, and peered in.

The Black Cadger was sleeping soundly before the fire. No one else appeared to be in the room.

As quickly as they could, Challenge and Chutney went back to the rest with the good news.

"Very well," said Evans, "that is so far satisfactory. We must now carefully go over our plans. What is your share to be?" This question was put to Challenge.

"I am to take the Black Cadger in the rear, and blindfold him with this bandage."

As he spoke Challenge drew from his pocket a stout strip of linen he had bought in the town, while Evans exhibited a coil of rope.

"That's correct; you are to do it while I slip the rope round
him," he answered. "Chutney, have you got your things with you?"

Chutney pulled a bundle from beneath his jacket. "The Black Cadger's ornaments are here," he said sweetly.

"Then, come on, men," cried Evans. "No hanging fire, mind; and recollect, Comber, you have to bolt the door behind us, so that no one can get in to help our enemy and he cannot get out. If even anything goes wrong and he discovers us, there are quite enough of us to overpower him. Remember, we can't go back and tell the whole Form we have been outdone by the Black Cadger."

"Don't be afraid of that," said Chutney, confidently. "We'll reward him for sneaking to the Doctor. He's a dear, good old man. It would be a crying shame if we didn't succeed in showing our appreciation of the recent whacking we each got, barring Comber."

Without further conversation, the boys went across to the head gamekeeper's hut. Evans looked through the window first, to make sure that the Black Cadger was still sleeping.

Satisfied on that score, the leader gently tried the latch. It moved easily, and, a moment after, the door was opened and their victim full in view.

The Black Cadger was sitting comfortably stretched out in a large oaken armchair, with a handkerchief over his face. The fire was burning low, and on the table were the remains of the occupant's dinner.

Over the mantelpiece hung the Black Cadger's valuables, including his gold hunting watch, a great treasure of the gamekeeper's, for it had been his father's before him. A leather purse was lying on the mantelpiece, besides several keys on a ring.

As soon as the boys were inside, Comber quietly shot the bolt of the door, while the rest watched to see if the Black Cadger heard its slight movement. Only a hard-drawn breath came from the man in the armchair.
Evans and Challenge moved forward noiselessly on tip-toes till they were close behind the chair. In an instant Evans slipped a noose over the victim's head and shoulders, and ran it taut, while Challenge followed suit by deftly bandaging the Black Cadger's eyes.

The gamekeeper woke instantly, but before he could free himself from the noose, he was lashed tightly in his favourite chair.

"Help! Murder! Thieves!" cried the Black Cadger, to which utterances the boys answered with a perfect howl of delight.

The victim understood what had happened the minute he heard the boys' shouts.

"So it's you Littlebury boys again, is it?" he cried, angry at his own helplessness. "Let me get up this instant, or I'll tell Doctor Chapple all about it!"

"We know you will," said Chutney, in his sweetest tone, "only as we're not anxious to interview the Doctor for a little time, we think you are better where you are. Turn him round, men!"

In spite of the gamekeeper's endeavours to prevent it, the boys turned their victim round till he faced the door, and then Chutney's share in the fun began.

"We've brought you a little present," said he, and forthwith Chutney unfastened the bundle he had. He took out nothing more formidable than an old lady's nightcap, which he tied on the Black Cadger's head, putting it a little awry to add to the effectiveness.

Meanwhile the others cleared everything off the table, putting the utensils and plates into the nearest corner. Chutney then took the table-cloth and made a big apron of it, which Evans tied round the gamekeeper's waist, who did nothing but make threats of future revenge.

"There, I think Mrs. Poll Pry looks perfectly bewitching!" said Chutney, stepping back to admire the Black Cadger, who,
with a long beard hanging from beneath the large frilled nightcap, looked very funny indeed.

Even then the boys had not finished, for Chutney took from his parcel a great rag doll he had bought for the purpose, and this was tied so that the gamekeeper seemed to be nursing it.

"We've given your baby a nice name," said Challenge, "and in case you may forget it, we've pinned a paper to it to remind you what it has been christened."

"Read him the paper," suggested Evans.

The legend affixed to the doll read, "Little Sneaky Peachy, the Cadger's Pet."

"We're afraid we must be going now," said Evans; "but, mind, if the Doctor hears one word of this affair, we will come some other day and pay you out far worse than this. You ought to know by this time that Littlebury men always keep their promises."

The Black Cadger was getting frightened.

"You don't mean to go away and leave me blindfolded and tied in this chair!" he cried.

"I'm afraid we do, but you won't be lonely with Little Sneaky Peachy in your arms, you know!" answered Chutney.

The Black Cadger threatened, he expostulated, he implored, but all for no purpose.

Suddenly an idea occurred to Challenge, and he communicated it to the rest. They expressed their high delight.

"We won't leave you here, after all," said Evans, "but we'll open the door and carry you outside. We shall put a handkerchief over your mouth to stop you from calling out. No doubt an under-keeper or his wife will see you there before very long, and set you free."

The thought of being discovered tied down and dressed in that ridiculous way made the Black Cadger almost plead for mercy.

The boys were obdurate, however. The gamekeeper declared being put out in the cold air like that would bring on
his rheumatism, from which he occasionally suffered; but that statement was only laughed at as furnishing all the more punishment to a sneak.

The boys therefore carried the Black Cadger outside his house, Comber having unbolted the door, and there they left him to return to Littlebury.

A hundred yards from the scene of their vengeance, the boys parted so as not to be seen returning together when the matter was investigated, as they knew it would be before long.

Soon after the boys had separated something very strange happened, something which no one had foreseen, and which was to affect every boy at Littlebury; for soon upon that famous school was to rest the shadow of a crime.

The first of the five to return to Littlebury was Comber, who was shortly followed by Chutney and Margarine. Evans did not return for some time after, and, surprised as the others were to see how late he was, he explained by saying that he purposely dawdled on the way.

The boys went into their Form-room, where the rest quickly followed them, and great was the amusement which the recital of the Black Cadger's defeat provoked.

"Do you think he will come and peach?" asked Curry of his brother.

"I should say yes; at least I hope so, because we shall then have a very good reason for giving him a little more of our doctoring," Chutney replied.

"Where's Challenge?" suddenly asked some one.

There was a look of surprise on Evans' face at the question.

"Hasn't he come back?" inquired Evans.

"Here he is," said some one in reply, for at that moment in came Challenge.

"I thought it as well not to come back to Littlebury in a hurry," explained Challenge.

That was the reason Evans had given, and it was passed over without comment at the time. Later on, under strange
and new circumstances, the late arrival of Evans, and the still later return of Challenge, that afternoon, became a matter of serious importance, and one which all the boys of the Fourth Form discussed from a strange standpoint.

"There's the tea bell," cried Margarine, who was as hungry as usual.

"I shouldn't think you want much after the way you were stuffing before we started to the Black Cadger's domain," said Evans, with a laugh.

"I wonder if any one has found him yet?" remarked Chutney, "and if so, what has become of Little Sneaky Peachy?"

The boys roared with delight at the mention of the doll.

"I dare say he will keep it as a memento," said Challenge, as they went towards the hall.

"If he brings it up here when he comes to complain to the Doctor there will be some fun," added Chutney; "even the Doctor will laugh."

"The Doctor will turn the laugh against us though," soliloquised Curry, joining in the conversation. "I suppose he will lamb us all round this time; I picture him lecturing us on our wickedness, and holding up Little Sneaky Peachy as evidence of our deep-seated wickedness."

"Mind, no one is to let out who bearded the lion in his den, the Black Cadger in his hall," said Parkinson, misquoting.

"Not a bit of it; the Doctor must whack us all or none of us," said Margarine. "I wish he wouldn't yarn before he does it though. I can stand a whacking; but it's the wigging that goes with it that upsets me."

"Poor old Margarine! he's so delicate—are you, Margarine?" asked one of the others, as they reached the table allotted to the Fourth Form.

Just then grace was said, and the boys sung the Amen, as was the long-time custom at Littlebury.

Margarine was indeed hungry, as were most of the rest,
although Christmas had had a good afternoon's business in his tuck shop, but he found time to kick the boy under the table who had called him delicate.

"You just shut up, and get on with your tea," said Margarine between the bites of his bread and butter, "or, perhaps we may buy a nightcap for you, by way of a change, and see that you wear it too."

"I say, Evans," called out Curry from across the table, "I've got something for you."

"Well, pass it over, and don't keep me so long in suspense," said Evans, shortly.

Curry threw a letter across the table. Every one stared. All the Fourth Form knew that occasional missives passed between Evans and Connie Castleton, but no one had actually seen Evans get a letter. Curry was suspected of being the go-between, so the boys began at once to make remarks.

"Don't read it now; it will spoil your appetite," murmured Margarine.

"Silly stuff, writing letters that don't mean anything," said Comber, who tried to catch a glimpse of the handwriting as Evans opened the letter.

"You'd better let the Doctor see that effusion," called out Parkinson. "I'll bet you anything you won't read it out to us. Too much twaddle in it."

Evans glanced at Parkinson. There was a mischievous light in his eyes as he said—

"Well, you never get a letter from Connie, that's one comfort!"

"Are you going to read it to us?" Parkinson insisted.

"What will you give me?" Evans retorted.

"What will you take?" asked Parkinson. He felt quite sure that Evans would not let any one read Connie Castleton's letter.

"I'll take all the stamps out of the first three pages of your stamp album," said Evans,
Paying out the Black Cadger.

Parkinson reflected. He was convinced Evans was only talking in that way to intimidate him.

“If you’ll either read the letter out to us—every word, mind—or you’ll pass it round for us to read, I’ll give you not only three, but six pages out of my stamp album—and you can take them from just where you like.”

It was clear Parkinson did not believe he would ever read the letter, for he had a splendid collection of stamps which was said to be the best in Littlebury.

“Then you can hand the stamps over to-night after prep.,” said Evans, calmly. “There’s the letter, and when you’ve read it you can pass it round.”

To Parkinson’s amazement, Evans tossed the letter upon his plate. He took it up and glanced over it quickly, then he blurted out—

“This isn’t fair; the letter isn’t from Connie Castleton at all.”

“I never said it was,” coolly retorted Evans.

“You won’t get my stamps, then, I can tell you!” said Parkinson, deeply annoyed at the trap he had fallen into.

“If you don’t pay up like a man, we’ll very soon make you, I tell you that, Parkinson,” said Chutney, promptly.

“What’s it got to do with you?” asked Comber, interfering on his friend’s behalf.

“Parkinson pledged his word before me, and we men of Littlebury don’t go back on our promises,” said Chutney.

“Then you let Evans settle his own quarrels with Parkinson. Who made you cock of the walk?” asked Comber, in an aggressive tone.

“Do you want to fight me, Comber?” asked Chutney.

Comber knew that meant did he want to fight both the twins or whichever one of them did the fighting twice over.

“I’ll fight half a dozen fellows I know before long, if they don’t give less cheek,” said Comber, ambiguously.
And there the matter stopped, for the conversation about the letter had become too absorbing.

"It's a challenge from Mitchell's lot," said Evans, disgustedly to Challenge. "They know we don't play ordinary Association football, as we have a special game of our own. That being so, they write this."

Challenge took the letter from his chum's hand and read as follows:

"The gentlemen of Hillside present their compliments to the fellows who were afraid to fight them in the woods, and ask if they are equally afraid to play football with them. If not, a team consisting of the eleven youngest at Hillside will meet the pick of the Littlebury Fourth Form anywhere and at any time.

"A reply will oblige.

"JOHN WITHER (Vice-Captain, H.F.C.)."

"Cheek!" was Challenge's comment, as he handed the letter back.

"Their secretary's ill or got the mumps," laughed Curry. 
"I suppose that's why Wither has favoured us with his illustrious signature."

"We'll make him wither, if we ever do play footer against Mitchell's lot!" said Margarine.

"The masters are rising for grace," said Parkinson. "I knew that bad pun would bring a judgment on you, Margarine."

Margarine hastily crammed the last half of a slice of bread and jam into his mouth, and then stood up with the rest.

After tea the boys went into their Form-room for evening prep., the old feeling against Mitchell's lot being rekindled by both the tone and contents of the letter.

The game which Littlebury played in the Meads was a peculiar one, engaging fifteen a side, and technically known as "Canvas." It was always played on a short ground, so
that in an ordinary game of football the boys of Littlebury would be somewhat handicapped.

Evans felt very sore about this fresh insult from Mitchell's lot. He sat next to Curry at prep., and learnt from him that one of the fellows from Hillside had given him the letter, and at the same time behaved in a very off-hand manner.

Mr. Bright saw the two boys whispering together and warned them; but as they thought he would not notice them again, they went on whispering, with the consequence that a minute or two after Evans was called out. He had the envelope and letter in his hand, and Mr. Bright caught sight of it as Evans put it behind his back.

“What’s that you’ve got in your hand, Evans?” the Form-master asked.

Evans showed the letter.

“Wasting time in prep.,” said Mr. Bright. “Evans, you will do me——”

“Would you mind reading this letter, sir?” said Evans, as a sudden thought struck him.

“I will read it, if you wish,” agreed Mr. Bright; “but at the same time I intend to punish you for talking. You will write me a hundred lines, Evans.”

Evans waited till Mr. Bright had entered the imposition in his book, and then handed him the letter to read.

The Form-master perused it with elevated eyebrows.

“What notice do you intend to take of this?” Mr. Bright asked, when he had finished reading the missive.

“I don’t know; I suppose the Fourth Form will settle it somehow,” said Evans, who was at a loss how to reply to the letter.

“What do you think of it?” Mr. Bright pursued.

“I can only think that they have heard we have been punished for our projected fight in the woods, and have sent this challenge to irritate us into committing further breaches of school rules, sir.”
"I like you to talk to me freely on this matter," said Mr. Bright. "It certainly seems to me that if you could meet the pupils of Hillside in the football field, it would be a much better way of proving your prowess or theirs than by such mad tricks as the one I had the misfortune to witness you practising for."

"They know we can't play them; they know our game is different to theirs. That's why they have challenged us," said Evans. "We are smaller than any eleven they could pick; but, of course, the Doctor wouldn't allow us to try what we could do. If he did, and we won, they would not constantly say annoying things to us Littlebury men in the streets as they do. I think a good football match between us would wipe out all our mutual ill-feeling. That, of course, is impossible, I am aware, sir," said Evans, in conclusion.

"Will you leave the matter to me?" Mr. Bright asked; "that is, until to-morrow. I will have a chat to the Doctor about it."

Evans was delighted at the idea. He told the other boys as they went to chapel, after prep.

"If only old Freddy could persuade the Doctor to let us tackle Mitchell's lot, it would be magnificent!" said Chutney, enthusiastically.

"It would wipe out the bad blood between us for ever," said Margarine.

"Old Freddy's a brick, whatever comes of it!" said Challenge.

The boys talked this new turn of affairs over in the dormitory that night till Jackson, the monitor, came in and peremptorily ordered "lights out."

No one really expected that Doctor Chapple would give his consent.

The next day, after dinner, Mr. Bright, before beginning work, said—

"It has been a great pleasure to me to know that since
the occasion when the Doctor punished the men of my Form, nothing has happened to bring further disgrace upon the Form which I have the honour to teach."

The boys were relieved at this opening statement, for it was clear the Black Cadger had not made any complaint as yet. There was a good reason for his not having done so; but the boys did not know that.

"I have been considering how to show my appreciation of the new and better spirit existent in the Form," continued Mr. Bright, "and I imagine no better way could be found than the one I have followed. I had a long conversation with the Doctor before dinner to-day, and, as he clearly understands from me, you are prepared henceforth to meet the pupils of Hillside on a friendly footing, he has consented to a wish I have expressed." There was a deep silence as Mr. Bright added, "My wish was that you be allowed to accept the challenge lately received. As I say, it has been granted, and I trust that Evans as captain, and Gammon as vice, will get together a team worthy of the Fourth Form, and worthy of Littlebury. We will now commence work."

Mr. Bright stopped speaking; but the boys of the Form were so completely pleased and gratified at the result of his mediation, that they broke out into a loud cheer, which the master at once tried, but ineffectually, to suppress.

The news spread all over the school—Littlebury was going to match its Fourth Form against Hillside! There was not a Sixth or a Fifth-Former who had not a word of encouragement for the "Plucky Fourth," as some one dubbed it on the spot.

It was to be an event in the school annals; and when a note came from Hillside fixing the date of the match a week hence, assiduous practice was the order of the day, while Evans and Gammon watched critically each Fourth-Former's style and form. Littlebury meant to win the match; the Fourth Form was in dead earnest about it, and that is always half way on the road to success.
CHAPTER XI.

THE GREAT FOOTBALL MATCH: LITTLEBURY v. HILLSIDE.

Hillside was famous for Association football. For the second time consecutively its pupils had won the Army Cup, and there was every possibility of their winning it that year for the third time, and so obtaining the cup as the property of their team absolutely.

It is well known that many army schools, until recently, were the happy hunting grounds of hulking fellows who were nominally supposed to be reading for army examinations, but who instead avoided work in every possible way, and made themselves obnoxious to every one with whom they came in contact.

Hillside had obtained a very unhappy notoriety in this way; it had its working pupils, those who were reading for the army "Further," but quite half of those who went there were too idle to even pass their "Preliminary."

Hillside aimed at appearing as much like a soldier's establishment as possible. Such a thing as a bell was never heard there; everything was done at the bugle-call, a bugler sounding the call to rise, or for meals, or work.

The inhabitants of Littlebury used to say that the pupils had full control of Hillside, and it certainly was the case that they did absolutely what they liked.

Smoking was allowed in the class-rooms, each pupil kept at least one dog, while several of them had quite a number of
dogs for ratting and other amusements. Of discipline there was practically none, and it was no wonder that a year or two after the events which we are narrating Hillside was closed altogether. But in the mean time the army pupils had a merry, as well as a very mischievous time indeed.

The night before the match the Fourth Form dormitory was all excitement, any one who knew something of the doings of Mitchell's lot being surrounded by an eager group, drinking in all that could be told.

"The funniest thing I know about them," said Evans to Challenge, as they sat disrobed upon their respective beds, with a little circle of intimates around them, "is this: You must know they have a great dining-hall up at Hillside which is called the mess-room. Every night at eleven o'clock the tutors make a show of going round to see if every one is in bed in his own separate room. One night after this had been done, and every one had answered to his name, all the fellows got up and made for the dining-hall. Next morning, when the man-servant went into the hall, he stared in astonishment at it. Every pupil had brought a mattress and his bed-clothes, and there they were, sixty of them, peacefully sleeping on the floor! He went and told Mitchell, who went in, to find that the fellows were all awake. The moment Mitchell went in, up they all got, and cheered him ironically as he tried to express his disapprobation. Then the fellows took each his mattress, and bed-clothes and putting the lot on his head, sallied forth into the grounds. After walking round there in solemn procession arrayed in white garments, they went back to their own rooms and dressed. At breakfast-time they appeared with the utmost demureness, and partook of the meal as if nothing whatever had occurred."

"That wasn't half so funny a thing to do as what was done when a certain great man was visiting Mitchell," commented Chutney.

"What was that?" asked several.
"Oh, the Hillside lot bought some pots of black paint, and when the distinguished visitor came down to breakfast at nine o'clock on a fine summer morning, he had the pleasure of breakfasting in gaslight—the fellows had painted all the windows over with the black paint!"

The boys laughed at this, whereupon Curry told of a freak of the army pupils which he vouched was true. They got printed a large bill and had it posted up in Littlebury, inviting the inhabitants to a free entertainment at Hillside on a certain evening. All the masters, including the principal, were put down on the bill to perform certain acrobatic feats very humorously described, and yet so real did it seem that some three hundred persons presented themselves for admission, the promise of a supper after the entertainment having been affixed to the bill in large letters. Of course the army pupils enjoyed the joke immensely but the village shopkeepers were so incensed that for a whole week no army pupil was served. As the nearest town was some miles distant, the Hillside fellows took the hint and tried no more jokes on in their own place.

"Tell you what," said Evans to Challenge, when Curry had finished his story, "I wouldn't mind a bit the match to-morrow if Mitchell's lot hadn't put that fellow Richardson into the team against us. It's decent of them to send me the list of their team, but that isn't fair, Bob—he's their best back. I saw him play some time ago; it will be impossible to get past him."

"Oh, I don't know that, Dick," replied Challenge; "we'll get round him if we can't get past. We'll whop Mitchell's lot somehow. What is the rest of the team like?"

"They sent me the full team," answered Evans, "and I should think, taking them all round, they are a stone and a half heavier than we are, and that's a lot, especially when you come to think we seldom play socker, unless it's at home in our holidays for other clubs. These fellows are
always at it, and they move up and down the field like soldiers."

"You're not going to try make us funky, are you, Dick?" asked Challenge.

"Not a bit of it; only it's just as well not to be over sanguine. I tell you what, I'd sooner have a week longer in the term than be beaten to-morrow."

"We won't be beaten, we'll lick them, I tell you," said Gammon, the vice-captain.

"We should if all our team were like you, old fellow," said Evans. "Well, good night, though; here's Jackson coming."

A minute afterwards all were in bed, and soon silence reigned in the dormitory, save that Margarine gave a gentle snort occasionally for Jackson's edification, till at last he went to sleep in earnest.

It wanted no inducement to make the boys of Littlebury get up the next morning. They were washing, and some indeed had finished, when Jackson came in and uttered his "One—two—three, four, five, six to be washing."

After their ablutions, the selected team got together and discussed what style to adopt with their more experienced opponents. Considering the heaviness of the opposing team, it was unanimously agreed not to try a rough style of play.

Richardson, whom Evans had discussed the previous night, was to captain the army team. He was a very tall, burly fellow, of above twelve stone weight, who played back, and had the reputation of hardly ever failing to take the leather away from the foot of a forward who ventured too near the goal before shooting. Of course, in doing so, Richardson always took care to bowl over the forward, just by way of a gentle hint to him not to come so near again during the rest of the game.

The merits and demerits of the Fourth Form team had been discussed again and again.

Evans played centre forward; Gammon, the vice-captain, played outside right wing; and, after considerable argument
and opposition on the part of Parkinson, Comber, and the latter's fags, it was decided to put Bob Challenge as inside-right. The left wing was entrusted to Parkinson and Chutney, the latter being placed outside-left.

Chutney was the fastest of the five, although Challenge, the new "man," was credited with a good rate of speed. Chutney could sprint up the wing at top speed to within a foot of the goal-line. Then he had a trick of stopping the ball, turning round, and putting the ball into the centre with his right foot.

The Fourth-Formers who played as halves were not brilliant—Margarine being among them—but they were hard workers; while both the backs were good kicks, although one of them, Comber, decidedly funkèd big forwards, and very seldom attempted to charge.

Curry, who was put as goal-keeper, was one of the pluckiest fellows ever put into that trying and most honourable position.

The morning wore very slowly away, and lessons were said with that amount of wandering intellect that masters are accustomed to when there is something unusually attractive running riot in boys' minds.

The better set in the Fourth Form, of which Evans, Challenge, Chutney, Margarine, and Gammon were the prominent representatives, got through their prep. with considerable credit, so that Mr. Bright, who was himself much interested in the coming match, was not over-exacting, and did not open his imposition book once during the morning.

When at last the great bell rang as a signal that morning school was over, Mr. Bright said—

"The Doctor is coming to see the match, men, so show him that his kindness is thoroughly appreciated. You can do that by winning the match, to the lasting credit of Littlebury. You have a stiff team to encounter; but I am sure you would sooner have one like that than a team you could beat without a struggle. And one thing further: don't forget three cheers for the visitors; let to-day mark the beginning of friendship
and the death of your enmity. Life is too short for quarrels. Now, men, do your very best; and good luck to every kick you give the leather!"

In order to give ample time for a respite before the match, the Doctor had arranged for dinner to be half an hour earlier, and a most exciting meal it was. The entire dining-hall was a perfect babel of talking, for the whole school honour seemed bound up heart and soul in the success of the Fourth Form team.

Immediately after dinner Evans, Challenge, and Gammon got together in the quad., and planned a little device for getting past the army giant, Richardson.

Challenge, who was anxious to make a good impression on every one in his first match at Littlebury, volunteered to get near to and in the way of Richardson, without actually getting offside, chancing being knocked down by the latter's well-known heavy charge.

When their scheme was arranged, which was kept a close secret, the Littlebury team went off to the Meads, where they soon turned out in the school colours, meeting with a tremendous cheer as they did so.

There was not a single fellow of Littlebury—except Tripp, who was still in the infirmary—who was not present to witness the match. All the masters and a large number of people were there also. Connie Castleton was the centre of a good many pairs of admiring eyes, and Evans kept his promise to his friend Bob by introducing the latter to her.

Presently the army team, wearing cerise and white shirts, appeared, and received a cheer which, it must be confessed, although it was hearty, was not so deafening as that which had greeted the Littleburyites.

The match had been mutually arranged to take place on Littlebury ground, as it was the better of the two.

The referee blew his whistle amid tremendous shouts of "Play up, School!" "Go it, plucky Fourth!" "Don't mind their size!" and various other cries.
The army pupils looked as if they would run away with the game; even the most sanguine of the "men" of Littlebury could see nothing but defeat in store for the school.

Littlebury, having won the toss, elected to play against the wind in the first half, and at the first blow of the referee's whistle both teams took up promptly their positions.

The army centre-forward had the ball before him, there was a momentary silence, the referee whistled shrilly, the former touched the ball with his toe—and the match had begun!

The first few minutes of the match amply convinced the spectators that if the Littlebury men even meant to make a draw of it they had all their work cut out. The play was as fast as it was exciting to watch; but at the end of the first ten minutes the army forwards rushed up the ground at top speed, their clockwork combination completely taking the Littlebury team by surprise. Well as the army team was known to be a good one, the play on that side was altogether beyond criticism; they played magnificently.

The result of the army rush was a hot shot from the right wing, which Curry cleverly fisted out; but the army centre was on the alert, and sent in another hot shot along the ground, which had its full effect, for the ball went clean between Curry's legs.

The referee declared a goal in favour of Hillside.

Amid cries of "Never mind!" "Play up, School!" "Don't funk!" the game was restarted. After that the play was of a give-and-take kind for some time, and then Littlebury began to warm up to its work.

Chutney, on the left, made a splendid sprint right up the field, and centred the ball in his usual style; but Evans, in trying to head it through, forgot, in his anxiety, all about the giant Richardson being there.

Richardson promptly brought himself under the notice of Evans, by charging him so violently that the latter went spinning to the ground, falling several yards away from where
Richardson charged him. Meanwhile the ball was landed back again, past the half-way flag.

Once more the army returned to the attack, and after a most exciting struggle in front of the Littlebury goal-posts, Curry punched the ball out, and the home team for a minute changed the state of affairs by getting half way down the field towards their opponents' goal.

This was, however, only a temporary success, for the army pupils pressed vigorously, and after several hot shots in front of goal, Curry saving time after time amid great cheering at his prowess, the referee gave a corner-kick to the Hillside team.

The ball was placed with beautiful judgment and due consideration for the wind, with the result that there was another struggle before the goal. Comber, to do him justice, played brilliantly, instead of funkimg, so that it seemed to be sheer bad luck on his part when, in heading the ball, he sent it into his own goal.

A minute after half-time was called. The game stood as follows then:—Hillside, two goals; Littlebury, none.

By half-time the Littlebury team had got used to their opponents' play somewhat, and, having the wind at their backs in the second half, they thought they might possibly win the match, bad as it looked.

There had been no opportunity so far for trying the little scheme on Richardson, which Evans, Challenge, and Gammon had purposed. Richardson had hurt Evans rather badly by his heavy charge, and the latter, naturally, tried to avoid the same fate a second time.

At the re-start, after half-time, the ball was kicked out on the right wing by Evans, whereupon Chutney took it up to within a couple of yards of the goal-line.

Challenge's opportunity to try conclusions with the giant Richardson had come at last. The latter came rushing up to charge over the wing, when Challenge, either by accident or
intentionally, fell right in front of him, with the result that Richardson went sprawling on the ground.

Chutney at once centred, and Evans, being at hand, sent in a hot shot which the goal-keeper just touched, but could not keep out.

"Goal! Goal!" cried the spectators, while the small boys of the Third and lower Forms flung up their caps in sheer delight. Richardson at once claimed a foul; the referee, who decided that Challenge had slipped, refused to allow the foul. He therefore declared a goal for Littlebury.

This success, accompanied as it was with much cheering, roused the Fourth Form tremendously, and, after the next kick-off, they ran the ball down the field, Chutney once more centring it in fine style. Challenge, who saw Richardson coming full tilt at him, nevertheless stood his ground, and, with clever calculation as to where the ball would come, headed it right into the army goal. Immediately after his brilliant piece of play Challenge went down, winded by the force of Richardson's charge; a second more and Richardson must have saved the goal.

Shouts, cheers, and frantic cries filled the air as Littlebury scored its second goal, thus making the score two goals all.

Mr. Bright, as the referee placed the ball, cried out, "Six more minutes!"

The spectators cheered louder than ever, and Richardson, the captain of the Hillside team, called out to his men that there was time to get another goal—and so win.

Two minutes before time, Evans succeeded in getting past the army backs and seemed to have their goal at his mercy, when Richardson charged him from behind, and sent him down heavily.

The referee allowed a free kick for this; but as it was taken near goal, it only resulted in something like a desperate Rugby scrummage.

The spectators left off shouting; a strange silence came upon every one who saw that struggle before the Hillside goal posts.
Mr. Bright, who was looking on anxiously, took out his watch and showed it to Connie Castleton, who stood by his side. It wanted exactly one minute to time!

Would the Fourth Form of Littlebury win? That was the question which fluttered unspoken on each one's lips who watched.

The struggle at the goal-posts grew still hotter; then with a jump into the air, Bob Challenge headed the ball once more into the goal—and Littlebury had won!

The referee's whistle blew time; but its sound was drowned in the outburst of cheers that went up from every throat at the success which had come at last. No one expected it; least of all, after the first half, did the army team dream of losing.

Richardson, on the conclusion of the match, went up to Evans and Challenge, who were walking across the field together, and held out his hand.

"We've been licked," said he; "but, for my part, I'd sooner we lost than won. You Littlebury chaps are the pluckiest set I've ever met on the football field. If we haven't been friends hitherto, you can tell your fellows that I, for one, will always be proud to call you friends from this day."

Evans and Challenge shook hands with Richardson heartily, and then joined in the cheers being raised for the defeated team. After that the Hillside team cheered their conquerors, and the boys dispersed in excited knots, prouder than ever, if that were possible, that Littlebury was their Alma Mater, and that their team had won, in the face of such difficulties, by sheer persistence and pluck.

"Well played, Dick!" said Connie Castleton, as the two chums fell in with her as they returned to Littlebury; "and well played too, Mr. Challenge," she added. "I think you are such a plucky chum of Dick's that I'll call you by your Christian name, after this." And so Challenge from that day was "Bob" to Connie Castleton, as well as to his warmest friend, Dick Evans.
CHAPTER XII

"BOOT MONDAY."

Monday was always a day on which the men of Littlebury felt mischievous, mainly because they disliked the dinner, and thought it only fair to make some one suffer in consequence.

Challenge, who had been used to a first-class table at home, was a little taken aback by the food given to pupils at public schools.

During the first week of his presence at Littlebury, the new boy had viewed the chunks of bread put upon the table with alarm, but when he found they were regularly accompanied with good large chunks of butter as well, he ceased to care. On half-holidays jam accompanied the tea, but this seemed to be made up for on Mondays at dinner by the fact that there was no pudding.

The puddings at Littlebury were always appetising, consequently every one seemed out of temper when they were not forthcoming.

"No pudding, of course not," grumbled Margarine, as the masters rose the following Monday after the match for grace.

"We are not 'truly grateful;' at least I'm not," muttered Chutney, under his breath, at the conclusion of grace, "and I'll take it out of some one before the day's over, I promise you."

"It's 'Boot Monday,'" said Evans, "so you can take it out of the cobbler or his apprentice, Put-it-down Garge!"

"I hate Boot Monday," said Margarine. "Fancy having to
stand in a long line waiting to have one’s boots examined, like horses waiting to be shod!"

"That isn’t the worst of it, though," added Curry; "the cobbler and that chap of his take such an awful time to get the affair over. It takes up all the break. Why it can’t be done in school-time, instead of in play-time, is more than I understand."

Challenge listened to all these comments with interest. He waited till the others were silent, and then turned to Evans.

"What’s this all about? Who’s the cobbler, and what does he come here for, Dick?"

"Come to the dormitory and get all your boots together, and I’ll tell you as we go along. I have to go in first of the Fourth Form, you know."

The boys hurried up to the dormitory, where Challenge collected his—he had five pairs—and then with his property in his arms, went downstairs behind Evans.

The two were just about half-way down the stairs, when Evans’ foot slipped on something, and he went sprawling down the stairs to the landing, where he alighted on his back, the boots that he was carrying flying in all directions.

Bob Challenge went to his rescue, having put his own boots in a heap on the stairs, while he helped to collect those belonging to Evans.

"A beastly trick," said Evans; but seeing that Challenge was laughing, he added, "either Chutney or Curry did it, I bet; they always have a lark on somebody on Boot Monday. Of course they put a marble on the stairs; I felt it under my foot, but too late to save myself."

At that precise minute Chutney and Curry came down the stairs from the dormitory, arm in arm, as they so often walked together. As soon as they saw Evans lying there they howled with delight, but a second or two later their tune was changed; for, not observing Challenge’s pile of boots on the stairs, the twins tripped over them and fell with a crash, getting considerably bruised in turn. They got up laughing, however
and declared it was a capital trick, although Challenge persisted that it was a pure accident.

"We are often concerned in such accidents ourselves," smiled Chutney, sweetly; "in fact, we have one on hand now. If you care to keep your eyes open you will see the result of docking fellows' pudding and then making them waste hours over their old boots."

Challenge followed his chum Dick to where the long corridor ran which led to the class-rooms. There was a small room opening from the corridor, and this was given up periodically to the cobbler and his apprentice.

The boys went in to have their possessions examined two or three at a time, and Challenge, when his turn came, found that Chutney and Curry were his companions in distress.

The cobbler sat on a chair and wore his apron, his sleeves being turned up, while his apprentice hovered near, writing with a wide piece of blacklead whatever notes his master commanded.

"Well, young gentleman," said the cobbler to Chutney, "much damage done this time?"

Chutney advanced and exhibited his boots. The cobbler called for his iron foot and hammered a few nails into the soles of a pair of Chutney's boots, passed another pair as needing no repairs, and finally took possession of a third pair.

"Master— Let me see—I always forget your name. Young gentleman, what is it?"

"Oh, Chutney will do for me," said that worthy, who rather liked his nick-name.

"Chutney—oh, yes, I remember your name on the Doctor's list, of course. You come from India where the Chutney grows, I suppose. Garge," he asked, "what grows in India?"

"Chutney, sir," the apprentice answered promptly.

His master looked at him admiringly, and said to Chutney—

"Garge never had much education, but I try to make up for it by teaching him all I know."
"If he knows all that, he ought to be very well educated," said Chutney, while Curry and Challenge turned round to hide a smile.

"Get the book, Garge," continued the cobbler, "and write down 'One pair of 'eels for Master Chutney, that grows in India.' Put it down, Garge, put it down; and don't forget what you learn here."

"Yes, put it down, Garge, put it down," said Chutney, mimicking the cobbler; "and don't you forget it."

"And now," said the cobbler, "who's next?"

"I am," said Curry.

The cobbler looked at him carefully.

"Brother or twins?" he asked. "My head-piece is not so good as it used to be."

"Both," said Curry, "and named 'Curry,' after a tree that grows forty feet high in India."

The cobbler examined Curry's boots. He passed two pairs, then turned to his apprentice again.

"Garge, put down 'Master Curry, twins and brother to the Chutney tree.' What two trees grow in India, Garge?"

"Chutney and Curry trees, forty feet high," said George, the apprentice.

The cobbler held out the remaining pair of boots to the latter, adding—

"Want soling and 'eeling. Put that down, Garge."

"I don't know you at all," said the cobbler, when Challenge stepped forward in his turn. "What's your name, young gentleman?"

"Challenge—Bob Challenge," the latter answered.

The cobbler was a little deaf.

"Rather a singular name, isn't it?" asked the man of boot leather.

Challenge stared as he answered, "Nothing funny about it, so far as I know. It's a good deal better than being called Put-it-down Garge, I suppose."
“Garge,” said the cobbler, as he went through Challenge’s stock of boots, “write this down: ‘Master Talons, Long Talons, one pair of soles, one toe, one stitch in the side. Be quick and put it down, Garge.”

“Well, what did you think of the cobbler?” asked Evans, as he met Bob coming out from his visit.

“He’s a treat; Chutney told him that his name meant a tree, and he believed it.”

“We always have him on a little; but he isn’t a bad sort though. Did he tell Garge to put anything down?”

“Didn’t he just,” said Challenge. “If Garge isn’t crazy before he’s much older it won’t be the cobbler’s fault.”

“Come to Canvas a bit?” asked Evans. “There’s half an hour to spare yet. We don’t begin afternoon school till half­past three on Boot Monday, you know. We have to make the time up, though, worst luck, or it wouldn’t be so bad.”

“Why not wait about and see what Chutney is going to do? He’s got something on hand, whatever it is.”

“Very well, Bob,” assented Evans; and so they stood talking till the cobbler had finished with the rest of the boys.

There was a general rush to the dormitory with the boots that had passed muster, and in this Challenge and Evans joined, for no sign of Chutney appeared.

Up in the dormitory a shower of boots flew from one part of the room to the other, and both Evans and Challenge had a narrow escape as they entered the door.

For a few minutes the fun was fast and furious, then a mis­directed shot of Parkinson’s sent a boot right through one of the windows. Fortunately the window was open, so that no glass was broken; but it so happened that Lawson, the Sixth Form boy, was passing at the time, and the boot struck him violently on the shoulder.

Lawson picked the boot up and, putting it under his arm, walked off with it to his study.

“Sneak!” called out several voices, as Lawson walked off.
"BOOt MONDAY."

"It's my boot," said Margarine. "That beggar Lawson will go and tell the Doctor I flung it at him on purpose."

"Go and ask him for it, Margarine," said Evans. "Who's afraid of Lawson? I'm not, for one!"

"He keeps a cane in that study he shares with Stokes," replied Margarine, ruefully; "if it wasn't for that, I'd go at once."

"I'll go," said Evans. "I know Lawson's tricks on those he can pay off with impunity, but I'll give him something for himself if he tries it on me."

Margarine looked very grateful as Evans went off to Lawson's study, and knocked at the door.

"Oh, it's your boot, is it?" asked Lawson, when he had admitted Evans. "What did you throw it at me for?"

"It wasn't thrown at you at all," said Evans; "it flew out of the window accidentally."

"I dare say it did," said Lawson, dryly; "but if you want the boot, you'll have to stand a licking."

Evans hesitated, but at last agreed to the terms.

"Get down, then," said Lawson, "and cock up."

He took his cane, and as Evans put his head and knees together on the ground, according to the custom in vogue at Littlebury, he spied the boot just beside the door.

The moment Lawson flourished his cane, Evans suddenly raised his head and darted between the Sixth-Former's legs, with the consequence that Lawson fell over his intended victim's back.

Quick as a flash Evans got to his feet, snatched up the boot, and ran out of Lawson's study before the latter could seize the boy who had tricked him so neatly. He went up to the dormitory to Margarine.

"Here's your boot," said Evans. "Lawson sends it with his kindest regards, and hope you'll pay him ten minutes' visit when you have time, as he wants to try a new cane he's bought."
"You're a brick, Dick," said Margarine. "Lawson wouldn't have given it back to me without a whacking. You don't catch me going to his study, though; I'm not so anxious to be whipped."

Margarine went away, and just then Chutney and Curry, who were both in the dormitory on Evans' return, went quietly down the stairs.

"There's still ten minutes before school begins," said Challenge, coming up to Evans; "let's go and see what the twins are up to. I thought we should miss the fun when you went off to Lawson's study to get old Margarine's boot."

"Come on, then, Bob," said Evans; and down the stairs they went.

After the boys' boots were examined, the cobbler spent some time in making chalk marks upon them, indicating what was to be the nature of the repairs. After this, each boy's name was chalked on his boot, and, to make sure none were missed or left behind, each pair was numbered. The boots were then put into a large bag with a loose slip knot at the top, and the apprentice put the bag on his shoulder to carry the load to the cobbler's shop.

From the nature and neatness of the trick which the twins had planned, it was evident they had thought it out with considerable care. It was no new thing for them to spend weeks in devising something for their own special amusement, and the singular part of the twins' nature was that they rarely invited the others to share in their tricks. Most of the boys thought this was because Chutney and Curry usually played such wild tricks that they did not wish any one else to share in the blame, for so long as the trick succeeded, neither of the twins cared in the least what consequences befel them.

The twins had discovered an iron ring fastened in the ceiling of the corridor, and this had set them thinking. The result of their cogitations was soon apparent.

Evans, Challenge, Margarine, and a few more got into the
class-room, from the window of which, since it opened upon
the corridor, they could see exactly what happened.

Chutney deftly tied a piece of string across the passage at a
height of about two feet from the ground. The moment the
cobblcer and his boot-laden apprentice reached the string over
they both went, spread-eagle fashion, while at that precise
moment Chutney slipped behind them, fastened a hook into
the bottom of the sack, and the latter, to the watchers' infinite
amusement, was hoisted right to the ceiling by a cord pulled
taut, as every one surmised at once, by Curry, who was in
concealment somewhere, and who held the end of the cord.

The cobbler scrambled to his feet, and, thinking for the
moment that his apprentice had somehow tripped him up,
administered a sounding box on the fellow's ears. The ap­
prentice roared for mercy as his master belaboured him, when
suddenly the latter saw that the boots were missing.

"Where's the bag, you mischievous rascal?" asked the
cobbler.

"I don't know, sir; it's gone!" whined George, who was
completely mystified at the turn affairs had taken.

"Gone, Garge!" cried the cobbler—"gone! Then go after
it and find it!"

Just then the bag, which the hook held by the bottom, came
undone, and a perfect shower of boots seemed to fall from the
ceiling right in front of the astonished cobbler's eyes.

Looking up in amazement, the cobbler saw whence they
came, and, as the bag was there very plainly also, he went off
with the apprentice to tell the Doctor the story.

Hardly had the cobbler gone than the bell for afternoon
school rang. In an instant Curry let the bag down, pulled the
cord through the ring, and took the hook from the bag; then
he and his brother rapidly thrust the boots back into the bag,
neatly pulled the slip-noose at the top of the latter, carried the
bag back to the room, and made all haste into school.

The twins came into the class-room with such an expression
of demureness and innocence combined, that nothing but the arrival of Mr. Bright prevented every Fourth-Former from going into shrieks of laughter.

Hardly had the lesson begun before Doctor Chapple's voice was heard in the corridor, while the cobbler called upon "Garge" to tell the head-master all about the sudden disappearance of the bag.

No sooner had the trio reached the spot than they found not a boot lying there. They glanced up to the ceiling, and the bag too had disappeared.

"This is a very singular story, Mr. Wiggett," said the Doctor. "Are you quite sure your apprentice brought the boots out of the room?"

"Certain sure," said the cobbler, doggedly.

"I carried un on my back, and I felt un go off my back, and I seed un all on the floor, and then I seed bag too up on ceilin'," said the apprentice.

"Well, where are the boots?" insisted the Doctor. "They are not here, and I'm sure the boys had no time to carry them away."

"I'll look for un in t' room," said George, gloomily, more to satisfy the Doctor than because he expected to find them there.

So the trio went into the room which the cobbler had occupied that afternoon.

There, sure enough, leaning against the chair the cobbler had sat on, was the bag containing the boots, looking as if it had never been touched.

"Well, of all the goes I've ever heard tell on!" said the cobbler.

"I know I carried un down t' passage," said George. "There mun be speerits about here; un couldn't 'a' got back there weethout un."

"Good afternoon," said the Doctor, who had his correspondence to see to, and who felt quite convinced that George was deceiving his master.
"I think you must have played some trick on me, Garge," said the cobbler to his apprentice as they went home; "I can't understand why you are so ungrateful. Didn't I even get the young gentlemen to give you instruction, all for nothing too? There will be no supper for you to-night, Garge, and I shall knock off your egg at breakfast to-morrow."

"Garge" protested and scratched his head with his free hand as he bent under the bag containing the boots; but he could make nothing out of it except that "speerits" were responsible for the whole affair—a view his master did not seem inclined to take.
CHAPTER XIII.

A STARTLING ANNOUNCEMENT.

"Will you come with us to Telford's Tunnel this afternoon, Bob?" Evans asked, as the Fourth Form came tumbling out of their class-room. "It will be grand fun. What do you say?"

"Where is the tunnel, Dick?" Challenge queried, for he had not previously heard of its existence.

"Oh, it's on the Andovy road, about three miles and a half from here; it's outside school bounds, but I suppose you don't mind that, Bob?"

"Not a bit of it; if there's any sport to be got I'll come, you may depend on that," answered Bob Challenge, taking his chum's arm and walking towards the quad.

"We shall have a grand time of it," prophesied Evans. "About half our fellows are coming, and it's the best tunnel on the whole of the Great Western."

"How long is it?" asked Challenge; "and when do we start?"

"Telford's Tunnel is a little more than a quarter of a mile long," replied Evans, "and there isn't a train running through it between half-past two and seven o'clock; so we generally have a long afternoon there once in the term. A lot of the Fifth Form fellows are coming, and a good sprinkling of the Third; so what with them and our own men, we shall muster a good eighty, I should say. Chutney and Curry, besides Gammon and Margarine, are in it; so there's sure to be plenty
A STARTLING ANNOUNCEMENT.

of excitement. We generally make up two long trains and play at collisions. You can just see the opening of one end from the other, and, as there isn't much light, we generally take our lanterns and make some fires along the sides. We shall have to get some bundles of wood at old Christmas' tuck-shop, which is, fortunately, on the way there; so we shan't lose time."

"Going with us?" asked Gammon, coming up to the two chums. "It's sure to be all the better fun if you're there, Bob."

Challenge was now known as Bob to every one in his Form, and his popularity bid fair to rival that of his great friend Evans.

"Rather! Do you think I'd be out of it?" answered Challenge.

Just then Margarine joined them.

"Coming, Bob?" he asked. "We shall be about ninety strong, I've reckoned," he said, which was ten more than Evans had calculated. "There are four lanterns: one for the beginning and one for the end of each train, and Comber's going to buy a bottle of paraffin in the oil-shop to put on the fires to make them burn well. It's going to be a right down good afternoon. We shall have two hours in the tunnel clear, allowing half an hour on the way there at the tuck-shop."

"Of course we're to stuff ourselves at old Christmas' shop," laughed Evans. "Margarine thinks he can always run better when he's stowed away about half a dozen large buns—just after dinner and all!"

"If you knew what it is to always feel hungry," said Margarine, without the trace of a smile, "you'd be a little less handy in putting jokes off on me about it; that's all I can say."

"You can't run a quarter of a mile, I know," said Chutney, who strolled up just then, and heard the fag end of Margarine's speech. "If you're so much afraid of a joke, we'll all go to
old Christmas' tuck-shop before you; for if you get there first
there won't be anything left to eat.”

"Margarine's going to hang on behind, at the end of one
of the trains," said Evans. "He's going to be the new stop-
dead break; there won't be much chance for his train to get
far into the tunnel."

"There's the dinner bell!" cried Chutney; and away the
boys went at the welcome sound.

It was the Tuesday half-holiday, being the day after Boot
Monday, when the expedition to Telford's Tunnel was planned.

As soon as dinner was over, the boys started on their way,
and soon drew up at Old Christmas' tuck-shop; but a good
many of them went straight on, for the term was advancing,
and pocket-money was getting rather scarce.

Old Christmas had a room behind his shop which he placed
at the disposal of his customers, and going into this, Evans,
Margarine, and Challenge found a stranger sitting, with a
glass of lemonade before him, but which he did not seem
to have tasted. The man, who was dressed like a country
farmer, seemed to brighten up as the boys went and sat at
a little table near him, where Comber, followed by Parkinson,
joined them.

"May I ask what school you go to?" the man inquired
of Evans, who was nearest to him.

"We are Littlebury men," answered Evans, not without
a tinge of pride in his voice, which the stranger was quick
to notice.

"Ah," said the man, "Littlebury; yes, to be sure, that's the
best school round for miles. I think I shall alter my mind,
after all, and send my son Tom there. I did think of sending
him to Harrow, or perhaps Eton; but there, Littlebury is quite
as great a public school as either; and it's nearer. Tom's
mother wouldn't like him to go to a school that was very far
away."

There was something so oily about the man's manner that
Bob somehow grew unaccountably suspicious of him, and forthwith kicked his chum Dick under the table as a hint to be careful what he said.

"I suppose," the stranger went on, "that you boys like being at Littlebury, don't you?"

"We do so," answered Margarine, who was busy munching a bath bun; "but there's one thing we don't like. What do you think that is?"

The stranger expressed his ignorance to answer the question.

"We don't like being called 'boys.' It's against the tradition of Littlebury; every one who goes there is called a man, and don't you forget it."

The stranger laughed at Margarine's remark, then went on talking in a soft, insinuating way.

"I think Tom's mother would like him to go to a school where he would be called a man; it's a way with mothers, you know. But what I want above all is a school for my son where there's plenty of fun going on—birds'-nesting and tricks, and all the rest of it."

"We plead not guilty, sir," said Chutney, a remark which made all the boys present laugh.

"Don't the boys at your school ever play tricks?" the man asked. "I was talking the other day to a man in the town, and he told me of a great piece of fun that the boys—I mean the men—of Littlebury had recently with a gamekeeper. Do any of you happen to know a gamekeeper?"

"We never associate with such," said Chutney, with a pretended air of indignation at the insinuation, that set the boys all laughing again.

"What I heard of was a very good trick—an excellent trick. When the man told me I wished myself back at school so that I might have had a hand in it. It was quite a thing for any set of boys—leastways men—to be extremely proud of."

"Well, we're very sorry you're not a boy again," said
Challenge, rising, as he suddenly caught sight of Old Christmas winking and nodding his head behind the stranger, "And, as we haven't much time just now, we'll wish you good afternoon."

"I'm very proud to have met you. When is your next half-holiday?" the man asked.

"Thursday, if it is of interest to you to know," said Evans, who got up with the rest.

"Then, on Thursday afternoon about this time I'll be here again, and if any of you would like to see my son Tom, I'll bring him, and I'll pay for a good tuck in, as I want him to get to know some of the men of Littlebury School. After seeing how happy you all are, I've quite made up my mind to send Tom to Littlebury."

The stranger offered to shake hands, and Comber, who was then near him, accepted, but the rest of the boys escaped without having to undergo that unpleasant action, for they all suspected the man meant them no good.

So that the stranger in the room behind the shop should not see what they were about, Evans stood at Old Christmas' counter, and with his back to the little parlour-window, took up a bundle of wood while Challenge, hiding this under his coat, walked out of the shop. A dozen of the boys acted in a similar way, and thus got the supplies for the fire, for Christmas sold large bundles of roughly chopped wood.

"What's he after, Christmas?" Evans asked the keeper of the tuck-shop, nodding his head towards the parlour where the man still sat.

"I don't know at all," replied Christmas; "he's a puzzler, he is. He's been tryin' to get all sorts of things out of me. He seems to know you comes here on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and what's more, he's got hold of some of your names, too; he had them off quite pat!"

"What's your idea, though?" Evans interposed in a whisper.
"I'm nonplussed, sir," replied Christmas. "He do dress like a farmer, but I ses to myself, 'Farmers don't have white hands like his'n, and they don't talk as if some one had been running oil down their throats to make 'em speak balmy like.'"

"Do you think it's anything to do with the house on the marsh?" asked Evans.

"I don't, sir; I think it's something more serious like. You young gentleman ain't bin and done anything very bad, have you? at least, I hope not, for it's my belief——"

Christmas stopped for a minute, then almost imperceptibly moved his head towards the little parlour.

"He's moved nearer the blind, and I just see him pull it a little aside, so I know he's watching you. The best thing you can do is to go away at once. If anything more turns up, I'll get the missus to write you a line, and give it to the postman to bring up."

"Send it to me—Dick Evans," said the latter. "We'll go at once; but what do you think the man is?" Evans asked, who was getting alarmed by the mysterious behaviour of the stranger.

Old Christmas stooped over the counter and whispered into Evans' ear—

"The man's a detective, or I never saw one!"

At that moment the stranger turned the handle of the parlour door, and the boys went out of the shop. They hurried along to try and overtake the rest, who were then some distance ahead.

"What can this all mean, Dick?" asked his chum, as they discussed the man's conduct.

"I can't make it out. It can't be anything to do with our House of Commons, for if that were to be found out it wouldn't be a reason for setting a detective to watch us, or to get into conversation with us."

"Perhaps Christmas is mistaken; the man may have a son he wants to send to school," said Margarine, whom the two
just then caught up, and whom Evans told what the tuck-shop keeper had said:

"Not he! Why, he's not more than twenty-five," said Evans, decidedly. "It's my belief Christmas was right; that chap was dressed up like a farmer, and was wearing a false beard for only one purpose—to get us to give ourselves away in an unguarded moment."

"I thought his beard was rather a funny one," added Bob. "I dare say you are right, Dick; it was false. Do you think he was trying to find out all about what we did to the Black Cadger?"

"How could I think anything else, Bob? Didn't he mention him? Why, it is all as clear as daylight."

"But we did nothing to get put under watch like this," persisted Bob. "We've played many a trick on the Cadger before, and he never thought of doing anything else than telling the Doctor. I can't think it's that; there's something deeper in the affair, I feel quite sure."

"Rubbish, Bob! What else can there be?" answered Dick Evans. "I tell you what it is, if we go on surmising and wondering like this we shall spoil our afternoon in the tunnel. Let the Black Cadger do what he likes, for all we need care; the Doctor would soon hush up anything about the school for his own sake. It can only mean another swishing, and it can't possibly be worse than the one he gave us the other day on account of that affair in the woods."

"I say," said Margarine, as the boys went still hurrying along, "there's no need to rush like this; all the fellows are waiting for us to come up. Look! there they are."

Sure enough all the boys were standing in a crowd, as Margarine had been the first to notice. But they had some other reason than merely waiting for the three to catch them up.

As the boys got nearer the rest, they saw that they were all looking at an advertisement hoarding, and were evidently much interested in what was to be read there,
“I wonder what it is?” said Evans, with a strange presentiment of coming evil.

“A new soap advertisement, I shouldn’t wonder,” said Bob, with a laugh.

As the three came up to the crowd, the boys made way for them, and then they saw what had attracted universal attention. It was a large bill about two feet long, and read as follows:—

“TEN POUNDS REWARD.

“WHEREAS, on the afternoon of the twenty-third of February last, some evil-disposed persons did maltreat and afterwards rob William Jenkins, chief gamekeeper to Lord Dunsandle. This is to give notice that the above sum of ten pounds will be paid to any person or persons who shall offer sufficient evidence to convict the offenders. The articles stolen consist of a gold hunting watch, numbered 26735 on case, and a leather jug-shaped purse, containing three sovereigns, seven shillings in silver, and two foreign coins. Pawnbrokers and others are warned against accepting the watch in pledge.

“Information to be given to me at the police station.

“JOHN ADAMSON,
"Chief Constable, Littlebury.”

“It’s a lie!” cried Evans, excitedly. “Not one of the five of us touched a thing belonging to the Black Cadger.”

“I’m not going to the tunnel now,” said Comber. “There’s a thief among us, whoever he is; and mind, men, I say this, Evans and Challenge were the two last to return from the woods that day.” And with this parting shot Comber turned back, taking no notice of the howl of execration which greeted his words.

“If I were you, I wouldn’t talk quite so loud, Dick,” said Challenge to Evans, warningly. “You’ll put our affairs in the hands of every youngster in the Third Form,”
"What shall we do?" muttered Evans in reply. "The afternoon's spoilt, so far as I'm concerned; I vote we go back."

"Not likely," answered his friend Bob; "what good will that do? It's no use going back and moping round the quad, talking the matter over. Let us go on to the tunnel."

"But this bill accuses us of downright theft," persisted Evans.

"It certainly does; but we know perfectly well that none of us touched a thing in the Black Cadger's house, so why should we be troubled about it? I'll tell you what we'll do; we'll drop talking about it now, and those of us who went to the Cadger's house will discuss this strange affair in the dormitory to-night."

"That's the best thing to do," said Margarine, who had joined the two, as all the boys were now going on towards the tunnel, discussing excitedly the import of the bill, for every one knew the Black Cadger by sight. Those who had only heard a slight reference to the fact that the Cadger had been paid out, as well as those who knew more of the details, were alike in thinking that some other hand than that of a school-fellow had perpetrated the theft.

So the boys went rapidly on to Telford's Tunnel, while Comber turned his face homewards, pondering the matter over and wondering how the discovery would all end, and what advantage he could get by fastening the guilt on Bob.

"I'll get him expelled! I'll get him expelled!" muttered he, over and over again, as he went along the road. "I've never had the same influence over my fags since he licked me the first time he came to Littlebury."

Comber had a habit of talking to himself, and being very excited, he continued to mutter his thoughts aloud, "Challenge shall be proved guilty. Some one stole this money and the watch, and if Challenge isn't blamed, then the other four of us will be let in for it. I wish I could pin the charge to Evans as well. I hate the pair of them; while as to
Challenge, I detest his very name. If only I can pay him out, that's all!"

Comber worked himself up into a passion as he went along. "Some one must be proved guilty, if we others are to be unsuspected; and if I don't make Challenge smart for every blow the beggar gave me—we'll see, we'll see!"

"See what, young gentleman?" said a voice by the boy's side.

Comber started, and stared at the speaker. He had been so engrossed in his thoughts of revenge, that he was afraid for a minute he had said something that he certainly did not wish to be overheard.

"What did you say, sir?" Comber stuttered, as he noticed his questioner was the man he had seen in old Christmas' tuck-shop.

"I asked you what you were going to see," the man answered in a suave voice, as he walked beside the bully. "You seemed to speak to me as I passed."

"I was only talking to myself," said Comber in reply. "It's a bad habit I've got. I'm always trying to break myself of it. The Doctor has more than once told me how silly it is to talk when one hasn't a companion, but is walking alone."

"Well, now, what was it about? You see, I sometimes do that very same thing myself, so I sympathise with you. You'd hardly think it, but I was talking to myself also as I came along. Didn't you hear me?"

Comber answered "No."

He wished the man would not walk by his side, for any one connected, however remotely, with the affair at the Black Cadger's house was not very desirable company to the bully. He understood, from what the others had said, that this man evidently knew something of the affair; besides, he had made direct reference to it.

"Which way are you going, young gentleman?" the man asked.
"I'm going to Littlebury," said Comber.
"That's just the way I'm going," said the stranger.
"But I'm sure you were walking in the opposite direction," insisted Comber. "I know I didn't see you after I left the other men."

"And why did you leave them, young gentleman, may I ask?" the stranger queried, apparently with indifference, but really much interested in the reply Comber might make.

"Oh, I was going with them for a walk," said the bully; "but I changed my mind. I don't feel up to walking this afternoon."

"Feel seedy, eh?" pursued the man. "You look rather done up. Too much tuck, eh?" He laughed a quiet, complaisant laugh, intended to put Comber at his ease.

"Only tired," answered Comber.

"Well, we're near the tuck-shop; will you come in and have some lemonade? I am glad I've met one of you young gentlemen alone. The fact is, I fancy that affair with Lord Dunsandle's gamekeeper will turn out badly for some of you. As I want to send my son to Littlebury, of course I shall take an interest in helping the school to clear itself of the charge. Have you seen this bill?"

The stranger took a bill, identically like the one the boys had read, from his pocket, and, unfolding it, held it outspread for Comber to read.

"Yes; but what's that to do with me?" Comber asked nervously. There was an indescribable air of suspicion in the stranger's tone as he showed the bill that made Comber turn ghastly pale.

"Oh, nothing, only as I'm sure one of the Littlebury boys, or I dare say several of them, stole this money, I asked some one to give me this bill. I thought, if you hadn't seen it, I might show it to some of you. But here's the tuck-shop. Shall we go in?"

Comber hesitated. A sudden thought entered his head. He
knew quite well that the man was a detective, for the latter had so overacted his part that Comber's suspicions became so strong they amounted to absolute conviction on his part.

"No, I won't go into Christmas' shop with you," said Comber, after a pause; "but there's a public-house a little way along the road, the Spotted Dog, and I don't mind going in there with you."

Comber did not wish Christmas to overhear any part of the conversation he might have with the man.

"The Spotted Dog, by all means," said the stranger.

So Comber led the way to the tavern he had mentioned.

There was a little parlour opposite to the bar itself, and as Comber knew of it very well, he walked in and rang the bell. The landlord came in, and Comber began to give an order, but the man stopped him.

"Landlord," he said, "we should like a small bottle of champagne.

Comber had never tasted champagne, but he only vowed he would not drink more than one glass, for he did not mean the stranger to get the better of him in that way.

"You don't drink," said the stranger, who had tossed off a glass of champagne with great gusto and show. "Every man can drink three glasses of champagne; at least, if he is a man, and not a common sort of fellow who hasn't tasted champagne a dozen times in his life."

Comber just sipped a little of the liquid, and then put his glass down.

"Now," he said, "what makes you think that some one from Littlebury stole this money?"

The stranger begged Comber to pledge him in at least two glasses more before they continued the discussion; but the bully had far too much sense.

"I know perfectly well what you are," said Comber, at last, for the plan he had conceived necessitated his telling the man that fact.
“What do you mean, young gentleman?” the stranger asked.

“You have only been talking about your son Tom as a blind. You have been set on to find out, first, if any of the Littlebury men ill-treated the gamekeeper and stole his things; and what’s more, you think you will find out who was the thief or thieves.”

The stranger stared open-eyed at Comber. He did not reply for a minute; then he took out a pipe from his pocket, slowly filled it, and struck a match. Comber, who was greatly disturbed, but tried to appear cool and defiant, took out his cigarette-case and followed suit.

“You’re a plucky chap, sir,” said the stranger at last. “There I say this, you are right, every way you are right. Now then, what about the affair?”

Comber looked at the man with affected surprise.

“How should I know anything about it?” he asked.

The man took a couple of whiffs from his pipe before answering, then he said slowly—

“You ought to know a very great deal about it, young gentleman.”

“Ought I? And why, pray?” asked Comber. He was not going to be bluffed, thought he.

The stranger smoked assiduously for a couple of minutes longer, as if thinking out what answer to give.

“What’s your name, young gentleman?” he asked at last.

“I decline to tell you,” answered Comber.

The man took out a pencil and a sheet of paper from his pocket, and with a few swift strokes of his pencil drew a remarkable likeness of Comber.

“Well, never mind about your name; this will do just as well,” he said. “Now, are you going to tell me what you know about this robbery, or aren’t you? I tell you this much; you had better do so. I might be able to help you if you do, so be careful how you answer.”
"I DO DARE, AND I SAY IT—YOU STOLE THAT MONEY! DENY IT IF YOU CAN."

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“I don’t want helping. I didn’t come here for that purpose; I came for something else different altogether,” said Comber.

“Well, I’ve got my idea who stole that money,” said the stranger, doggedly. “We won’t say anything about the assault, because the gamekeeper doesn’t wish to make more fuss than possible; but this I will say, I’ve seen the boy who stole that money this afternoon.”

Comber’s lips worked, but he made no answer.

“I say I’ve seen him,” continued the stranger, “and I say I see him now!”

“What!” gasped Comber, “do you dare to say—”

“I do dare, and I say it—you stole that money! Deny it if you can!”

The stranger leant forward and watched Comber’s face from the opposite side of the table from where he sat facing him. It was all guess-work on the man’s part, but he thought he knew Comber’s character.

“I can deny it—I do!” answered Comber. “I say you are altogether wrong. Why should you suspect me more than the rest of the three hundred odd men of Littlebury, I should like to know?”

“Perhaps you will tell me you didn’t read the bill on the wall; perhaps you will say that after reading it you did not at once turn back because—you were tired.” The stranger spoke almost contemptuously; then he waited for Comber to explain.

“You think that after reading the bill on the wall, as you seem to know I did,” said Comber, “that I got frightened, and that was why I turned back!”

The stranger nodded as he replied, “Yes, I saw a crowd of you reading that bill. If you were innocent, why did you come back? Why did the others go on, except because they knew they were innocent?”

“You don’t know anything about it,” said Comber, who was considered one of the best debaters in the Littlebury House of Commons; “your reasoning is altogether wrong. Perhaps
I did not turn back because I was tired. Suppose I turned back because I fancied some one, in whose company I was, was the guilty party, mightn't that be a very good reason?"

"I own that it would; but, then, why did you come here with me if you didn't want to find something out?" the man asked. "You say you know what I am; why did you run the risk of talking to me unless you had some object, such as trying to find out who was suspected, for instance?"

"I had a reason for talking to you," said Comber, slowly; "but if you intend to bring a false charge against me, I will talk to you no longer."

Comber got up and walked towards the door, as if about to go out of the tavern parlour. The man at once became a little more deferential.

"There," he said, "I admit I only said that to frighten you, for I can plainly tell you are not the guilty party. Now don't you think it would be a good idea to earn the ten pounds offered on the bill, by letting me into the secret?"

Comber sat down again. He did not go to the chair he had vacated by the table, but took one near the fire. He rested his chin on his hands, and looked into the flaring coals as if plunged into thought. The man did not move; he thought it as well to let Comber have his own way, and not appear too anxious. He was conscious that he had a stronger will to contend with than he at first supposed, and this made him more cautious.

"Suppose," said Comber at last, raising his head and looking the man in the face—"suppose I don't know who did this robbery, but that I suspect a certain person, or even more than one, what then?"

"What then?" said the man, thinking that at last he was going to succeed in his endeavour to track the guilty person or persons. "Why, if you can prove their guilt, the ten pounds will be yours."

"Could I get the ten pounds without it being known that I
gave the information, always supposing that I should discover
my suspicions were well founded?" Comber asked.

"That depends a great deal on the information you give.
For instance, if you give information that enables me to find
the thief or thieves, and by that means they are convicted,
there will be no need for your name to appear at all. Again,
you might have seen some one steal that purse and
watch——"

"I did not," said Comber, emphatically, interrupting.

"I only said you might have seen, not that you did see," the
man explained. "Of course, we all forget things at times, and
remember them afterwards. You may not remember that you
did see this done to-day, but to-morrow you may recollect
more about it."

Comber understood. He was being asked to bear false
witness. He had very little conscience, but he would not go
so far as that, much as he hated Bob. It would, perhaps,
bring him into a serious position. He knew what perjury
meant.

"There is one thing you might do, and that easily," said the
stranger; "you might look about and see if any one has a
watch not his own, or has been spending money freely. Why,
that watch may be in one of your fellow's boxes, at this very
time! If you could find that out, and let me know where it
is, I would manage the rest. Your name would never be
mentioned; besides, I don't know it even."

"I don't know. I'll see," said Comber, hesitatingly; "I'll
think it over. Mind, at present I say this, I know nothing of
this theft myself; and I may never find it out at all. Perhaps
it was no one at Littlebury who ill-treated the gamekeeper at
all. Even suppose some of our fellows did, was there no
chance for some one else to commit the robbery?"

The man explained how the gamekeeper had been found
bound in his chair, and told Comber that he was, at that
very time, still keeping to his bed with a very bad attack of
rheumatism, brought on by exposure to the cold for four hours on the afternoon of the occurrence.

"It looks like a school trick, I own," said Comber, "but you must remember there are plenty of schools round Littlebury; there is that army school, Hillside, for instance."

"Yes, but there's only one school whose pupils are known to have a spite against Lord Dunsandle's head gamekeeper, and that's Littlebury," the man replied.

"Well," said Comber, "I don't think you will find much out, without assistance. If a Littlebury man did it, it's clear there must have been several in the affair of tying the keeper down in his chair. My idea is that after they had all gone away one or two went back and stole the things."

The man watched Comber's face carefully.

"I should think that is just what did happen," he said. "Now, is there any one you suspect? is there any one likely to disgrace the rest of you by doing such a thing? If you know, tell me; I'll keep it a strict secret."

Comber's chance had come, and he was not slow to take advantage of it.

"You remember one of our men who said to you in the tuck-shop that he was sorry you were not a boy again?"

"I remember him very well. I saw him kick another boy slyly under the table. What's his name?"

"Robert Challenge—and if there is a thief in Littlebury, that is his name," said Comber.

"He isn't a friend of yours, is he?" the man asked, curiously.

"I should be very sorry for him to be," retorted Comber.

"Very well, watch that boy, and if you find anything out, let me know. My name is Bingham, and a letter to the police-station will bring me here at any day or hour you please."

"I may write, but I won't come here to meet you," said Comber; "it wouldn't be wise on my part."

They conversed together a little while after that, and then
Comber went out of the tavern, walking towards Littlebury School.

"I'll ruin Challenge; I'll do it yet," he said between his set teeth.

The man watching him from the door of the tavern, muttering to himself—

"There were several in it, that fellow among them, I'm certain. They've had a quarrel about the division of the spoil; that's why he's so anxious to put the blame on one of the others. He's a sly card, that—and clever too! Things are going better than I expected. It's the old case, when thieves fall out justice gets her due."

Comber had not left the man ten minutes before he repented having said anything to him. He vowed he had made a fool of himself, and determined not to write the letter. Then he wavered again, and thought he would. Moreover, he formed a plan in his head with which to entrap Challenge; and so, a study in conflicting emotions, the bully went on till he entered the Middle Gate of Littlebury.
CHAPTER XIV.

A RACE FOR LIFE.

As soon as the boys reached the tunnel they set about making fires, for which purpose the wood had been brought. The tunnel itself was very narrow, there being only a single line of rail running through it. For the safety of workmen who might be repairing the line or the walls of the tunnel at any time, a number of man-holes, or large hollows, were made at distant intervals from one end to the other of the tunnel walls.

These holes were large enough to accommodate a man each, and two boys could just fill the space one of the hollows gave. There was no room for any one between the train and the walls of the tunnel otherwise, for the steps of the carriages projected to within a few inches of the brick boundaries whenever a train passed through.

It had been a time-honoured custom at Littlebury to play in this tunnel, which was considered quite safe, since the boys took care to learn the times when trains passed through it.

Part of the wood was heaped up at some distance from the entry to the tunnel, so that the light from the fire might not be seen from outside, and a similar fire was prepared towards the termination of it. These two fires, although large, were smaller than the one placed in the middle of the tunnel, in a man-hole which the workmen frequently used for the purpose.

Besides the wood bought at Christmas' tuck-shop, most of
the boys had gathered what they could on the way, so that there was plenty of material with which to make three roaring fires. A boy was entrusted with the care of each, and a heap of wood was allotted to him to feed his fire with.

When the fires were satisfactorily laid, Chutney went to each, and saturated the wood with paraffin, after which an eager attendant thrust a lighted piece of rope into the midst. The wood broke out into flame, and up rolled in the three places a volume of smoke and leaping flames, while the wood crackled and flung up sparks as it burned.

"Now," cried Evans, who had for the time recovered his good spirits with the rest, "what shall we play at?—I mean what trains shall we represent?"

One of the boys, who had been north behind one of the great engines racing there just then, suggested calling the one train the Flying Scotsman, whereupon another, who had been west, promptly capped the suggestion by calling the other the Flying Dutchman.

"That's it! that's splendid!" called the boys in chorus, and Gammon was appointed to be the engine of the Scotsman, and Curry the guard's-van. The Flying Dutchman had Challenge as its steerer, with Margarine behind. Each of the four boys carried a lantern, and amidst the greatest excitement began to pick out their carriages, as the rest of the boys were called. Various little difficulties had to be got over before all the boys were satisfied; but, in the end, Evans was placed next to his friend Bob, and preparations for a start were at once made.

Each train of boys went off to the opposite entrance of the tunnel, and there formed in a long line. Some one appointed for the purpose, who stood by the fire in the middle of the tunnel, blew a whistle loudly and shrilly, whereupon the rival trains started.

Every boy ran at top speed, holding on to the one in front with his right hand, and putting his left behind him for the
next to catch hold of. The boys at the beginning and end of each train held a lantern in their free hand.

Quicker and quicker the boys seemed to move, while the cold air of the tunnel smote against their cheeks in the race for the centre where the boy who tended the fire held a flag.

"They're coming! they're coming!" called out Gammon, at the head of the Flying Scotsman, and faster and faster still his train tore down the tunnel; but the team of boys headed by Bob Challenge passed the flag first, and was declared the winner in the race.

"One of our fellows slipped," grumbled a boy in Gammon's team.

"Well, if even he did, we had to drag old Margarine along, so I'm sure that made up for it," laughed Challenge.

"Why I was pushing the man in front of me forward the whole time," expostulated Margarine, with an air of indignation.

"Well, it wasn't a fair test; we started too soon after the walk," grumbled another. "I tell you what it is, men; let's both start from the same end, and we'll see who can get to the other entrance first."

"That's fair enough," several of the boys cried.

"Let's have a rest first, though," said Margarine, who was panting hard.

So the boys gathered round the great fire in the middle of the tunnel, and stood there talking, laughing, and making all kinds of cries, which reverberated strangely along the tunnel.

"Come on, men," said Evans; "we've rested long enough, now. Which end shall we start from?"

"We'll begin from the south end," said Gammon; and as this mattered little to any one, the boys walked to that end.

The two trains of boys were ranged side by side, the boy who looked after the fire at that end being commissioned to start them.
“Get ready; right away!” the boy cried, and he blew the whistle he had.

Once more the rival trains started and dashed into the tunnel, the boys shouting and cheering each other on.

“We’re winning! we’re winning!” cried Margarine, who was really making a tremendous pace in his anxiety not to impede the train of which he brought up the tail end.

“Hurrah! we’re nearly half a length in front of their first man,” cried Bob Challenge to his fellows, to encourage them; and the latter thereupon did their utmost to increase the lead, while Gammon urged his train to make a spurt and reduce the lead of their opponents.

Gammon’s train was creeping up a foot or two at a time, and had almost got on a level with the other train, when suddenly a loud cry came from the boy in the middle of the tunnel.

“Into the man-holes! quick! quick!” the boy cried; and even as he spoke the rumbling of a train was heard.

“It can’t be a train; there’s no train due!” some one called out reassuringly; but the rumbling grew more distinct, and the boy who had given the first warning came running towards them.

“Into the man-holes! into the man-holes!” he cried; and the startled boys turned and fled for safety.

The man-holes were at some distance apart, and those nearest were quickly filled, so that the boys who had been in the forward part of the trains were left without any place to get into safety without running for a considerable distance.

The scene became a startling one. The boys ran pell-mell through the tunnel, racing for their lives, as they well knew, while the dull roar of the pursuing train sounded louder and nearer at every yard they ran. Into the man-holes boy after boy dashed, and diminished the number flying for safety; but there were at least twenty boys left when a loud blast from the engineer’s whistle was heard as the train drew near to the end of that long, narrow tunnel.
The twenty flying boys were reduced to fifteen, to ten, to five, to four, to three, to two, to one—and then the engine seemed to be right on the top of the one boy left—and that boy was Evans.

Right opposite to where Evans ran was a man-hole, in which Bob Challenge was standing in safety, and on the other side of the tunnel was another man-hole; but Evans was too appalled to do anything but run frantically on, with his eyes almost starting from his head and his hands pressed to his ears to keep out the sound of the rushing engine which he expected each second would strike him down and pass over him, leaving his body a mangled mass beyond recognition.

In that second the whole of his life seemed to pass before Evans' eyes. He recalled his first day at school, the parting with all those he had left at home, the new friends he had made, the many escapades he had been in, and, last of all, the coming to Littlebury of the great friend who had won his affection—his new chum, Bob Challenge.

The engine was upon him, and Evans uttered an agonised shriek as he felt the strong rush of the wind presaging the train. The engine-driver had not seen him; even if he had, it would have been too late to be of service to the boy in such dire peril.

"Help! oh help!" cried Evans, as he flung up his arms, and his face turned ghastly pale.

But the shriek on his lips suddenly stopped; he felt that the train had struck him, and he fainted!

Something wrapped itself swiftly round the boy, dragged him from the rails, and hugged him close to the wall of the tunnel. But Evans was unconscious of this. Had he not been so, he would have known that his chum Bob, when he saw his dire peril, suddenly dashed from his own place of refuge, caught up the fainting boy in his arms, and instantly pressed both himself and the one he had rescued from certain death close to the sheltering wall of a man-hole, as with a shriek from the steam
whistle, a cloud of smoke from the funnel, and a heavy thundering of wheels, the train dashed by.

No sooner was the danger past, than the boys came out of the man-holes, and soon a crowd of them had gathered round where Evans lay apparently dead, with blood slowly trickling from one of his legs, while Bob Challenge was kneeling beside him, trying to find out what injuries the boy had received.

Some one brought a flaring piece of wood from the fire, and held it so that the flare from it lit up the boy's face.

No one spoke in that moment of suspense; the startling conclusion to their play in a forbidden place made every one seem suddenly stricken dumb.

"Let's carry him out into the open air," said Bob, as he rose from his kneeling position; "we must do our utmost to bring Dick round."

Bob felt quite convinced that Evans was dead, but he did not say so to his school-fellows, as he thought it would dishearten them from the attempt to find out if life still lingered in the boy. Several boys assisted at once, and Evans was soon placed upon a dry bank where his injuries were seen to. Some water was brought, and before long Evans revived.

It was found that with the exception of a few rather deep cuts where the engine must have just caught Evans' leg, the boy was practically uninjured.

"Thank goodness!" said Chutney, with a sigh of relief, as Evans sat up and declared he was better.

"Tie a handkerchief round my leg," whispered Evans, rather faintly; "when I get back I'll get Mother Myers to plaster it up and say nothing about it."

"Dick! Dick!" said Bob; "thank God you are safe!"

"Why, Bob," said some one, suddenly, "there's blood streaming down your arm!"

"Never mind me," said Bob, nonchalantly; but, even as he spoke, the effect of the injury he had received told upon him,
in spite of his efforts to make light of it. He turned giddy, stretched out his hands, groped at the air like a blind man, and fell heavily to the ground.

The rest of the boys were thrown into complete consternation by this unexpected occurrence. Evans staggered to his feet, and getting the water which had been brought to him in a tin found by one of the boys, he stooped down beside Bob and bathed his forehead. Chutney loosed the collar of the insensible boy, and then proceeded to chafe his hands; but still Bob showed no signs of returning animation.

A few of the boys, out of sheer terror, ran along the main road, which was close by, with a vague idea of seeking assistance at some house.

"Here's some one coming in a trap," cried one of the boys. "Let's see if he will drive to Coombs' house and bring him here."

Coombs was the school doctor, who was still attending to Tripp. As the trap drew near another boy exclaimed—

"Why, it's Coombs himself. He's been into Littlebury to see Tripp, and he's coming back."

This, oddly enough, was exactly what had taken place, for the doctor lived at some distance from Littlebury, having a partner in the place itself. Mr. Coombs was about to drive by with a friendly shake of his whip, when several of the boys called out to him.

"Anything wrong?" the doctor asked, seeing their pale and anxious faces.

"Two of our men hurt, Mr. Coombs," replied Curry, who was among those whom the doctor met; "and we're afraid one of them is very seriously hurt too!"

The doctor got down from the trap immediately, and having tied his horse to the near fence, accompanied the boys back to where the rest of the Littleburyites were.

The doctor stooped over Bob and examined him carefully.
He caught sight of the blood trickling down the boy's arm and asked—

"What does this all mean? Can any one tell me what has happened?"

Evans, who was feeling better, answered the doctor.

"We were playing in the tunnel, and a train came through unexpectedly. I should have been killed, but Bob rescued me, so they say. My leg is hurt a little, but not much; I'm afraid Bob got hurt much worse than I did."

The doctor made a quick examination of Bob. Just then the unconscious boy moved slightly, and gave signs that he was coming round. The doctor quickly staunched the wound Bob had received, and washed it with some of the water still remaining, after which he took a small case from his pocket and proceeded to bind up the injured arm.

"I'm better—I'm better," muttered Bob, feebly. "Where's Dick?"

The latter pressed the hand of his chum silently, while the doctor went on with his examination of his patient.

"There's nothing else wrong, is there?" Gammon asked.

"I'm afraid there is," answered the doctor, whose long thin fingers were being pressed against the boy's head. "He's had a nasty blow on his head, which, I fancy, was the real cause of his fainting."

"Get the rug from my trap," the doctor said a few minutes afterwards, and two of the boys went for it.

When the rug was brought, the doctor gently placed it beneath Bob, and then, instructing several of the bystanders what to do, by combined effort, Bob was carried to the trap. The seat was quickly removed, and the injured boy made comfortable in the bottom of the trap.

Every boy from Littlebury stared aghast at these proceedings. It was plain the whole affair of the tunnel must be told to the head-master, and that would mean dire punishment of some sort.
"My advice to you, boys, is to get back before I come," said the doctor, not unkindly. "You may trust me to say as little as I can about this affair."

There was an exclamation of gratitude which came from the boys' lips as they acted according to Mr. Coombs' suggestion, and at once made all haste back to Littlebury, for the afternoon was wearing to a close.

Evans walked beside the doctor, who, when they came to a convenient stile, bade him pull up the leg of his trousers and show the injury he too had received.

"Only a little flesh wound, nothing whatever to hurt; you need say nothing about that to the head-master unless you choose. I'll just put a little plaster on it, and you won't know you've been hurt at all, in a week," said Mr. Coombs.

He did as he promised, and in a few minutes the journey was resumed.

A great sensation was produced by the arrival of Bob and the doctor together. Mr. Bright happened to be in earnest conversation with the head-master at the Middle Gate entrance when the trap was stopped.

Doctor Chapple went forward. "What is the matter? one of my boys hurt?" he asked.

"Yes; I understand he met with an accident while playing with some of his school-fellows," said the doctor, making light of the true facts of the case. "I think his name is Challenge."

"Challenge!" cried the head-master and Mr. Bright together. They had just been discussing him; indeed, he had been the main subject of their conversation for half an hour or more.

"Not hurt much, I hope," said Mr. Bright, in real alarm, as he looked at Bob, who had again fainted away.

"I'm afraid I undertook a very grave responsibility in admitting Robert Challenge to Littlebury," said the head-master, as Mr. Bright and the doctor together lifted Challenge out of the trap.
Mr. Coombs paused a moment before carrying Challenge, with Mr. Bright's assistance, to the school infirmary.

"I hope you will look over this matter, Doctor Chapple," he said. "It seems to me that this unconscious boy has already suffered, and is likely to suffer considerably, for whatever prank brought him in this sad condition. Besides, the other boys who may have been with him are also sure to feel the matter no less acutely; and, you know, boys will be boys."

"Of course, after meeting with such an accident, I cannot very well punish Challenge further," agreed the Doctor, after a pause.

The head-master followed to the infirmary, where Challenge was placed upon a bed, and the doctor proceeded to make a final examination of his injuries.

"Lift your right arm up," said the doctor to Challenge, after carefully feeling it.

Challenge tried to do so, but it hung limp from just below the wrist.

"Get me some wood to make splints with," said Mr. Coombs to Mrs. Myers, who had come in haste to see her fresh charge. "I find he has broken his arm. Poor fellow! I don't wonder he keeps fainting from pain."

While the three were talking together, after Challenge was at last settled comfortably in bed, Evans came into the room, and seeing the head-master there, he said—

"I couldn't stop away any longer, sir. Whatever happens, you ought to know that Bob saved my life."

The head-master started; then he drew Evans away towards the window.

"What is this you say, Evans? Challenge saved your life? How?"

"I was playing on the railway line, sir, and a train approached me before I could get away. Nothing but Bob's risking his life for mine could have saved me. He ran across
the line in front of the engine, and snatched me up just in time."

"Challenge is a rather small boy to lift you up in that manner," said the head-master, thoughtfully. "Are you quite sure you are telling me the truth of the matter? How did you happen to get on the railway line?"

Evans hesitated. If he explained thoroughly, he felt he must inculpate the rest of his fellows. The head-master noticed this, and said, to Evans' great surprise—

"You may speak freely, Evans. I promise you that as you have been so outspoken about the matter, and, moreover, are so ready to testify to Challenge's bravery on your behalf, I will overlook whatever indiscretion you may have been guilty of this afternoon."

Evans still hesitated. He wanted pardon for the others as well.

"Why don't you make an open confession now?" said Doctor Chapple. "You may regret not doing so, perhaps, to-morrow."

"There were others concerned, Doctor," said Evans, slowly. "Ah, I see—a case of schoolboy honour. You have been breaking bounds, I suppose?"

Evans offered no denial.

"I fully intend to stop all school holidays, on account of another matter, certainly as serious a one as this, so that you can do your school-fellows no harm by speaking out, for I shall inflict no further punishment than the one already determined on. If there is anything you can say in Challenge's favour, Evans, I beg you to say it, for he needs it far more than you, as head of the Fourth Form, may be aware."

Evans, whose conduct was afterwards approved cordially by every one in his Form, as well as by those out of it who heard the details, then frankly narrated to the head-master what had happened. As he concluded, the doctor left his patient's side, and crossed the room to the head-master.
"I think he will do now all right," said Mr. Coombs. "Unless feverish symptoms manifest themselves, there will be no need for me to call until to-morrow afternoon. I will give Mrs. Myers instructions how to proceed and to dress the wounds. It was an act of the utmost bravery, Doctor Chapple; I hope you will not forget that."

The doctor bowed to the head-master, and left the room. Meeting Mrs. Myers at the door, he hurriedly gave her instructions, and departed.

After a few more words with Evans, the head-master too left the infirmary, where Evans sat down beside his chum, and watched him as he fell into a quiet slumber.

Tripp, who occupied a bed on the other side of the room, and who had been all eyes and ears, called out to Evans to come and tell him all about it. But Tripp's curiosity was not to be satisfied just then, for the tea-bell sounded, and in came Mrs. Myers, carrying some hot toast and tea for Tripp, while she at once peremptorily ordered Evans off to take his place with the rest of the school.

"The idea!" said Mrs. Myers to herself, as Evans went away very reluctantly. "He wanted to stay here, and miss his tea! I'll be having a whole infirmary full soon, if I don't keep a firm hand over them." She nodded to herself approvingly, then went across and sat down by Tripp.

"Say your grace; that's right," said she. "Now make a good tea, for I want to get rid of you out of the infirmary."

"But I don't want to go; you are so kind to me," murmured Tripp, between his ravages upon the toast.

"Stuff!" said Mrs. Myers. "Me kind to you! The idea!"

She took out her knitting, and went on with it, glancing up many a time at Tripp's face, and feeling very happy in the motherly task she was called upon to pursue.

"When am I going out of the infirmary?" Tripp asked Mrs. Myers, when he had finished his tea.

"In three days' time; but you are to sleep here, where
I can see to you, for a week longer. I spoke to the headmaster about it,” said Mrs. Myers.

“I’m glad I am not going back to sleep in the dormitory at once,” answered Tripp. “I wonder whether Challenge——”

Mrs. Myers held up her hand warningly, for the injured boy stirred in his bed, and Tripp’s sentence remained uncompleted.
CHAPTER XV.

THE INVESTIGATION BEGINS.

There were all kinds of strange rumours current in the dormitories on the night that succeeded Challenge's accident. A little truth was mixed with a great deal of fable, and many were the conjectures as to what had really happened at the Black Cadger's. Those who knew the details of the practical joking, as well as those who had had a hand in carrying out the Fourth Form vengeance, were alike in declaring that some effort must be made to clear the school of the grave charge resting upon it.

The Fourth-Form men settled the matter by determining to hold a meeting of their House of Commons, in the house on the marsh, where the matter should be fully investigated, and those who had been appointed to inflict the necessary punishment on the Black Cadger might give a clear account of how it was done. It was commonly believed that the theft had been perpetrated by some other hands than a school-fellow's; but it was decided to be most emphatically necessary to search into the matter because of what had transpired.

At teatime that afternoon the head-master went into the dining-hall, and called for silence. He plunged at once into the subject uppermost in his mind. No reference was made to the accident in the tunnel, but the Doctor stated that a grave charge hung over the whole school. He took a gloomy view of the matter, and it was evident he suspected
that the culprit was a pupil of Littlebury. From the nature of his speech, Evans and a great many of the Fourth Form men felt that the head-master was talking at them, as if quite convinced of their guilty knowledge of the wrong-doer.

"It is painful to me," said Doctor Chapple, in conclusion, "to feel that I must state my belief that we have unfortunately a thief in this grand old school, for I cannot help remembering the long feud between the head gamekeeper and a certain portion of Littlebury School. At present, however, I cannot fix upon the guilty party, so I am reluctantly bound to take precautions against the recurrence of such a disaster. My intentions then, are these:—For the rest of the term all half-holidays will be stopped, with the exception of the one approaching, and this is only excepted because otherwise it may afford the masters some inconvenience. After that holiday, the whole school will be required to spend the usual half-holidays in the Form-rooms, with the exception of the monitors, of course. Further, I may add, that if the culprit is not discovered by the end of the present term, I fully intend to shorten the Easter recess by at least a week. Meanwhile, if the guilty individual, or individuals, choose to come to me and express contrition, I will remove the punishment from the rest of the school. The monitors are asked to at once find out what they can about the matter, and to report the same to me."

Doctor Chapple went out of the dining-hall, with a very stern expression of countenance. The boys stared at each other in amazement at the sweeping effect of the punishment.

"It's beastly bad luck," said Margarine, as the boys went off to prep. "Nobody out of Littlebury did that, I know. How can we find out the thief when he can't possibly be among us?"

"It's fearful, to lose all our halves, and then get a week cut off the holidays too; I call it a shame!" said Gammon.

"Well, we must go into the matter," said Chutney. "It's
my opinion the Doctor suspects one of us in particular, or he wouldn't have spoken so pointedly."

"Who's that?" asked several.

Chutney was slow to answer, but at last he said, looking at Comber, who was near him—

"I believe the Doctor's making the same mistake that you made, Comber; I believe he suspects Bob."

"Don't you say that again, whatever you think!" cried Evans, angrily. "I won't hear one word said against Bob. He saved my life, and a thief wouldn't have had the pluck to act like that. Whoever did it, Bob was innocent, I'm certain."

"Well, don't get your hair out of curl," said Chutney. "You don't suppose I think Bob stole the purse or the money either, do you? I only said that's what I fancy the Doctor was hinting at. As for me, there are a good many I'd far sooner think did it than Bob."

"Well, why should the Doctor suspect Bob, then?" demanded Evans, who was ready to fly into a passion with any one who said a word against his rescuer.

"I think it's this way," replied Chutney, as the boys drew near their Form-room: "Bob came here just in time to join in that affair in the woods; he's been one of the foremost in everything we've done this term, and I know Jackson, the monitor, hates Bob. You may depend upon it, Jackson's said what he could against him. We all know what a beast Jackson is."

"It's all very well, to talk like this," said Parkinson, who spoke to get Comber's approval, "but sentiment is one thing, and stealing another. Nobody wants to deny that Bob acted bravely this afternoon, and while he's lying ill we all must feel a little worried about him." Parkinson did not look very worried, though, in spite of his words, as he continued, "Isn't it very likely that the fact of having stolen this watch and purse accounts for Bob's behaviour this afternoon? You see,
he might have thought, if the crime were traced to him, the
fact of having saved Evans would also save him from being
expelled."

"There's a very great deal in that," said Comber, with a
cordial nod to Parkinson. Nothing that the latter could have
said would have pleased Comber better.

"We'll talk it over in the dormitory, and decide what to
do," said Curry, shortly, as they reached the door of the Fourth
Form class-room.

Mr. Bright was seated at his desk when the boys entered,
and so the conversation was abruptly stopped till after Chapel
that night, when the decision to hold a meeting of their
House of Commons, on the sole remaining half-holiday, was
decided upon.

Meanwhile, the head-master sent for the monitors and
addressed them at some length in his study, finishing by
urging upon them to leave no stone unturned to discover
the thief.

"Suppose, sir," said Jackson, "the thief should turn out
to be the new man, who was injured to-day? If I may
venture to ask, how would the discovery affect his position
in the school?"

Jackson spoke with a very respectful air, watching the
Doctor's face as the latter replied—

"Of course, whoever the culprit is, I must try and keep
the case from being made public. I may say that the news
was brought to me this afternoon, and that I had a long talk
with Mr. Bright concerning it. I am bound to say that Mr.
Bright feels very strongly on the matter, and has urged many
reasons upon me why Challenge cannot possibly be guilty.
Mr. Bright has considerable faith in the poor fellow who now
lies in the infirmary. I understand that Challenge is invariably
courteous to him, and works steadily and well in class. More­
over, Mr. Bright says that he shows distinct promise of one
day doing great credit to Littlebury. That, of course, I trust,
may be so. I must confess that circumstances, in my mind, seem to point to Challenge as guilty. It will be a terrible thing for me to have to expel a man from Littlebury, knowing, as I do, that he has just performed a deed of self-sacrifice that few of us indeed would have the courage to do. At the same time I cannot overlook such a grave offence as theft. I have written to Lord Dunsandle’s head keeper—who, I regret to say, is confined to his bed—that I am going to call upon him to-morrow, if he can receive me. If Challenge be indeed guilty—although I trust he is not—I shall, of course, as soon as he is well, expel him. I hope you will all endeavour to help me to bring this charge home to the guilty parties. Whether one man or six are concerned in this matter, I shall most certainly expel whoever is found out to be guilty. I think, Jackson, you will do well to make careful investigation in the Fourth Form, for I somehow feel convinced that, even if Challenge be innocent, the culprits are under your special charge. It is now time for Chapel; to-morrow I hope you will begin, each one of you, investigations which will result, let us hope, in clearing the innocent and discovering the guilty.”

“I’ll find him out, somehow,” said Jackson to one of the other monitors, as they left the Doctor’s library. “Fortunately the Doctor gives us every freedom to use our monitorial powers, and I will leave no stone unturned to clear the school of the charge.”

“I hope the culprit, or one of them, isn’t Challenge, though,” said Gregson, thoughtfully. Gregson was a monitor in good repute among the men of Littlebury, and was the holder of a valuable classical scholarship.

“Why?” asked Jackson, curiously.

“Oh, well, you saw his plucky play against Hillside in that socker match; and besides, a fellow who’d risk his life for a chum, you know——” Gregson did not finish his sentence.

“I should think that Evans knows the whole affair from end to end,” said Lawson, who was present; “he and
Challenge are inseparable, you know. I've heard from Parkinson, and Comber too, that when that pair get together there's always some mischief brewed."

"I wouldn't take notice of anything Parkinson said, if I were you, Lawson," said Gregson.

"And why not, pray?" asked Lawson, a little vexed.

"Because he's always to be found smoking about in the half-holidays. I see him frequently. In an outhouse, behind a stack of hay—in any place, in fact, that he thinks is safe—Parkinson can be found, and with him his boon companion, Comber. I understand that the Fifth Form have offered membership of that club of theirs to the pair of them. You always know what to expect when a man is patronised by those in the Form above him, or toaded to by those in a Form below him."

Gregson did not know that Lawson himself had accepted membership of this same club, and that the conclusion of his remark was therefore somewhat personal.

"I think you have no right to speak so disparagingly of either Parkinson or Comber," said Lawson, hotly; "and, as they are friends of mine—"

"Oh, if they are friends of yours," said Gregson, with considerable emphasis upon the word, "I have no more to say." He turned and went off briskly, for the Chapel bell was clanging in its monotonous way.

"I think you are right, Lawson," said Jackson, "and I'm much obliged to you for the hint about Evans. I can't very well go and question Challenge while he's lying in bed, and with a broken arm too, so they say, but I'll get it out of Evans. Can you help me in the matter?"

"Come to my study after Chapel, and we'll talk it over," said Lawson.

Jackson accordingly went, and the two held a long conversation.

"Don't you think it would be a good plan to get Evans in front of the monitors?" asked Lawson. "You see, if that
were done, he would either have to answer and own up what
he knows of this affair, or else tell a lie."

"He might choose a third course, and be silent, though," said Jackson, thoughtfully.

"Oh, we'll soon make him speak, one way or the other," laughed Lawson. "Besides, he's in your Form; you have the
right of caning him, so it's as easy as A B C to get it out of
Evans. I dare say if he's obstinate he'll soon find his tongue,
if you keep on licking him, you know."

"It would be difficult for me to do that," said Jackson, who
was carefully weighing over the pros and cons. "I was caning
a fellow, or, rather, I had caned one and was going to cane
another, the other day, when old Freddy himself interfered."

"That's your fault for doing it where old Freddy can inter-
fere," retorted Lawson. "Why not get Evans here on some
pretext, and cane him into a confession?"

"That would be a capital way of getting at the secret, but
there are two objections to it. If all the monitors are present,
then Gregson will come, and I know he's too chicken-hearted
to see a fellow thrashed badly without interfering. The other
objection is that Stokes, who shares this study with you, will
not consent to such an inquiry being held here."

"I'll answer the second objection first," said Lawson. "Stokes is going out to a party to morrow evening, and the
Doctor has agreed for him to come home later than usual, so
Stokes won't be in your way."

"That is fortunate," said Jackson; "but isn't it rather a
late hour to begin the inquiry? I suppose you mean after
Chapel?"

"Exactly, and that is just the very time, for you are not
likely to be disturbed in the investigation. Now, as to your
first objection. That is not so easy to get over. Gregson is an
ass, just as big an ass as Stokes; if we were all like them, the
whole power of us monitors would vanish in a few terms.
The y go in for the humane, let'-em-alone theory, and don't
believe in whacking even a beastly fag. You'd get support from most of the rest of us, but perhaps just as Evans was on the point of letting it out, Gregson would interfere and spoil it all. It's absurd to do that when a good stiff caning might get the whole school out of the Doctor's black books. Besides, we can't have Littlebury disgraced by such affairs as robbing a gamekeeper of his watch and purse."

"Just so. Then what do you advise?" asked Jackson.

Lawson was silent for a few minutes as he pondered the affair over. At last he thought of a solution.

"I'll tell you. Why, the whole thing's as easy as possible to carry out. There's no need to say a word to the other monitors at all. I'll arrange the whole thing for you."

"How?" asked Jackson.

"In this way" answered Lawson. "When Chapel is over to-morrow night, I'll ask Evans to come and have a chat with me. I'll tell him, I've heard something about Challenge and the theft from the Black Cadger's, and then he's sure to come, for I dare say he suspects Challenge does know something about it. I suppose you know that on that very afternoon, both Evans and Challenge were seen to come back to school very late? Comber saw them; he told me so just before tea."

"Yes, that is all right," agreed Jackson; "but what's next?"

"Why, Evans will come with lamb-like innocence right into the lion's mouth. I'll chat to him for a few minutes, hinting that I know a lot, without saying much, and in the mean time you can come in—casually, you know—to see me about something. Of course you will be surprised to find Evans there—you understand?"

"Yes, I understand that. It's a very good idea, to my way of thinking," agreed Jackson.

"You can get over your surprise, and then ask me if you can talk to Evans, in my presence. I'll give you permission, and, as a monitor, I'll put a few questions to him myself, if
necessary. Once he gets confused or stubborn, threaten him; after that the ground will be perfectly clear."

"Exactly. I'm awfully obliged to you, Lawson," said Jackson, rising. "I must go now to the dormitory. Of course you won't say a word to any one about the plan?"

"Not a word," agreed Lawson, "and I'll see that my cane is renewed. I broke mine this morning over two beastly fags who spilt my ink on the tablecloth when clearing the table. I'll get a stout one handy for the occasion."

The two monitors wished each other good night, and there the matter rested till the next evening.

Lawson watched for Evans, as he promised, after chapel, and spoke to him. He told Evans he bore him no ill-will for his former trick, and invited him to his study.

Evans was rather in good spirits; he had heard during the day that his chum Bob was much better, and had been promised by the head-master permission to visit him the next day.

"It's very good of you to interest yourself in getting Challenge—that is to say, my friend Bob—cleared of this charge," said Evans to Lawson, gratefully, as he sat with the latter toasting his shins before a huge fire in Lawson's study.

"I suppose you won't keep me long, whatever you have to say; the fact is, so much suspicion is turned upon the unlucky Fourth Form, that we are watched in all directions. I expect Jackson, the monitor, will soon discover that I am absent if I go back to the dormitory late. He's keeping a close watch on us, and I suppose he's only right there. All the same, it's too bad. We have our escapades in the Fourth just the same as other Forms, but to pin a charge of theft upon us is too much. What I can't understand is the growing suspicion against Bob Challenge. I can't help thinking some fellow is poisoning every one's mind against him. I think it's against all that is fair and right," concluded Evans, who spoke in a deferential tone to Lawson throughout.
"People will talk, you know," said Lawson, in an off-hand manner; "but it's best not to take notice. I should think you Fourth Formers can easily clear yourselves. Of course, we all understand that Challenge couldn't have done the thing, if, indeed, he did it at all, single-handed. Depend upon it, there were several engaged in the matter. I won't ask you if you were one, but I should advise you, if you were, to go to the Doctor and make a clean breast of it."

Lawson was watching the door furtively all this time. He was merely talking to kill time till Jackson came, and he expected every minute that Evans would put him some awkward question he would find difficult to answer. Evans, on the other hand, although he did not wish to appear so, was getting very anxious for Lawson to explain the reason of his being invited to the study. Lawson had said he had something important to tell Evans about Challenge, but seemed to be keeping from it.

"Of course, as a monitor, you have a right to advise me to go to the head-master about the affair if I was in it," assented Evans; "but as I never saw the Black Cadger's property, and certainly never touched it, I have nothing to confess about, so I shall stay away. All the same, I hope the mystery will be cleared up soon."

"I hope so—I feel sure it will," said Lawson, with a touch of irony in his tone that Evans did not perceive, for he heard the sound of footsteps coming towards his study door.

A minute afterwards the door was thrown open, and Jackson came in saying—

"I say, Stokes—" Jackson stopped, as if surprised not to see Stokes; then he continued, "I'm sorry to interrupt you, Lawson, but I promised to lend Stokes this book; perhaps you won't mind giving it to him."

"Not at all," said Lawson, rising, and taking the book.

"Hallo, Evans!" said Jackson, as if noticing him for the first time, "you ought to be in the dormitory by now. By
the way, Lawson, there's something I want to ask Evans; as he's here, do you mind my doing so now?"

"Not at all. Do as you like, by all means," replied Lawson, carelessly. "Here's a chair; sit down and join us."

"I'll be going, I think," said Evans, rising, for intuitively he guessed Jackson meant him no good.

"Not you," said Lawson, as he pushed Evans back into the chair; "I don't suppose Jackson will keep you long, and, as he's your monitor, you need be in no hurry."

"Sit down, Evans," said Jackson, with a show of friendliness.

Evans accordingly sat down. He was caught in the snare which the two monitors had prepared so skillfully for him. Jackson's eyes gleamed with a sudden light. He felt he had Evans at his mercy, and that the secret of the theft was his.

"Now, Evans," began Jackson, "I want to ask you a few questions about this Black Cadger business. As you are at the top of the Fourth Form, I think it best to begin with you. Afterwards I mean to question all whom I think likely to have had a hand in this affair."

"Of course, Evans won't mind answering you," interjected Lawson, as he watched the latter's face keenly; "he knows that this affair has to be inquired into by us monitors, and that any one who refuses to give us what information he can, must come under suspicion as one of the guilty parties."

Evans turned pale. He felt that Lawson had entrapped him, and that there was no chance to escape from Jackson, who had, he felt sure, asked the former to assist him.

"There is nothing I am afraid to answer, provided it does not incriminate any one else," said Evans. "Of course, Jackson, you won't ask me to peach on other fellows in the Fourth."

"Oh," said Jackson, in astonishment, "so you own at once that the Fourth Form knows something about this affair?"

"We had a long talk over the matter last night in the dormitory before you came up," continued Evans, "and we
determined, among other things, to own that we have paid out the Black Cadger for sneaking upon us with regard to that expedition in the woods."

"So you own that the Fourth Form was concerned in the robbery?" cried Lawson, in sheer amazement.

"I did not tell Jackson that at all," contradicted Evans. "What I said, I will repeat; my words were: we determined, among other things, to own that we have paid the Black Cadger out for sneaking upon us with regard to that expedition in the woods."

"Well, we may have different views as to what paying out the Black Cadger may mean," said Lawson, dryly; "but, from what you say, I suppose you think paying a man out and stealing from him is one and the same thing?"

"That is the mistake you are making," said Evans to Lawson, quietly but firmly; "but Jackson, who is our monitor, has not said so."

"I should really like to know what you do mean, Evans," said Jackson, supporting his fellow-monitor's remarks.

"I mean this: the Black Cadger sneaked, and we went to his house and paid him off accordingly."

"How did you do it?" Jackson queried.

"We blindfolded him, tied him in a chair and tied a doll in his arms. Then we put him outside his door and left him there, and at once came away."

"So that is the yarn you fellows of the Fourth Form have concocted, is it?" asked Lawson, incredulously.

"It is the truth," insisted Evans. "We touched nothing belonging to the Black Cadger."

"What did you blindfold him for, then?" asked Jackson, suspiciously.

"The Black Cadger was asleep in front of the fire; we stole behind him——"

"I dare say you did," interjected Lawson, "and stole from him as well."
Jackson glanced rather angrily at his fellow-monitor for interrupting just then, and Lawson subsided for a while, feeling that his habit of repartee had got the better of his discretion.

"Go on, Evans," commanded Jackson; "you were saying you got behind the Black Cadger——"

"When he was asleep in his chair," continued Evans, ignoring Lawson's insinuation, "and while one of us pinioned him another of us bound his eyes. If we hadn't done this latter, he would have recognised us and so told the Doctor, for he knows a number of Littleburyites by sight, and he could have easily picked out any one among us that he didn't previously know. Of course, he would have come up to the school the next day; at least, we thought so."

"You don't happen to know that your treatment of the Black Cadger brought on his rheumatism, from which he has suffered considerably," said Jackson; "and you may not know, Evans, that the head-master went to-day and had an interview with the Black Cadger. I will say this much for you, that what you have said thus far agrees with the Black Cadger's complaints. Doctor Chapple sent for me this afternoon, and told me what he had heard from the man's own lips."

Lawson was a little surprised at this; he had not seen Jackson since the previous night to speak to, nor had he heard the result of the head-master's visit to the Black Cadger.

"Tell me what else you Fourth Formers decided to do besides owning to this wanton attack upon a blameless game-keeper," said Jackson.

"We decided to relieve the rest of the school from the punishment the Doctor threatened by narrowing down the charge to our own Form. We own we went to the Black Cadger's, but we deny the theft—we deny it altogether," said Evans, flushing as he thought of the imputation raised against his Form.
"It seems to me, Evans," said Jackson, "that you fellows in the Fourth have run wild lately. I won't say any more about the fact that you flung ink at me at the beginning of term; probably the first time a monitor has been disrespectfully treated in Littlebury."

Evans was about to speak, denying this was done purposely, when Jackson held up his hand.

"You needn't deny it; you all did that before, and I could not see my way to believe you. Your next offence, omitting countless minor ones, was that extraordinary nocturnal expedition in the woods, coupled with taking or sending Tripp out at night in such a condition that for days his life was despaired of. The Doctor for that offence alone intended to inflict condign punishment upon the guilty parties, but there you have so far outwitted him. I was informed by the head-master in my interview with him to-day, that Tripp acknowledges he was forced by some one in the Fourth to make that expedition, but he resolutely refused to give the name of his persecutor."

"There's a pretty big black list accumulating against the Form," remarked Lawson, who had found his tongue again.

"Tripp declared that he was afraid to name his persecutor, and that he had solemnly promised not to do so. It is getting to a fine state of things when the head-master is thus baffled in his inquiries by such deep-laid schemes as that," added Jackson.

"Then there's that accident to Challenge," added Lawson. "I understand that the Doctor has magnanimously promised to overlook the fact that some sixty or seventy of our fellows broke bounds and went to play in the most dangerous place they could possibly find. Of course the head-master naturally feels some qualms in adding that affair to the list of offences in which the Fourth Form is directly concerned, after hearing of Challenge's deed of daring, which, however, I dare say was exaggerated to throw the Doctor off the real reason why Challenge met with his accident."
THE INVESTIGATION BEGINS.

Lawson's speech was intended as a direct attempt to rouse Evans. He felt that Jackson was not getting worked up into a passion, and he thought if Evans broke out into indignant denials this might lead to his punishment.

"I only know that Challenge saved my life," said Evans, quietly, "and if ever I get the chance I will repay him."

"Very heroic!" commented Lawson, mockingly. "It's easy to talk; wait till you get the chance. I don't suppose you'll prove such a hero as you fancy."

Evans bit his lip to prevent himself from making an angry retort.

All this time, Jackson, so far from wandering from the matter, as Lawson supposed, was, instead, thinking his hardest how to bring home the charge to the guilty ones by means of Evans. There was silence for a minute, then Jackson asked—

"What were the other things you fellows decided to do? I think you said there were some more."

"We decided to hold a meeting and to investigate into the case," said Evans.

"By the way," said Jackson, suddenly, "how many of you went to the Black Cadger's that afternoon?"

"I cannot tell you that," replied Evans. "That is a matter I am bound in honour not to divulge. I may say, however, that we are just as anxious in the Fourth to clear ourselves of this charge as the Doctor is to clear the reputation of the school. If after we have concluded our investigations we believe that one or more of our fellows were concerned in the theft, we shall give them twenty-four hours in which to give themselves up to the Doctor as guilty. If that is not done, it will be my place, as head man of the Form, to put the result of our investigation and our conclusion before the head-master."

"You expect you will find out, I suppose?" asked Lawson.

"We mean to make the effort, Lawson," replied Evans, respectfully.
"You mean you are going to throw dust in the eyes of every one by making an investigation, or, rather, a show of one; for, of course, you will find as a verdict that the Fourth Form is simply immaculate and erroneously suspected! Your idea of confessing to having paid out the Black Cadger, and then concocting this inquiry to prove you were all innocent of stealing the watch and chain, is ingenious; but in my idea it won't hold water. Why don't you answer Jackson's straightforward question, and say how many of you went to execute the vengeance of the Fourth? If you are as innocent as you pretend, why don't you give some signs of it?"

"I think," said Jackson to Evans, before the latter could reply to Lawson's remarks, "that my question as to how many of you went to pay out the Black Cadger should be answered."

"I am sorry I cannot answer it," said Evans, slowly.

"Were you one of them?" inquired Lawson.

Evans looked at Jackson. "As monitor of the Fourth, do you wish me to answer that question? Is it a fair one?"

"Perfectly fair," retorted Jackson, who was getting angry at last. "You don't call it sneaking to answer a question that only concerns yourself, do you?"

"No, it isn't peaching to do that," replied Evans.

"Well, then, speak out, and don't shuffle with your words so, Evans. Answer me, if you won't answer Lawson. Were you or were you not concerned in the affair? Did you go into the Black Cadger's house on the afternoon when his purse and watch were stolen?"

"I did," answered Evans, frankly.

"I thought as much," said Lawson. "We're beginning to let a little daylight into the affair. How many went with you?"

"I have declined to answer that question before," said Evans, "and I still decline to do so."

"Sheer obstinacy, because he knows that once we get the names of those who went we shall have the offence narrowed
down to those who actually had a hand in it," muttered Lawson to Jackson, but sufficiently loud for Evans to overhear.

The latter made no remark, but waited to see what Jackson would do.

"I'm very sorry, Evans," said Jackson, slowly and deliberately, "that you both know those who were actually concerned in this theft, and are determined to shield them from the consequences of their folly. I ask you this once more: will you give me their names?"

"Stand up and answer at once," commanded Lawson.

Evans at once stood up and answered, "No."

"Then there is no alternative for me but to make you answer," said Jackson, scowling. "Lawson, will you lend me your cane?"

Lawson got up and brought the cane from a drawer in the table and handed it to Jackson, who stood before his intended victim determined to wrest the secret from his unwilling lips.

"You shall answer my question," cried Jackson; "you shall not keep such a guilty secret any longer. I will cane you till you do."

Evans made no reply; he shivered as the first blow fell heavily on his shoulders, but stood quite still, while Jackson rained down blow upon blow that cut into the flesh beneath his jacket.

Lawson sat down in his chair, and, tilting it back upon the two hind legs, looked idly on. He was glad that Jackson had not tried his own method of punishing Evans, which the latter had evaded by throwing him to the ground and escaping on the day when he came for the boot.

Jackson was very strong, and the cane had inflicted a most severe punishment upon Evans before it was necessary for the monitor to pause to take breath.

"You don't hit him hard enough," coolly suggested Lawson, during the brief respite afforded to the unfortunate Evans.
"Why, you haven't made the little beggar cry yet! Shall I take a turn?"

Jackson knew, however, that he could justify his own action in thrashing Evans to the head-master, but he had no right to delegate his power to another.

"I ask you for the last time: will you own up?" Jackson questioned Evans, as he got ready to continue the task he had set himself to.

Evans maintained a dogged silence. He felt sick and giddy with the terrible castigation he had received, but he was as determined as ever to inculpate no one. Moreover, Bob, who had risked his life for him, was among the rest of the five who had gone to the Black Cadger's that eventful day.

"Very well," said Jackson, and he raised his cane once more.

The blows fell harder than ever, but still Evans would not give in; while Jackson, in his anger, lost complete control over himself, and cut and slashed at his victim almost regardless of where the blows fell.

Evans found his feet becoming unsteady under him; he tried his hardest to keep still, but it was of no avail, for, beneath a torrent of tremendous blows, he fell on the floor of the room.

"Get up; it's no use shamming!" commanded Jackson.

Evans struggled to rise, but could not manage it; he was too exhausted

"If you don't, I'll cane you where you are," insisted Jackson.

"I don't think he minds your cane one bit," said Lawson. He had advised this course, and, as it seemed likely to fail, he was more enraged with Evans, if possible, than Jackson was.

"There's my ash stick in the corner; try that," continued Lawson.

"Get it for me, then," said Jackson, who did not care to leave his victim an opportunity to make for the door, from which he had been resolutely blocked.
Lawson at once did so, and Jackson, flinging the cane aside, took the ash stick in his hand.

"Get up! get up, you little beggar!" he cried, and he raised the stick to strike him.

"What does this mean?" asked some one who suddenly flung the door open and caught Jackson's hand before the stick could descend. It was Stokes, who had returned from the party Lawson had mentioned.

"It means," said Jackson, "that the little beggar's shamming. He knows who stole the things from the Black Cadger's, and he refuses to tell."

"How came he on the ground?" asked Stokes, curtly.

"He fell down because he wished to avoid being punished," answered Jackson.

"Have you already beaten him?" Stokes asked, as his keen eyes caught sight of the cane lying on the ground.

"I have given him a caning, certainly," said Jackson, coolly.

"What business is it of yours?"

"By what right do you dare to use this study as a place to inflict punishment upon one of the men you unfortunately have power over?" asked Stokes.

"I have a right to punish Evans where I like and when I like," said Jackson, sullenly.

"And how you like, I suppose!" said Stokes, thoroughly roused. "You think you can make use of my study in which to beat a culprit without my permission, I suppose?"

"Lawson gave me permission," said Jackson, who began to see that matters had taken an awkward turn.

"I deny Lawson's right to do so; I am senior of the two, and I must say I am ashamed that Lawson has apparently witnessed your cruelty without attempting to stop you. Had I not come in, I suppose you would have beaten Evans with that ash stick—and on the ground, too! You miserable coward, you!"

Jackson turned deathly pale. He could scarcely believe that such words were said to him.
“Get up, youngster,” said Stokes to Evans.
The latter struggled faintly to his feet, and then leant against the wall for support.
“Poor little chap!” said Stokes, with a sympathetic air. “There, go off to your dormitory and try to sleep. That’s the best remedy I can offer.”
Stokes opened the door, and Evans went out, making his way slowly to the dormitory, where several of the boys were still awake and heard his story with amazement.
“We’ll give Jackson something for this,” said Chutney to his brother.
So when the dormitory seemed quiet, the twins got out of bed and arranged a little reception for Jackson.
When the latter, after settling accounts with Stokes, came to bed, the first thing he did was to fall headlong over a box placed very conveniently just inside the dormitory by the door. When he got into bed, he found that it had been made into apple pie. Jackson’s pillow was missing altogether, and although he searched the dormitory for it, he could not find it, and was obliged, therefore, to make a pillow of some clothes. He had just got comfortably settled in bed when the bedstead gave way and shot him to the floor.
Jackson put down all these annoyances to Evans, but the latter was at last sleeping peacefully, forgetful for the time of the castigation he had received, and the events which had brought his misfortune about.
Margarine heard the crash of the falling bedstead and awoke. He listened as Jackson declaimed against the perpetrator of these ingenious tricks, but the fat boy only snored vigorously as if he were fast asleep.
Margarine guessed that the twins were the culprits, and at breakfast, the next morning, he watched their faces. But these revealed nothing; the twins knew it was not considered good form to play tricks on a monitor, and so said nothing—nor did Jackson ever discover the real perpetrators.
CHAPTER XV.

IN THE MEADS.

The excitement at Littlebury grew more intense day by day. The whole school was soon in possession of the information that Evans had acknowledged the guilt rested upon the Fourth Form. Moreover, the head-master interviewed the Form, and, after enlarging on the enormity of the offence committed, stated that he would give the boys a few days to discover for themselves the black sheep among them.

One of the first things to happen after this was that the Senior Forms held a mass meeting in the great hall, and at their "House of Lords" passed a resolution, calling upon the rest of the school to put in Coventry every boy in the Fourth Form until the crime was brought home to the guilty party or parties.

The half-holiday came, which was to be the last of the term, unless the head-master was made aware of the culprits' names. There was, indeed, excitement felt that day, for it had also leaked out that the Fourth Form, at its House of Commons, intended to try Evans, Margarine, Chutney, Comber, and Bob, although the last was still lying ill in the infirmary, but reported to be getting rapidly well. Tripp still slept in the same room with Bob, but was otherwise attending to his ordinary school routine.

None of the five boys inculpated were allowed to be present at the Fourth Form meeting, and Tripp was specially excluded
also, as it was intended to prevent whoever was found guilty from discovering whose evidence and votes convicted him.

Immediately dinner was over, the boys of the Fourth Form went off to their meeting-house, while the Seniors stood about the quadrangles discussing the affair, and speculating upon whom the charge would be fixed.

Bob, of course, knew nothing of the affair, and was engaged that afternoon in reading a book from the school library, which Evans had sent him. The latter, accompanied by Chutney and Margarine, went into their Form-room, where Mr. Bright had thoughtfully advised them to spend the afternoon, to avoid the suspicious glances of their school-fellows. Comber at first, as one of those equally suspected, joined them; but he soon discovered that he was not wanted by the trio, and took his departure, going towards the Meads for a walk alone.

"It's a jolly bad look-out for us," said Margarine, in the course of a conversation between the three in the class-room. "Suppose our House of Commons makes a mistake and pins the guilt to the wrong parties?"

"I don't see how the guilt can be brought home to any one," said Chutney; "but I do know this, if any one stole the Black Cadger's purse and money out of the five of us suspected, I'm certain that one was Comber."

"I don't believe that for a minute," said Evans, quickly. "I know Comber's a bully and the rest of it, but I don't think he's a thief as well."

"You seem to have suddenly turned Comber's partisan," said Chutney, who was a good deal surprised at the remark. "Perhaps you won't mind telling us who you think did steal the things, then. There were only five of us. You won't blame Bob, we all know, and you don't think Comber did it; that leaves three of us—myself, Margarine, and you. Of course, you don't blame yourself, so that you evidently suspect me or Margarine—perhaps both."

"Don't talk nonsense, you goat!" said Evans. "I don't
suspect any one in the whole of Littlebury. My idea is this: while the Black Cadger was tied in his chair, some tramp went along, and, seeing the chance, went into the house and stole the things."

"I don’t think that’s likely," commented Margarine. "The Black Cadger’s house lies out of the high road, and a tramp always keeps to the main road, except in summer, when there’s a shady tree in the wood to lie under. If no one at Littlebury stole the watch and money, who could it have been, then? I don’t think one of the under-keepers could have done it—it would have been too dangerous a thing to try on. No, I feel certain, somehow, that the House of Commons will decide it was a school affair, and I wish with all my heart we were safely out of it."

“Well, you needn’t get into a blue funk about it, croaker,” ejaculated Chutney. “Whenever we’ve tried a case in the House of Commons, I’ve always noticed we’ve hit on the right party. I believe the same thing will happen this afternoon; and, for my part, if there should happen to be a mistake, and they pitch on me, I’ll go straight to the Doctor and own up.”

“That would be a fool’s trick,” said Margarine. “You’d get expelled for what you didn’t do, for you’ve told me, over and over again, that you had nothing to do with the theft whatever.”

"Of course I didn’t," assented Chutney. "Why should I steal the fellows things? Why, I get as much money as ever I want from India. At least, if I don’t get it, I write and say how dear things are in England, and the dad sends me more money to spend. So, if for no other reason, I never wanted the fellow’s money or watch. Still, it will be better for some one to take the blame than for the whole school to be under suspicion and punishment."

“But the Doctor won’t punish any one outside the Fourth,” interposed Evans.

"Won’t he, just I That’s all you know, Mr. Innocent—you wait and see!"
“There’s one thing puzzles me, Dick,” said Margarine to Evans, slowly, “and I hope you won’t mind my mentioning it. I know for certain that Parkinson will bring the fact before the House of Commons this afternoon, and it’s this: after we made the raid on the Black Cadger, why were you so late in coming back? With the exception of you and Challenge, we were all back at Littlebury some time before you got here. Now, it stands to reason, unless you had some purpose, you would neither have stopped in the wood, for fear of being caught or seen by one of the under-keepers.”

Evans blushed scarlet. The other two boys noticed it, and waited eagerly for his answer.

“I don’t deny that does seem a little odd,” acquiesced Evans, “and I’ve heard a lot of hints on the subject. But I made the reason known to Curry this dinner-time, and if that comes up at the inquiry, he will put in my explanation of it.”

“Can’t you tell us as well?” asked Chutney, who began to feel suspicious, somehow, of Evans. The latter’s defence of Comber had struck him as oddly as it did Margarine.

“I think I’d rather not, unless you feel it a matter of honour for me to do so,” said Evans, turning scarlet again.

“I think you ought to tell us,” insisted Margarine. “It seems to me that if Curry can be intrusted with such a secret we should too.”

“Well, then, I’ll tell you,” said Evans, drawing a long breath. “It was this way: after I left the wood alone, I met Connie Castleton, and went for a walk with her. She seemed to think we had behaved a little too harshly with the Black Cadger, and wanted me to go back and ungag him. I refused, and we had a little quarrel about it. The end of it was she said she wouldn’t speak to me again, and I turned to come back to Littlebury, feeling very much upset. Just as I got near the school, I saw Bob, and, as he’s such a chum of mine, I told him about it. Like the clinking good fellow he is, he went off in the direction where I had left Connie, and explained to her
that I was bound by honour not to interfere in any way with what the whole Form had planned to do. She listened to his pleading on my behalf, and I got a little note from her the same evening to say that she would make it up. That's another good turn I owe Bob; but, of course, by doing that he threw himself under suspicion subsequently, through coming in last of all. I didn't want Connie's name brought into the affair, as you may suppose; so I wished, if possible, to keep the reason why both Bob and I were late from the rest of the school."

Margarine looked anxiously at Evans.

"I fancy that Curry will have to give your explanation in the House of Commons, and what's more, I believe Parkinson will throw ridicule upon it. He knows Connie Castleton cannot be mentioned outside the House of Commons, for if the Doctor knew there was love-making going on between you and his niece, he would most likely ask your father to remove you for that alone. Parkinson is hand and glove with Comber, and I'm sure Comber hates the very sight of you lately; you have taken Bob up so warmly, you know! You ought to know one thing about Comber by this time—he never forgives. If anything is decided against you, I tell you it will be more awkward than for either me or for Chutney."

Margarine ceased speaking, and Evans looked gloomily into the faces of his two friends.

"I don't know what to think," he said at last. "I'm worse off than any of you. Should this charge be brought against me, of course I shall go to the Doctor and own it, just as you said you would, Chutney. I think with you it's better for one innocent one to suffer than for the whole Form, or perhaps the whole of Littlebury, to be brought under the ban. I know the Doctor is determined to exact the full penalty once he gets the chance. But if I make this confession I shall lose Connie. I shall be expelled, and what with that, and the disgrace at home, I shall never have five minutes' happiness again."
"I'm so sorry, old chap," said Chutney; "but aren't you taking the gloomy side? Suppose, after all, that matter of being late is passed over, as it easily may be, and the blame gets put on some one else? It's no use looking on the black side. Wouldn't it be a splendid thing if Comber were to be brought in the culprit, and one of his fags knew something about it, and owned up under cross-examination?"

Evans did not answer. Somehow his explanation seemed, even to himself, to be unsatisfactory. What would it be when told to a number of his school-fellows, among whom there were considerable heartburnings because Connie Castleton favoured him? Might not a number of them vote against him in order to get him out of the way, so as to press their claims in the direction where he had been hitherto so favoured?

"You're getting down in the mouth, and no mistake," said Margarine. "However, we shall soon know what's decided, for it's time the meeting broke up, although I haven't heard any one about."

"It's enough to make a fellow down-hearted," retorted Evans, gloomily.

"There's one thing, I don't agree with either of you on," said Margarine. "Perhaps you'll think me a coward, but I don't care even if you do. I say this: a lie is never allowable, not even to save a whole school, let alone a whole Form. If you didn't have a hand in it—and I feel certain you didn't, Dick—don't go and confess. Why should you? In my opinion it's a sense of false honour altogether, lying to screen others I won't, so there!"

"You're afraid of your skin, Margarine," said Chutney, who had suggested the idea. "It isn't a black lie; it's only a white one. I say the fellow who owns to being guilty to save others is a fellow I'd respect for the rest of my life."

"And you're a sentimental silly," said Margarine, "and I dare say no one would be more likely to think so than the guilty
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party, who would thus escape ever being found out and getting his deserts."

"Hark!" cried Evans, starting up, "I can hear the fellows coming!"

"They are, sure enough," cried Margarine, turning a little pale, for he felt that perhaps he had been picked out for the scorn of his school-fellows, although he was quite innocent.

Before the boys could leave the class-room, Jackson, the monitor, came in with a face that boded no good.

"The meeting's over," he said, in a quiet, hard tone, "and I suppose you three would like to know who has to bear the punishment; in fact, who the Fourth Form has declared guilty?"

"Certainly, Jackson," said Evans, firmly, for he saw Jackson's eyes fixed upon him.

"The finding of the Form is this," said Jackson, slowly and with calculated cruelty in his tone: "the Black Cadger was robbed by two Littlebury men, and those two men were—Evans and his dishonest friend and companion, Robert Challenge!"

Evans turned ghastly pale, both at the accusation and the bitterness of Jackson's reference to his friend.

"Whoever is guilty, Bob Challenge is innocent," he said excitedly, and without another word walked unsteadily to the door and went out of the class-room, his brain on fire, and the word "Thief! Thief!" ringing in his ears.

For some time Evans paced the quadrangle irresolutely, not knowing what to do. It wanted fully an hour to teatime, and at first he thought he would go up to the room where Bob was and get Mrs. Myers' permission to speak to his chum. But then, he reflected, Bob knew nothing of the turn events had taken, and would, if he heard, be greatly worried and annoyed by the false charge. Clearly, thought Evans, it would be better not to tell his chum.

The next course open to Evans was to go to the Doctor and confess the theft. Not only must he do that, but it would be
necessary to clear Bob by accepting the entire blame. Evans did not mean that his friend, after running the risk of his life for him, should find him ungrateful. He felt sure, too, that Bob was as innocent as he was himself. All he must necessarily suffer by making such a degrading confession occurred to the boy's mind, and yet, now that the whole Form had declared him guilty, he felt he must bear the result. Whatever happened to him, he would clear his chum Bob. He knew it would be expected of him to go to the Doctor, and not wait to be sent for. The latter would involve the additional charge of cowardice.

"What shall I do! Bob must be saved! I am innocent!" muttered Evans to himself. He could not remain in the quadrangle any longer; every boy seemed to be watching him, every eye turned upon him to seek to read his guilt upon his forehead.

Evans clenched his hands nervously, and then walked out by the Middle Gate and wandered away from the school. He took a turn away from the Meads, and wandered aimlessly beside the river with his head down, looking very dejected and miserable.

"Well, Evans, where are you off to?" asked a voice, suddenly.

Evans started like one awaking from a dream, and recognised the speaker. It was Mr. Bright.

"I'm going for a walk, sir," he answered. Then, in an agony of grief and shame, he cried out, "Mr. Bright, you—you at least won't believe it—I mean——" Evans stopped. He had by that time fully made up his mind to confess to the theft to clear all the rest of his Form, and specially to remove any suspicion from Bob.

"Believe what?" asked Mr. Bright. Evans had always been a favourite pupil of his, and, indeed, it was partly on account of Evans that Mr. Bright had, over and over again, defended Bob to the head-master. He felt that Evans, in
choosing the former as his special chum, must have felt that the boy had those manly qualities which he himself possessed.

"Oh, I can't tell you, sir. They say, that is—I stole—"

"Ah, I understand you, Dick," said Mr. Bright, kindly but seriously, as he put his hand on the unhappy boy's shoulder. "I understood that the men of my Form intended to investigate the grave charge hanging over them. So they have done so, and they say you are the thief? Am I not right, Dick?"

"The blame is fastened upon me and upon Bob Challenge, sir," said Evans, in a low voice.

Mr. Bright started. "I am sorry to hear this, Dick," he said. "Of course you are innocent?"

"Bob Challenge never touched a thing belonging to the gamekeeper; I am certain of it, sir," insisted Evans.

"It does you great credit to speak so for the man who saved your life, Dick," replied Mr. Bright, "and I must frankly own that I do not believe any ill of Challenge. I have no doubt that all will be explained on his part, but I should like your assurance that you did not touch this purse and money. Of course, I feel sure you are innocent, but I shall feel happier in my mind if you will tell me in plain, outspoken language, that you are quite innocent."

Evans was silent. He intended as soon as he returned to Littlebury, to go to the head-master's study and confess the crime laid to his charge. How could he, then, tell his Form-master that he was innocent?

"You don't answer me, Dick," said Mr. Bright, after an awkward pause; "don't be afraid to speak."

"I can't, sir," muttered Evans, through his parched lips.

The master stared at his pupil in amazement, as he said "You can't answer me? you cannot deny this charge, Dick? Why, this means that you are a—th——"

"Not that, sir; not that—spare me the word!" interrupted Evans.

Mr. Bright looked thoughtfully into his pupil's face as he
said, "My poor fellow, you are either innocent or guilty. From your character and from your face, I judge you to be innocent; but your words are not consistent with innocence. Let me advise you, before it is too late, to make a friend, a confidant of me. I promise you I will do all in my power to save you, if even you are guilty—provided you make a confession of your guilt to me. Let me implore you not to persist in this course. Either declare your innocence or openly acknowledge your fault. In either case I will befriend you."

"Thank you, sir," said Evans, in a voice which shook with emotion, for he had great affection for Mr. Bright, "if I could tell you I would, but I cannot. Only, when you hear—please do not judge me too—too—"

Evans could trust himself to say no more; he was afraid he would break down and betray his resolve. He disengaged himself from Mr. Bright's hand, and darted away till he had put some twenty yards between them. Then he stopped and looked back. Mr. Bright was standing still, looking after the retreating form of his favourite pupil.

"I cannot understand it at all," muttered the master; "I would have trusted Evans anywhere. I can't believe him guilty. Can it be that I have been mistaken about this new pupil, Challenge? Has he led poor Dick astray, after all? Are the men of my Form right in declaring that Dick and his fast friend have stolen these things between them?"

Mr. Bright turned slowly away, and walked towards Littlebury. Just before he reached the school he fell in with Comber. The latter had come from the opposite direction, from the Meads, and, seeing his Form-master, hastened towards him.

"We've found out all about the gamekeeper, sir," said Comber.

"Have you?" Mr. Bright asked quietly, as he watched Comber's face closely. There was a kind of suppressed
excitement about Comber's manner which attracted Mr. Bright. Had he known what caused it, the master would probably have avoided conversation altogether with the bully.

"Yes, sir. I'm glad to say the matter only concerned two of the men of our Form, and the rest have been proved innocent."

"And who are the guilty two?" asked Mr. Bright, giving no sign that he had heard their names previously.


"I'm very sorry to hear this, Comber. Don't you think some mistake has been made? Dick, you know, has always been considered one of the most open and manly fellows in Littlebury. I cannot conceive that he should be found out to be a thief."

Comber thought before answering, then he replied slowly, "Of course, sir, Dick Evans used to be a good sort of fellow; indeed, no one liked him more than I did. But he has changed lately. I haven't been able to associate with him at all this term." Comber spoke with such an air of superior virtue, that Mr. Bright asked him why.

"To tell you the truth, sir," said Comber, "I think the new man, Challenge, has spoilt Evans. Ever since Challenge came, at the beginning of term, Evans has been totally different to what he was the previous term. I can't help joining with the rest of the men of the Form in their belief that Challenge had many very bad habits, and has succeeded in teaching them to Evans. Of course, now it is all out, I may mention one fact that I have been careful not to speak of before."

Comber stopped, expecting Mr. Bright to ask him what it was. But the master had no such intention. Finding that he was not questioned, Comber, perforce, went on incriminating Evans and Challenge.

"I've noticed, sir, that both Evans and Challenge have had a great deal of spare pocket-money lately."
Mr. Bright started at Comber's words. Their significance was apparent. Then he asked Comber—

"Did you mention this to any one before? I think you said not?"

"No, sir; I have not been questioned for one thing, and I very much wished not to incriminate any one. The truth is, I was among those who went to the gamekeeper's house, and I was consequently among the suspected. Had I said a word, it would have turned undue attention to Evans, and might have caused him to be misjudged."

Comber was lying wholesale. He had put Parkinson up to tell the rest of the boys this untrue statement about the pocket-money. The fact was, he had Challenge so securely in a trap as he thought, that he determined to make him the means of getting Evans expelled also.

The two had reached the school by that time.

"I hope the innocent will escape, and the guilty be punished, Comber," said Mr. Bright, as he left the boy.

"And I hope the guilty will escape, and the innocent suffer," muttered Comber to himself. Comber's wish ought to have been gratified if cunning availed anything.

After leaving Mr. Bright so abruptly, Evans wandered on a little further; then a thought occurred to him, and he crossed the river by the bridge and made for the tuck-shop of old Christmas. He had to walk very fast, for otherwise the time would not have allowed of the visit.

Christmas was serving some customers when Evans reached the shop, so the latter walked into the little parlour which the boys frequented, and sat there with his head buried in his hands till Christmas came to wait upon him.

"You don't look altogether well, sir," said Christmas, who was startled at Evans' haggard face.

"I am pretty well," said the boy, trying to pass it off.

"Bring me a bottle of ginger-beer—and I should like a pen and ink, with a sheet of paper and an envelope."
Christmas got the required articles without comment, although secretly he wondered what was amiss.

Evans sat at a table remote from the window by the shop, and wrote his letter with a trembling hand. When it was finished, he put it in the envelope, fastened it securely, and then touched the little bell upon the table. Christmas came in; Evans held out the letter to him.

"Will you deliver that for me in the usual way?" he asked.

Christmas looked at the address; the letter was directed to Connie Castleton. He supposed that the boy and she had had a little falling out, and that the letter was to set things straight. That accounted for Evans' troubled look.

"I'll see it be received afore the night's past," said he.

"I should like it delivered as soon as possible. Couldn't you find some excuse to go up to the house almost at once? I will pay you double the usual sum." Evans held out a florin.

"I don't want no double, nor no single neither," said Christmas, magnanimously, "and I'll go up about orders at once. There's a load of wood been ordered, and I'm not quite sure what kind is wanted," he said, thus explaining the excuse he would give for his visit to Littlebury.

Evans pressed the coin upon the old man, but the latter was obdurate and stoutly refused it.

A few minutes after that Evans was making all haste back to Littlebury, while Christmas was slowly following in his wake with the letter.

On reaching the school, Evans went up to his dormitory and there found Margarine brushing his hair, for it was on the verge of teatime.

"So you've come back!" cried Margarine. "Some of the fellows said you were going to run away. That's just like their beastly cheek. I knew you better, though. What's more, I know you didn't touch the Black Cadger's stuff—not you, Dick."
BULLY, FAG, AND HERO.

Margarine went over to where Evans began to pour out some water, and when the latter had set the jug down, caught his hand and wrung it heartily.

"Cheer up, old chap! I don't think you did it, and Gammon doesn't think so either, while as to Chutney, he says he'll go and own to the Doctor that he stole those beastly things rather than you should be disgraced."

"It's too late to do that now," said Evans, slowly; "for I'm going to tell the Doctor at once."

"But you didn't do it, you know; why should you? Besides, no one expects you to do so at once, even if they think you are guilty. You've got twenty-four hours left yet. Don't be in a hurry; something may turn up in that time."

"It's best to get it over," said Evans, "and so I'm going to see the Doctor while every one is at tea."

"I say, Dick," said Margarine, thoughtfully, "do you know, it seems to me that there's a reason why you are so anxious to take this blame. We all know that Bob saved your life, but still, you know—you know—"

"Know what?" asked Evans, who did not catch the drift of his friend's speech.

"Oh, you see," said Margarine, slowly, "both of you are accused. It's possible that only one of you did it, and that one—"

"Is myself, I suppose?" interrupted Evans.

"Nothing of the sort; you won't try to understand me," said Margarine. "What I mean is this: don't go and ruin yourself for life by owning to this theft when you didn't do it, just to screen Bob."

"I understand you now," said Evans, bitterly. "You think that Bob was the thief, and because he risked his life for me I am going to save him from this charge, somehow."

"I've heard what the fellows said at the meeting," replied Margarine. "It's all over the place that Bob was the chief in the affair, and dragged you into it."
"So much for popularity," said Evans. "Yesterday Bob was a hero; to-day he is a thief. Well, I don't believe it. There, tell the fellows I did steal the things. You hear me. I say it distinctly—I stole the Black Cadger's watch and purse! Now go and leave me."

"Dick! Dick! you're a fool—you're a fool! You're going to lie to the Doctor, and if afterwards you are found to be innocent, you will have to suffer for that. Don't go! don't go! There never were two such fellows as you and Bob Challenge at Littlebury. Don't do anything; wait and see what happens!" Margarine clung to Dick's hand, and the latter saw tears in the boy's eyes.

Clang! clang! The tea-bell was ringing.

"You'll get an imposition if you don't look out," said Evans, shaking his friend off.

Margarine reluctantly went downstairs to tea, but the thought of what was happening during that meal troubled him. For the first time since he had been at Littlebury, Margarine had no appetite.

Meanwhile, Evans walked slowly to the head-master's room, and knocked at the door nervously. Doctor Chapple was within. He did not take tea as a rule, since he dined with the masters in the evening.

"Come in," called out the Doctor; and Evans went in.
CHAPTER XVII.

COMBER'S CUNNING PLOT.

Comber had certainly carried out a strange plot on the afternoon when Mr. Bright met him returning to Littlebury. It seemed as if fate were playing into the bully's hands for a time, and helping him in his foul endeavour to ruin the good names of both Bob and Dick.

When Comber found that the three boys who were in the class-room did not want his company, he walked sullenly off and went, as he frequently did, for a solitary walk.

Turning towards the Meads, he came upon a disused barn, which he entered for the purpose of having a pull at a merschaum-pipe which he favoured. The boys who smoked at Littlebury were always very careful to keep out of sight while doing so, for it was an offence against school discipline and rules which the head-master invariably punished severely.

The remains of some hay lay heaped in the corner of the barn, and Comber, after lighting his pipe, lay down and smoked, with a thoughtful look on his face. He knew that at that precise time the Littlebury House of Commons was endeavouring to fix the theft of the Black Cadger's watch and purse upon some of the five boys of whom he was one, and he chewed nervously at the amber mouthpiece of his pipe, as the unpleasant thought occurred to him that perhaps he might be found guilty. He pondered over all he had told Parkinson to say for him, and the charges he had asked him to make against Bob and Dick.

Although Comber and Parkinson were very close friends,
still the former occasionally had his suspicions of Parkinson, whom he knew was untrustworthy in most things, and who always put his own affairs before those of any one else.

Comber was smoking hard, when suddenly he heard the sound of footsteps coming towards the barn. Before he could knock the ashes out of his pipe to extinguish it, a shadow fell upon the doorway, and in came Stokes, the Sixth Former who had interfered with Jackson when the latter was beating Dick.

In his excitement, and fear of being caught, Comber thrust his lighted pipe into the hay, and started to his feet.

"Ah, Comber, so you're here, are you?" asked Stokes, as he glanced round suspiciously.

The fact was, Stokes had been for a walk, and seeing Comber in the distance, had quietly followed him, for, unknown to the rest of the school, Mr. Bright, aided by Stokes, was trying to make the discovery of the real thief of the Black Cadger's property. Mr. Bright had recalled the night when he saw Comber coming home to his dormitory very late, and that, as well as other signs, had convinced him that Comber wanted careful watching. So he had spoken to Stokes, who was in his confidence, and hence the latter had watched Comber's doings that afternoon.

"I've been for a walk," said Comber to Stokes, in reply to his remark, "and feeling rather tired, I came in here to rest for a few minutes."

"No doubt of that, Comber," said Stokes, dryly. "What do you think the result of the meeting of the Fourth will be this afternoon?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," answered Comber; "but I hope whoever did it will be found out."

"You are among those suspected, aren't you?" asked Stokes.

"I was one of those who went to the Black Cadger's; but I don't think any one suspects me, because they know I get
plenty of money from home, and have no need to steal in that shameful way," answered Comber, virtuously.

Stokes glanced very thoughtfully at Comber, as he asked, "Was that the only reason why you came in here this afternoon—to rest yourself?"

Comber was puzzled at the question, but answered "Yes" to it.

"Well," said Stokes, "I know that the Doctor objects to the men of Littlebury coming into this barn, or, indeed, going anywhere where they cannot be seen. If you wanted to rest, why didn't you lie down on the grass?"

"The grass is too damp," said Comber, readily; "I was afraid to."

"It hasn't rained for over two weeks," said Stokes. "I'll tell you what it is, Comber; you are becoming a most atrocious liar, and if you don't mind, I'll report you to Jackson, and get him to give you a good tanning. Why, man, what have you been doing?—look!" cried Stokes, suddenly, as a great flame of light rose from where Comber had been lying down.

The truth was, Comber's pipe had ignited the hay, and after smouldering for a few minutes unnoticed, the hay had broken out into flames.

"I didn't do it—on purpose," stammered Comber, glancing aghast at the flame.

"Come out of the way!" commanded Stokes, who saw that there was every chance of the barn being set on fire.

Without any more ado, Stokes tore off his jacket, and beat at the flames with it, trying to subdue them. Comber was too dazed to do anything but look on in sheer fright.

After a few minutes' strenuous effort, Stokes got the flames under, and trampled out the smouldering embers, in doing which he suddenly felt something hard under his feet among the hay. He stooped down and picked it up. It was Comber's pipe, or at least the remains of it, for the stem was broken short off and the bowl injured.

"I thought as much!" said Stokes, indignantly. "You
suppose I don’t know what tobacco-smoke is, do you? Why, as soon as I came into the barn I noticed it was reeking with smoke. Get outside at once, or I’ll not wait till I see Jackson. Be off!”

Comber got out of the barn as quickly as he could, and went on towards the Meads. He was more afraid of Stokes than he was of his own monitor, Jackson. He anathematised his bad luck in sending him to smoke in the barn just when, as he thought, Stokes happened to be coming along. He was angry with himself, and with everything else. Besides, his pipe, which he prized so much, and which was the envy of Parkinson and the entire “Whiff” party in the Fourth, was broken, and Stokes had the pieces. Comber felt sure that Jackson would duly hear of his smoking adventure, and that made him more vexed than ever. He was in a thoroughly bad temper.

Tripp, who, it will be remembered, had been excluded from the meeting then going on in the house on the marsh, had wandered to the very Meads towards which Comber was making.

The fag had learnt from Evans how to make a “cave,” in which to hide anything of value. Evans had formerly been at a school where these caves were popular among the boys, and when he came to Littlebury; he initiated the boys of his Form into their mysteries. Any one who was in the secret could have found out one of these queer holes in the earth, with its covering of live turf, fairly easily; but the uninitiated would have gone by the place a hundred times without discovering it.

In the early part of the term, Tripp’s aunt had given him a tin of biscuits, but, being afraid that Comber would bully them out of him, the fag had made a cave in the Meads, and concealed the tin. When no one was about, he watched his chance, and helped himself to the biscuits. Tripp was rather a greedy boy, and this idea of hiding the biscuits
furthered his wish to have them all to himself. Now that he was better, he had made a special excursion on this momentous afternoon to get some of the biscuits.

Comber, walking slowly along, suddenly caught sight of the fag, stooping down beside the little ditch which bounded the western side of the Meads. The bully was just in the mood to vent his annoyance upon any one who gave him the chance, and at the sight of his fag he smiled grimly. But Comber's smile soon gave way to fear. As he watched the fag, the bully felt his knees tremble under him.

"He's looking for a cave! Why, the sneaking little beggar! Who could have told him? How has he got to know?" Comber broke out into a profuse perspiration, which trickled down his forehead in great beads.

It was a most extraordinary thing, this fear of the fag by the boy who bullied him so remorselessly. What was its cause? Comber got behind a tree, and from there he watched Tripp with staring eyes.

The fag, quite unconscious that he was being watched, stooped down and examined the turf near the ditch. Comber suddenly remembered Stokes, and wondered if he were coming the Meads way. He turned round to look. Stokes had evidently gone back towards Littlebury, for he was nowhere in sight. Relieved at this, Comber kept his eyes upon the doings of his fag.

Tripp had not bent down to look for his own cave; indeed, his purpose was far from it. He saw three heads of short dried grass tied together, and he knew this indicated that a cave was near. It was not the cave the fag had made for himself, for his own was ten yards or more away. Tripp began to get interested. He wondered whose cave it was, and what was in it. He too looked round to see if any one was watching him. Comber stood bold upright against the protecting bole of the tree, and was thus safely hidden from the fag's view.

Tripp searched carefully, and in a minute or two found the
cave. He bent over it, while Comber watched, with his face burning, with every limb shaking. Tripp rose from his stooping position, and Comber saw the signs of astonishment on his face as the fag held something up to the light.

Before Tripp was aware that any one was near, Comber darted from behind the tree, and caught at the fag's hand. Tripp was, however, too quick for him. In an instant he thrust whatever he had found into his trousers pocket, as he recognised his persecutor.

"So you're up to your old games, are you?" asked Comber. "What's that you're hiding—eh?"

"Nothing, Comber; I'm not hiding anything—I found a cave, that's all," whimpered Tripp, who was more afraid of Comber than ever.

"What made you look for one here?" demanded the bully. "Who set you to look for one? Speak out!"

Tripp thought it best to tell the truth, even though this involved the loss of the treasured tin of biscuits.

"I've got a cave of my own here," said the fag, "and I found the other one here by chance, Comber. It's the truth; it is, indeed!"

Comber was a little relieved at this statement, but, he reflected, perhaps, after all, the fag was not telling the truth; so he asked—

"Where's your own cave? Show it to me at once, or I'll twist your arm so that you won't be able to use it for a week."

Tripp got out of the reach of the bully, and soon came to where his own cave was.

"What have you got in it?" asked Comber, who found that part of Tripp's statement true.

For reply, Tripp reluctantly took out the tin of biscuits, and placed it at the bully's feet.

"You greedy little beggar!" said Comber. "So you get things like these, and keep them to yourself, when you know I like biscuits! What do you mean, eh?"
Comber's thoughts were far from Tripp's greed at that precise minute, had the fag only known. The fact was, now he was relieved of a certain suspicion of the fag's actions, Comber was rapidly revolving something in his mind. He was wondering how he could turn the fag's discovery to his own advantage.

"You can have them all, Comber," volunteered Tripp. "I'll take them to the dormitory and put them under your bed."

"For the other fellows to see, and to ask for their whack, I suppose!" said Comber, derisively. "Not much! What you can do is this: you'll bring me a dozen every day till they're gone; and mind, no eating them yourself! I know pretty well how many biscuits there are in that tin, so don't try to cheat me. If you'd owned up about them, as soon as you got them, I might have let you have some for yourself. Being greedy hasn't paid you, you see!"

Comber, by that time, had his plan formed. He dismissed the subject of the biscuits instantly.

"Now, then, I want to know what you've got hidden in your pocket. Turn it out!"

Tripp hesitated, but Comber caught his two wrists and turned them till he cried with pain.

"Oh, I'll show you; I will—I will!" cried Tripp.

Comber released his hold.

"Out with it, then; don't waste time, you beggar!" the bully commanded roughly.

Tripp pulled a package from his pocket, wrapped up in dried grass; but the grass was loose, and through it Comber caught the glitter of gold.

"Undo it—undo it!" the bully ordered.

Tripp pulled the grass asunder. If Comber was acting, it was certainly a masterpiece of art.

"Why! What!" he cried. "Why, that's the Black Cadger's watch! And there's his purse! You beastly little beggar! Why, you're the thief!"
Tripp dropped the watch and purse from his nerveless hands as he understood what Comber’s words meant.

“I—I—found them—Comber—I did indeed!” he gasped.

Comber laughed in his face.

“A pretty story!” he cried. “Who do you think will believe it?”

“I don’t know, but it’s true! I didn’t put the things there; I am not a thief! Comber, do believe me!” So wailed Tripp.

“Believe you!” cried Comber. “You must think me very foolish, if you think I do for a minute. There are the stolen things, and I shall go back to the Doctor at once and tell him I caught you red-handed with them!”

Tripp gave way to moans and cries, that convinced Comber he could easily make the fag carry out the plot he had conceived.

“There are only two other men in the Form who could have hidden those things if you didn’t,” he said at last to Tripp.

“Those two are Bob Challenge and Dick Evans.”

“Then they did it, and I didn’t!” cried Tripp, jumping at the chance to put the blame on other shoulders.

“If you deny it, it must have been them,” said Comber. “I wish I could believe you. I always knew you were a sneak, but I never thought you were a thief.”

“It was Bob and Dick who stole the things, I’m sure of it, Comber,” insisted Tripp. “Won’t you believe me?”

“They are an artful pair,” agreed Comber. “I dare say they found your cave, and made one near it on purpose to put the blame on you. Besides, Evans introduced these caves at Littlebury.”

“You won’t tell the Doctor what you said, will you, Comber?” pleaded Tripp, anxiously.

“I won’t, but on one condition,” answered Comber. “There’s no doubt that that precious pair stole the things, and it’s only fair they should be found out. If I say nothing
about your finding them, will you do what I'm going to ask you?"

"I'll do anything," answered Tripp, glad to escape the dreadful charge.

"Very well," said Comber. "Get away as soon as you can, now, and go up to the dormitory. You'll find Evans has a zinc box for butterflies in the recess by his window. Put the Black Cadger's purse into it. Challenge's box is unlocked, for I saw Mrs. Myers getting some things out for him this morning. Put the watch in Challenge's box."

"But suppose they didn't do it?" asked Tripp, alarmed.

"Then you did, that's all! If the things are not there before another hour, I'll tell the Doctor that you stole them."

"But no one will believe that I stole them," said Tripp, who did not like the task he was being ordered to carry out.

"Won't they?" sneered Comber; "just wait and see! If I tell the Doctor how I have caught you, and he interviews you in consequence, I tell you you won't be here this time tomorrow."

"It's a difficult thing to do, Comber," pleaded Tripp. "Suppose I get caught at it?"

"If you do, you silly little beggar, you will have to take the consequences, and serve you right too! So just cut off and put the things where they ought to be; it's just like the meanness of Evans and Challenge to try to get you blamed as they have done. They're a pair of cowards and sneaks, so you needn't be squeamish about doing them any harm. And mind this, if you do make a muddle of the affair, I'll get at you somehow, and I'll give you a warm time of it, and no mistake. Get off!"

Tripp turned and ran off, bent on carrying out Comber's plot, for the bully had persuaded him that Challenge and Evans were guilty. Besides, Tripp dared not thwart Comber—and he knew it.

Meantime, Comber, well satisfied at the result of his
discovery of Tripp in the Meads, returned to Littlebury also. He cared nothing for the verdict of the Fourth Form now; if he should be implicated in the affair by the boys, he knew he could at once clear himself. He only had to wait till he knew the things were placed where he had told Tripp to put them, and then a letter to the police-station at Littlebury, and the whole plot was assured of success.

On nearing the Middle Gate Comber fell in with Mr. Bright, as already narrated.

Meanwhile, Tripp, who was most anxious to get the stolen property out of his possession, went up to the dormitory, and, going to the place where Evans' bed stood, pulled the curtain aside by the window recess. Evans was fond of collecting butterflies and moths, and there was quite a little pile of chip-boxes, and cork-lined cases for storing the insects. Lying there, by itself, was the zinc box, of which Comber had spoken. Tripp opened it quickly, gave one guilty glance round the dormitory, thrust the purse into the box, closed it, and drew the curtain. He had hardly done so when he heard the sound of footsteps upon the stairs, and he darted towards the door. Tripp began to descend the stairs just as Margarine was going up.

"Hullo, Tripp! Getting better, old chap—eh?" asked Margarine, cheerfully. It was no wonder all the boys liked Margarine, in spite of his greedy ways. He always had a good word for every one.

"Much better, thank you, Margarine," said Tripp, as he hurried off. He was shaking in every limb—if only Margarine had been a minute sooner in going upstairs, Tripp thought!

The fag sat through the tea in the hall in a state of great nervous excitement. He heard the rest of his fellows discussing the affair, and gathered that Bob and Dick had been found guilty. Comber was right, then! After all, he was only doing as he should, in putting the things where they would help to convict the guilty if found, and there was no harm in doing
that—so Tripp reasoned with himself. Yet, somehow, he felt what a mean, cowardly trick he was engaged upon, as the boys, in spite of their decision, still had a good word for those whom they had condemned as guilty, on what seemed to them indisputable evidence.

"I'd sooner have stolen the things myself," said Gammon, "than have heard that two chaps like Dick and Bob did it," and the others sorrowfully agreed to what Gammon said.

Tripp felt the watch in his pocket. He seemed to fancy each minute some one would turn to him and say, "Give me that watch!" He hardly tasted his tea, but in that respect he was like several others, and so no one noticed him much.

After tea there was a short interval before prep., and it was this interval of which Tripp hoped to make good use. He went up to the dormitory again, where, however, a group of excited boys were soon gathered round Margarine, as the latter told them of Evans' decision. The boys uttered the wildest conjectures as to what the result of Evans' confession would be, in the middle of which the bell clanged, and there was a hurried departure to prep.

The last but one to leave the dormitory was Curry, who slid down the balusters, which were long and very slant, as the stairs were steep. He caught up Comber and Parkinson, who were going downstairs in close conversation. As Curry neared them, he shot out his legs as he slid along, and sent them flying down the rest of the stairs.

Before the pair could get up, Curry jumped over their prostrate forms, and ran off to the class-room. When they followed him a minute afterwards, Parkinson was limping painfully. In the fall he had hurt his right shin by its coming in contact with the stairs.

"I'll pay you out, you beast!" muttered Parkinson, into Curry's ear, as he limped to his seat.

Curry turned upon him the very sweetest of smiles, as if he had been promised a good tuck-in in the dormitory. He knew
perfectly well that Parkinson dared do nothing of the kind. The latter had encountered the twins a long time before this story begins, and had got decidedly the worst of it.

No sooner had Curry left the dormitory than Tripp ran across to Bob Challenge's box, and tried the lid. Comber was right—the box was unlocked. Tripp put the watch in, and, to make it look quite Bob's affair, he wrapped it in a handkerchief belonging to the latter. He closed the lid, ran down the stairs, and was just in time to see Comber and Parkinson lying sprawling on the floor.

Before Tripp could pass, they both got to their feet, and Parkinson gave the fag a vicious kick, at which Comber and he roared with delight. Parkinson's amusement was, however, cut short by the fact that he suddenly became aware that his shin was hurting him. He pulled up his trousers, and letting down his sock, saw a bruise as large as a five-shilling piece.

"That beggarly Chutney!" he said.

"It wasn't Chutney; it was Curry," said Comber.

"I never do know which is which," said Parkinson, gloomily.
CHAPTER XVIII.

EVANS BEFORE THE DOCTOR.

When Dick was bidden to enter Doctor Chapple's study, he went in and stood before the head-master with his eyes fixed upon the carpet. Doctor Chapple, on receiving this unexpected visit, looked up from the sermon which he was preparing for the coming Sunday. He was aware that the boys of the Fourth were trying to discover the culprits, but, of course, knew nothing of their method of doing so at the house on the marsh.

The head-master glanced at Evans not unkindly, as he asked, "Well, Evans, what is it?"

Dick shot a nervous glance at the Doctor's face as he answered, in a very low tone of voice—

"It's about the watch and purse, sir—the gamekeeper's watch and purse."

Doctor Chapple at once became interested. He put down the pen which he had kept in his hand, and turned his chair round so that he faced Dick.

"An unpleasant matter, Evans—a most unpleasant matter," said the head-master. "In all my experience at Littlebury, nothing has occurred which has caused me more, or indeed as much, anxiety and annoyance. I trust that the men of your Form have sent you as their representative with some information which may help me to remove the black sheep from our school."

Nothing was further from the head-master's mind than to suppose that Dick himself was one of those accused. As the latter was head boy of the Fourth, it was a natural mistake for
the Doctor to make to suppose that the rest of the Form had sent Evans to put him in possession of the knowledge they had acquired. As to the boy who had gone to make the confession, he was overwhelmed with shame and confusion. The head-master's attitude made it still more difficult for him to carry out the plan which he had formulated.

"Something has been discovered—that is, sir, I mean the men of the Fourth—know who—they think they have—at least—" said Dick, and there for the minute words failed him. He found it very much harder to tell a lie even to shield Bob than he had expected. Dick was invariably truthful, and the lie he felt he must tell would not come glibly from his tongue.

"Ah, I understand you, Evans," said the Doctor, encouragingly. "I can easily gather that such news as you are here to impart to me is not pleasant in the telling. Your own high sense of honour, coupled with the fact that the disgrace is attached to the Form of which you are justly the head, must affect you deeply. At the same time, you must control yourself. After all, better for the guilty to suffer than for the innocent to be under grave suspicion, as the latter have been lately. Speak out, then, Evans, even if the culprits are your best friends. We all make mistaken friendships in our lives, but it is our duty, our stern duty, when such friends prove unworthy of our confidence, to unmask them."

Dick understood what the Doctor meant. It was clear he suspected Bob, for the Doctor had observed the close friendship between the two boys, and, indeed, Jackson the monitor had sown seeds of suspicion of Bob in the Doctor's mind.

"I have come to tell you, sir, who stole the gamekeeper's things," said Dick, without a stop and at a breath. "The men of the Fourth Form suspect Bob Challenge and myself, but Bob had nothing to do with it. Do, Doctor, believe that, for it was I alone who stole the things, and I have come to confess it to you."

Doctor Chapple stared at Dick incredulously.
“God bless my soul!” he exclaimed, taking off his glasses, and putting them down on his desk. “You, Evans!—you a thief! I——. Why, it is only the other day I said whoever was guilty, I could vouch for your innocence! It can’t be, my good fellow; you are excited, and are making a mistake!”

Dick felt a thrill of happiness even at that moment at the Doctor’s words. He was considered to be above suspicion! Still he had come to confess, and he knew what the result of that must be. He had told his lie; he meant to stick to it.

“It is true, sir. Oh, believe me, I did it alone—quite alone. I cannot bear to think that Bob Challenge is involved in the charge with me.”

The head-master sat silent for a minute, then he answered slowly—

“So you insist this matter is true, Evans. You, of all men, in whose character I believed implicitly—you, the head man of the Fourth Form, acknowledge that you are a common thief—a thief in no way different from an ordinary footpad. You know the illustrious traditions of the school; you know that your father was at this school before you; and yet you deliberately have chosen to disgrace us all in this shameful manner! Evans, I am astonished! The discovery of your guilt is a worse blow to me than the knowledge I had that one or more of the men of Littlebury had done this thing. Of course, now that you openly confess the affair, I have but one course to pursue—to decide the penalty. On that matter I must think before announcing the decision, but I warn you solemnly I shall, in all probability, inflict the most severe punishment in my power. I will endeavour to save you, if that be possible, from the hands of the law, but you must prepare your mind for public expulsion.”

Dick, now that the words were spoken, would have given all he had to withdraw them. The confession he had made would brand him for life. He thought of what Margarine had
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advised, but what could he do now? He flung himself at the Doctor's feet.

"Not that, sir—not that! he cried. "Flog me, sir, or anything; but don't expel me. I dare not go home; my mother's heart would break!"

Doctor Chapple was, however, a man of great firmness and force of character. He would not allow such a boy to remain in the school to contaminate others. Had any one else told him Dick was guilty, he would not have believed the statement. But here was the case of a boy having committed a very serious theft, and who afterwards allowed the charge to hang over the rest of those in his Form until he was forced, at last, to own the offence. Dick, besides the original crime, had been guilty of great duplicity; so the head-master thought at least. He understood the promptings of Dick's heart which made him beg not to be expelled; but in those few moments Doctor Chapple had formed his resolve. Dick must be sent from Littlebury, and the reason of his expulsion brought before the rest of the great public school, as a warning and an example of the result of evil doing.

"I shall not flog you, Evans," said the Doctor. "I must say that I am sorry a man with your past good name should act as you have done. But, I have a duty to perform—a stern duty, which I owe to pupils and parents alike. Do not expect me to do anything else but what I have intimated to you. Either I must expel you, or hand you over to the proper authorities to deal with. I will not do the latter if it be possible to prevent it; but I see no reason why you should remain here. However, I will not speak definitely now; go to your dormitory at once, sir, and remain there till you are sent for by me. On no account are you to associate with the other men of your Form, nor are you to speak to them. I shall send Jackson to see that my commands are carried out."

The Doctor, who had risen, waved his hand to the door, thus dismissing Dick. The latter, finding that the head-master
was obdurate to his tears and entreaties, rose, and turned to go out of the room.

As Dick turned the handle of the lock, the door was opened from the outside, and Bob, looking intensely ill, and with his arm in a sling, hastily entered the room. He pushed Dick back towards the Doctor with his uninjured hand as he said—

"Doctor, this is some dreadful mistake!"

The head-master was as much surprised at Bob's action as he was to see the injured boy.

"What does this mean, Challenge?" he asked. "You are supposed to be too unwell to leave the infirmary, and yet you are here! What am I to understand when my orders are thus openly disobeyed?"

Bob answered the head-master firmly but respectfully, "I have come from the infirmary against the wishes both of yourself and the doctor, I know, sir; but I was obliged to do so. I have received this note; you will see it is in the handwriting of Margarson, and signed by him. It will explain why I came here."

The head-master took the note and read it aloud—

"The fellows have decided that you and Dick stole the Black Cadger's purse and watch. We all know you are too much of a man to let Dick take all the blame. He has gone to the head-master to confess that he carried out the affair single-handed. Dick is a fool; but don't let him ruin himself to save you or any one else. If you did it, Bob, go and own up. Poor old Dick mustn't be allowed to go on with his mad project of clearing you by declaring himself guilty. I don't believe either of you did it. It's a plant, so believes,"

"Your stout chum,

"Margarson."

The Doctor having read the letter aloud, read it over again to himself. It puzzled him. It seemed contradictory, yet
how could he believe in Dick's innocence when the latter had just made a clean breast of the affair?

"I am most astonished at this, Challenge," said the head-master. "Of course, I can quite understand Margarson's motive in doing this. He is a very kind-hearted boy, although he has his faults. Still, this letter proves nothing." The Doctor turned to Dick. "You have heard this letter read, Evans," he said. "Do you still insist that your confession is true?"

Dick seemed dazed at the turn affairs were taking; but he answered stoutly—

"Bob did not steal the gamekeeper's property—I did it single-handed, sir."

"Doctor Chapple," said Bob to the head-master, "I'm afraid Dick does not understand the full meaning of his statement. He cannot be aware of the grave nature of the offence he is admitting, because if he were he would not own to it. Besides, it is impossible for him to have committed the theft."

"Why is it impossible?" the Doctor asked, a puzzled look spreading over his countenance.

"There was only one Littlebury man concerned in the affair, sir—that is why," answered Bob, firmly.

"I fail to understand what you mean by that. If one only was concerned in this theft, and Evans declares he was the one, how can it be impossible, Challenge?"

"It is impossible, sir," insisted Challenge, "because the thief was myself!"

If the head-master was surprised before by the entrance of Challenge and by his first statement, he was ten times more so at his last words.

"You mean to tell me, Challenge, that you are the thief, and that Evans has wilfully deceived me in order to screen you?" he asked.

"I acknowledge, that in a moment of temptation, I stole the things from the gamekeeper's house, sir," said Bob; "and I
am sure Dick has only confessed to save me. You see, sir, he thinks I saved his life in the tunnel that day, and he has such a generous heart that he feels he ought to undergo the penalty of my offence as a return."

"I did steal the things," cried Dick; "I did indeed, sir!"

"I stole them; he had nothing whatever to do with it!" cried Bob, immediately, thus contradicting Dick.

For the first time throughout the whole affair, Dick felt that his chum was guilty, and felt more determined than ever to save him from the consequences. He had thought before, that, in owning the offence, he would save Bob from the mortification of being accused. That was his original motive. Now it was different.

"I think that one or the other of you is a most barefaced liar," said the Doctor, sternly. "I cannot attempt to fathom the reason of this mutual desire to take the blame. Duty, or even devotion, cannot require that you should lie to me in order to save the innocent one from punishment."

"Bob did not do it, sir; do believe me!" cried Dick once more.

"Stay!" said the Doctor. "I understood, Evans, that the members of your Form came to a certain decision concerning this affair. Be good enough to repeat that to me."

"They said we were both guilty," answered Dick; "but they made a mistake. It was so easy for them to do that, sir!"

"I am convinced, Evans, that the men of the Fourth Form have more insight with regard to this matter than you seem to give them credit for," said the Doctor. "I have shown great patience to you, both because I have been anxious, if possible, to make some difference in your relative guilt. The object which you both have in view is to me quite apparent. I understand you both at last, and very clearly. Your clumsy attempts to deceive me have altogether failed. The men of your Form are right. You are both guilty; I can plainly tell that is the case. Now that you are found out, you attempt to shield each
other, because as you are both guilty, you know very well what to expect.”

Evans attempted to speak, but the Doctor raised his hand to enjoin silence.

“Do not interrupt me, sir,” said the Doctor. “I wish to hear no further untruths from your lips. For you, Evans, I have some little sympathy, since I feel that your companionship with such a man as Robert Challenge has proved himself to be has led you into the dreadful position in which you stand. From a man of honour you have sunk, in one term, owing to such evil influence, into a thief, and, I regret to say it, a liar. Public expulsion, which I shall now most certainly inflict upon you both, will not purge your offences. The sting and the stain of them will always remain with you, and in after years you will reflect on your proceedings now with infinite regret.”

“Spare Bob, sir,” pleaded Dick.

The Doctor made no answer to the petition.

“I am very sorry, Doctor,” said Challenge, “that you find yourself compelled to punish us in this way. For myself I will try to bear it, because I have owned to the charge. But Dick here, every one in Littlebury likes him, and will assure you he cannot be guilty. I came as a new pupil; let me be expelled alone, sir; and I am sure you will find out eventually that Dick was quite innocent. Even if you will not allow him to escape for the untruth he has told you, still that does not deserve expulsion.”

“You speak like a man far beyond your years, Challenge,” said the Doctor, who was a little affected by the impressiveness of the former’s manner. “Unfortunately from what you say, it is apparent to me that you, too, have not spoken the truth. I can, therefore, take no notice of what may be a well-meant attempt to save Evans. I am sorry for him; as for you I will say nothing. There is one matter I wish to have answered: what did you do with the money,
and also with the watch belonging to Lord Dunsandle's gamekeeper?

Both the boys started at the question. Bob was quite as innocent as Dick, and consequently, neither of them knew what had become of the things. The two boys looked at each other blankly. The Doctor observed this. He sat down in his chair and glanced keenly into their faces.

"Answer me without prevarication—where are these illgotten goods?"

"I don't know," answered Dick; "that is, I cannot say, sir."

"Challenge," said the Doctor, "what answer have you to give to my question? Think carefully before you reply."

"I am sorry to say, sir, I cannot answer the question," replied Bob, who, like his chum Dick, found himself in an unexpected difficulty, through his quixotic conduct.

Doctor Chapple's eyes blazed with anger. He rose from his chair and paced the room, trying to obtain control over himself before making a reply to the boys. Not only were they, in his estimation, dishonest and untruthful, but they further had, as he thought, plotted to keep possession of the stolen goods.

The Doctor stopped suddenly in his peregrination of the room and faced the boys.

"I will attempt to shield you no further," he said. "So long as I thought you were possessed of the ordinary feelings of regret and compunction for your offence, I was inclined to keep this matter from the public ear. As it is, I must act differently. I will give you both forty-eight hours to confess where you have hidden this plunder, or what you have done with it. If not, you must both take the consequences of your gross misconduct. You do not deserve to be spared any shame, for you appear to be destitute of it."

The head-master touched the bell, and his man-servant entered.

"Williams," said the Doctor, "tell Mr. Jackson, of the Sixth,
that I wish to speak to him at once. Ask Mr. Lamb's permission to deliver the message."

The man bowed and went out of the room. He went immediately to the Sixth and asked the Form-master to allow Jackson to go to the head-master. The Doctor himself was technically the teacher of the Sixth Form, but Mr. Augustus Lamb, the master of the Fifth, usually took charge of both Forms, he being the second master. Lamb was famous as a teacher of mathematics, and anything but a lamb in the estimation of the men, with whom he was somewhat unpopular.

Jackson was soon in the presence of the head-master. "You will take charge of Evans," said the head-master to the monitor, "and see that he remains in his dormitory. The necessary arrangements with regard to food had better be made with the dormitory maid, who will see that she obtains Evans' meals from the kitchen."

"Until when, sir?" asked Jackson, who did not relish the idea of being kept to the dormitory himself as well.

"Until Thursday morning," answered the Doctor. "At ten o'clock on Thursday the school will assemble in the great hall, and I wish you to bring Evans to my study ten minutes before that hour."

Jackson departed, followed by Dick. The monitor was angry beyond measure. "So you and that Bob Challenge are the thieves!" he said to Evans, as they went along; "I thought as much all along! From the first hour that your evil companion came to the school I fancied we should have trouble here before long. It's the old saying come true: Evil companions corrupt good manners. There's one thing, though; it's all over the school that you two are going to get expelled, and a very good job too, it seems to me!"

"Bob had nothing to do with it," said Evans, who felt about as miserable as it is possible for a boy to feel.

"I dare say not," said Jackson: "he's a model boy, no doubt."
One of his good qualities is that of setting fellows against their monitors; I haven't forgotten him. I suppose you two have owned up to save trouble, haven't you?"

"I have taken the blame, and Bob has done the same to save me," said Evans.

"You're a fool, Evans!" said Jackson. "Why don't you acknowledge that you had nothing to do with it, and tell the Doctor so? It's easy to get out of it that way. Let Challenge be expelled; you won't see him again—anyhow, after Thursday. I don't really think you did it, or had a hand in it."

Jackson was tempting Evans. The fact was, the monitor wanted to get out of keeping watch over his charge for the intervening forty-eight hours, and he wanted, besides, to make Challenge as black as he possibly could. He certainly had no good-will towards Dick, much as he pretended to have.

"Time will tell, Jackson," said Dick. "I'm sorry you have to stay in the dormitory with me; if you like I'll give you my word of honour that I will stay there till Thursday without you watching me."

The monitor stared at Dick. Was he trying to get an opportunity to run away? Jackson knew that on a former memorable occasion when a piece of misconduct had been found out at Littlebury, several of the men had made good their escape and only came back after they had failed to get a place on board ship—for the boys had run away to sea.

"I don't want your word of honour, Evans," said Jackson. "Why not do as I say? There's plenty of time; go back to the Doctor. You need not say it before Challenge."

"Because it would be a lie," answered Evans; "that's why I won't say it."

Jackson laughed contemptuously. "How good we are, all of a sudden!" he sneered. "We don't mind stealing, but to tell a lie! Not we! I shouldn't have thought you would find much difficulty in doing that, after acting one all this time..."
and letting the blame fall on innocent shoulders, as you have evidently done."

Dick winced at the monitor's words. He was like a good many other boys; he thought he could draw a distinction between lies according to the object in view.

"I won't do it!" said Dick, firmly.

They had got to the dormitory by that time.

"I've seen your obstinacy before," said Jackson; "I should have thought you knew better than to defy me."

Dick certainly did remember how Jackson had ill-treated him, but he was as determined as ever. What he would do for friendship he would not do for fear of punishment.

As Dick did not answer him, Jackson, without the least provocation, struck his prisoner a violent blow with his fist upon the side of his head.

Dick's blood was up. He knew he would be expelled in two days' time, and that nothing else mattered. He turned on Jackson, and struck the monitor as hard as he could with his clenched fist.

"You coward and bully!" cried Dick; "take that!"

The blow crashed upon Jackson's nose, from which a stream of blood spurted instantly.

Nothing could have astonished Jackson more than what had happened. He was too astounded to ward off the blow when it was aimed at him, and far too much of a coward to touch Dick again. Although twice the boy's size, the monitor was afraid of him. He went over to one of the basins, and, pouring some water into it, staunched the blood, Dick looking on in sullen silence, fully determined to protect himself from the monitor's violence, if necessary, as best he could.

When Jackson had stopped the bleeding, he carefully poured away the tell-tale water and turned on Dick.

"I'll thrash you for that, mind," he said. "I'll give you the worst licking you've ever had!"

"You will never touch me again," said Dick. "It is quite
time your brutality was stopped. I will go to the Doctor and
tell him. I hate a sneak, but I loathe a bully more.”

He turned, and, to Jackson’s sheer terror, went off to the
head-master’s study once more.

The Doctor was still there, but Bob had gone. The Doctor
had sent the former back to the infirmary, Mrs. Myers being
told to see that he had no communication with the rest of the
boys.

“What is it, Evans?” the Doctor asked, thinking that the
latter had made his mind up to confess where the things were
hidden, or how they had been disposed of.

Evans pointed to a swelling, the size of a pigeon’s egg, upon
his head, as he answered respectfully—

“I know I am to be expelled, sir; but is it right for Jackson
to beat me for refusing to blame Bob Challenge?”

At that moment Jackson burst into the room, so uncere­
moniously that the Doctor glanced at the monitor in deep
annoyance.

“You will please to knock at my study door before entering
for the future, Jackson,” the head-master said stiffly.

The monitor was considerably abashed.

“I only came to say, sir, that Evans, here, struck me a blow
in the face, and I was compelled to retaliate,” he said.

“You surprise me, Jackson,” said the Doctor, to the latter’s
discomfiture. “Do I understand that you, a monitor, have
indulged in fisticuffs with a man over whom I have set you? This is most astonishing to me; it is most surprising conduct
on your part. I have heard from a certain source that this is
not the first occasion on which you have misused your authority
over Evans. Now that you come and openly acknowledge such
proceedings, I shall deal with you at once. Evans has dis­
honoured the school shamefully, but he is not to be beaten by
you in consequence of that. Mr. Bright has repeatedly called
my attention to your irregularities. Be good enough to con­
sider yourself deposed from your position as monitor of the
Fourth Form. You will no longer be a monitor; I shall request Mr. Lamb to find some one more fitting than you are for the post. In going at once to your Form to renew your studies, ask Mr. Stokes to come this way."

The Doctor spoke with the utmost politeness, but his firmness was unmistakable. Jackson was deposed—and by the very boy he had treated so harshly! In exposing the monitor to the head-master, Dick had done good service to the Form.

Jackson went sullenly off, and delivered the message as he was bidden. It was bad enough to be deposed, but for Stokes to be put in his place, as he thought, was still more trying.

When Stokes entered the head-master's study he saw Dick was there, and guessed his purpose.

"I have sent for you, Stokes," said Doctor Chapple, "because I wish you to take charge of Evans. He and Robert Challenge have jointly confessed to the crime which has disgraced Littlebury. It is my intention to expel both of them on Thursday morning next. After that, whether they go home, or are taken to a less congenial place, depends upon their making a confession as to where they have hidden their plunder. I hope, in the mean time, you may persuade Evans to give me the necessary information."

Stokes glanced into the Doctor's face in surprise at the threat launched at Evans and Challenge. As to Dick, his lips trembled, but he gave no other sign of having heard the threat of imprisonment.

"I think it will be as well for you to have Evans alone in your study," continued Doctor Chapple; "I do not wish him to mix in any way with the rest of the school. For this object, be good enough to request Lawson, who shares the study with you, to take charge of the Fourth Form dormitory and to act as monitor. I am sorry to say I have been obliged to depose Jackson for a most flagrant case of bullying. Ask Mr. Lamb to kindly remove Jackson's name at once from the monitorial list for the rest of the term."
Stokes bowed, and, followed by Evans, left the head-master's study.

When Stokes and Dick reached the former's study, Stokes closed the door, and, drawing two chairs up to the fire, invited Dick to sit down.

"Now, youngster," said Stokes, kindly, "tell me all about it. There's nothing like opening your heart to another fellow, if you want to relieve your feelings."

Dick told Stokes all that had happened, including the account of his and Challenge's confession.

"You're a queer pair," said Stokes, when the story was finished. "If you stole the things between you, and you have both owned up, why don't you say where they are?"

Dick was silent. Stokes' tone was sympathetic in the extreme, but even that could not extract the real secret from him.

"I'll tell you what it is, youngster," said Stokes; "it's my belief the Doctor has made a mistake in thinking you are both guilty. You've got some quixotic idea into your heads of removing the charge from each other, it's my belief; and you've been telling the Doctor what isn't true. You don't look guilty, and I'm sure that Bob Challenge wouldn't steal anything. It's your sly man who's usually a thief. No; I'm going to take a different view. In short, I'm going to use the time between now and Thursday morning to prove you both innocent, in spite of yourselves. A nice blunder your mutual friendship has led you into! It seems to me that Margarine is the only sensible fellow in the Form; he told me after tea this afternoon that he was sure you were both innocent, although he wouldn't give me his reasons. So just make yourself at home here. You can read any of my books you like, but don't touch Lawson's. You will sleep in Lawson's bed to-night, as he's going to take charge of the Fourth and won't require it. I suppose I can trust you not to go out of this study unless you get my permission?"

"Certainly, Stokes," said Dick, respectfully, "and I'm very
much obliged to you for letting me read your books if I want. When I do get home, if that happens, I'll ask the governor to write and thank you for—for—" Dick could say no more.

Stokes, who was genuinely sorry for Dick, said in an unnaturally loud tone—

"Rubbish, Evans; it's nothing," and he went out of the study.

Soon the servant came in and lit the gas, and a few minutes afterwards one of the waiting-maids came in with some tea and bread-and-butter for Dick.

Stokes guessed Dick had had no tea, and so before going to see Mr. Bright, which was the reason why he left his study, he made his way to the housekeeper's room and asked for some food to be sent to Dick.

To tell the truth, Dick was very hungry, and in spite of the position in which his want of truthfulness had placed him, he fell-to and enjoyed the meal. After it was over he drew his chair up to the fire again, and began pondering over the whole matter. Somehow he felt that Stokes would prove a good friend in need, and when the latter returned, some time after, he found the wearied boy lying back in his chair sleeping soundly, without a trace of trouble on his countenance.
CHAPTER XIX.

FOUND!

Mr. Bright did not personally superintend the prep. of the Fourth Form that evening. The head-master held a long consultation with him, and when the former had gone Stokes came in.

"I must confess to you," said Mr. Bright to Stokes, as they sat talking together, "that the case looks very black against Evans and Challenge—very black, indeed. Still, somehow, I cannot believe they are the culprits. There is something behind it all which we must try to fathom. The question is, how are we to get at the truth? In other words, if Evans and Challenge are innocent, in spite of their confession, who is guilty?"

"It certainly is a most puzzling affair," assented Stokes, "and the confession has only made it worse, for no one can believe the men who have owned to it to be guilty, as they declare. Still, Doctor has formed his own opinion, and I am afraid, unless we can offer clear evidence of another's guilt, Evans and his chum will have to pay the penalty."

"Can you suggest anything?" Mr. Bright asked.

"I have an idea, certainly," replied Stokes; "but I do not see how to carry it out. It is a strange one, I dare say you will think, when you hear it; but still it might be tried."

"What is it?" asked the master.

"You know that I have amused the Seniors occasionally with a mesmeric entertainment at some of our Saturday evening concerts, towards the end of term?"
"You certainly understand mesmerism very well," assented Mr. Bright; "but how can that affect the matter at issue?"

"Only in this way: suppose we get hold of some one who is likely to know a little about it and mesmerise him. I could then obtain all the information necessary."

"Do you intend to mesmerise Evans?" asked Mr. Bright.

"No; I don't think anything would be gained in that way. My idea is to try my skill on one or two of the known bad fellows of the Fourth."

"For instance—— ?" asked Mr. Bright, reflectively.

"Well, I should say either Parkinson or Comber, or even both."

"Parkinson is too much of a coward to have had a share in the matter," objected Mr. Bright; "while as to Comber, I am sure he would object to being mesmerised. You cannot do this against his will."

"Shall I try the experiment if I can get Comber's permission?" asked Stokes. "There are many reasons why I think Parkinson or Comber had something to do with the matter."

"Try it, if you like," agreed Mr. Bright; "but I am afraid it will lead to nothing. Certainly Comber's behaviour has been very strange of late; he has bullied worse than ever. I have my idea that he was to blame in that Tripp affair; but we could never bring it home to him, as Tripp refused to give any information. Comber was certainly out very late one night, for I saw him stealing off to his dormitory long after the others had gone to bed. It was that which made me suspect him concerning Tripp's refusal to speak; for Mrs. Myers—declares some one broke down the ivy in front of the infirmary that very night, and that she found the marks of boots upon the freshly painted window-sills. So I think Comber may reasonably have had something to do with this other affair. He certainly seemed overjoyed to hear that the boys had accused Evans and Challenge. Indeed, he roused my suspicions from his manner. He came up and told me, which was rather surprising, for he rarely
honours me with his conversation. Still, we mustn't give a dog a bad name and hang him, you know! I sincerely hope Comber had nothing to do with it."

"But you suspect he had?" said Stokes.

Mr. Bright moved uneasily in his chair. "I really don't know whom to suspect; the matter has quite upset me and made me suspicious of every one. When Evans and Challenge are suspected by their own fellows, what are we to think? It is a complete mystery."

"I will see if I can get hold of Parkinson or Comber," said Stokes, as he rose to go. "If I find anything out I will tell you at once."

Stokes had hardly gone out of Mr. Bright's private room when some one tapped at the door. The master rose and opened it. He glanced into the face of the visitor in surprise. It was Connie Castleton.

"I want to speak to you, Mr. Bright, if I may," said the Doctor's adopted niece.

"Pray come in," said Mr. Bright, as he admitted her and placed a chair for the visitor, after closing the door.

"I must stay only a few minutes," said the girl, hurriedly; "but I felt I must tell you, Mr. Bright. Will you promise not to say a word of what I say to my uncle?"

Mr. Bright, who was more surprised than ever, agreed to keep the interview a secret.

"It's about Dick—I mean Evans," said Connie, blushing furiously.

"Ah!" said Mr. Bright, who knew something of the affection existing between Evans and his visitor; "I suppose you have heard what has happened? It's a sad affair; poor Dick has confessed to the theft."

"But he isn't guilty, sir. Dick is as innocent as you are—as innocent as his friend Bob is," said Connie, emphatically.

"I fervently hope so," replied Mr. Bright; "but have you any grounds for what you say?"
"Dick told me—that is to say, he sent me word—that he was innocent, Mr. Bright."

"When was that?" the master asked.

"This afternoon," Connie answered.

"That may be; but it was this same afternoon that he went to the head-master and acknowledged his guilt."

"I know—I know," the girl said hastily; "but won't you believe me when I say he is innocent? I always thought he was your favourite pupil, sir."

"He was, and I am very much troubled about him. Why should he confess if he be innocent?"

"You don't understand Dick," persisted Connie. "He could not possibly do such a thing as steal. He has been foolish—that is all. When he heard that his friend Bob was to be accused, and he knew that Bob would try to shield him, he determined to declare himself guilty."

"I know," said Mr. Bright; "but he refused to tell me he was innocent."

"But he has told me!" said Connie, triumphantly, "and there is what he says."

As she spoke, the girl held out a letter for Mr. Bright's inspection. The latter read it carefully, and then gave it back to the girl.

"In that letter Dick tells you he is innocent, and that his friend is innocent. He also declares that he does not know who is guilty. The letter does not help us in any way to find out the guilty person."

"No, it does not," admitted Connie, sorrowfully; "but I thought you, as his Form-master, if you were convinced of his innocence, might intercede for him. Perhaps my uncle will listen to you, and I could not leave this chance of serving Dick undone. Won't you befriend him, when he wants a friend so much, sir?"

"I will do what I can; believe me, I am doing what I can for Dick. Unfortunately, his falsehood has complicated matters
if he be not guilty. I hope before Thursday morning that some light may be thrown on this affair."

"Thank you very much, sir," said Connie; and, after a few words of further conversation with the master, she left.

Mr. Bright went to Stokes' study, and, as Evans had retired to bed by that time, he held another conversation with the Sixth-Former, to whom he told the fact that Evans had owned his motive for the confession in a letter, and had also declared his innocence at the time. Mr. Bright did not, however, divulge the name of his visitor.

"I told you so; I know Evans is innocent," said Stokes, as Mr. Bright got up to go. "We'll get at the bottom of this affair before very long, I feel certain."

"I hope we shall," said Mr. Bright. "Good night, Stokes."

"Good night, sir," answered Stokes; and so they separated.

Meantime, in the Fourth Form dormitory, the boys were eagerly discussing the events of the day before retiring to bed, for by this time it was ten o'clock.

A group of boys were gathered round Margarine, who was loudly declaring the innocence of his chums, Dick and Bob, to the others.

"I say it was a shame—a beastly shame—to bring Dick and Bob in guilty. Some one lied; I'm sure of it. You fellows were so eager to get out of the punishment the Doctor put on the whole school, that you sacrificed the two best chums a fellow ever had. I could fight any one of you."

"Bravo, Margarine!" said Chutney and Curry, in a breath.

"That's all very fine," grumbled Margarine; "but why didn't the fellows wait, and not decide off-hand as they did?"

"We talked it over for two hours, and we decided against Dick Evans by a majority of eleven, and against Bob Challenge by a majority of two," said Parkinson. "It was fair enough, wasn't it?"

"No, it wasn't fair," said Gammon, "because Comber's fags voted in the majority."
“What’s that about me?” demanded Comber, who had just joined the number.

“I said,” repeated Gammon, slowly, “that your fags voted against Dick and Bob. And I say besides, that if it wasn’t for your bullying ways, the verdict would have been against some one else instead.”

“I wasn’t there, so no one was influenced by me how to vote,” retorted Comber. “You always support the verdict of the House at other times. Why shouldn’t you do so now?”

“Because your fags knew Parkinson would tell you which way they voted,” said Gammon, coolly.

“You seem to know a lot about it,” retorted Parkinson, who stood near. “I suppose you think Comber is guilty, or that I am.”

“If you’re not more polite to me I’ll show you what I think,” said Gammon, raising his clenched fist.

“Come, no fighting,” said Margarine. “We’ve made a fine mistake, but I suppose there’s no way out of it.”

“We don’t want to find a way out of it,” retorted Parkinson. “Dick Evans and Bob Challenge will get kicked out on Thursday, and we’ll all be taken to the Great Hall to see the fun. It will be a fine affair! I once saw a fellow expelled. He did look a guy!”

“You ought to know what it feels like, as well as looks,” said Chutney. “We’ve all heard you’ve experienced the ordeal twice already, and it would be a jolly good job if you experienced it again.”

“We’re very witty, aren’t we?” said Parkinson, but he turned a trifle pale at the recollection of his former disgrace.

“Lawson told me,” interposed a sallow-looking boy, “that he was coming to take charge of us to-night. Evans sneaked on Jackson, and the Doctor has given us Lawson as our new monitor for the rest of the term.”

“Just our luck,” grumbled Margarine. “It’s a good thing
to get out of Jackson's clutches, but I don't think Lawson is much better."

"You will please to remember that Lawson is my friend," said Parkinson, curtly.

"I'm not likely to forget it," said Margarine. "He's too much like you—a sweet-tempered youth."

Some of the boys laughed at this, while Parkinson, angered beyond control, rushed at Margarine and struck him full in the face.

"A fight! a fight!—Parkinson and Margarine! Go it, Margarine!" cried half a dozen voices at once.

Instantly a ring was cleared. Margarine, who had little wind, knew that he couldn't fight Parkinson, although the latter was smaller than he was. Accordingly, after a few feints, he suddenly caught Parkinson by the waist, and after a tussle, the two fell to the floor, Margarine on the top.

When the boys were parted, Parkinson was not anxious to renew the fight. Margarine's weight had winded him completely. All the boys saw what had happened, and cheered Margarine till the rafters rang.

"I heard that the Doctor means to find out what has become of the stolen things," said Chutney. "If Dick or Bob won't say, they will have something else to suffer besides expulsion."

"Rot!" said Margarine, unceremoniously. "Doctor only said that as a try on. Do you think he will let this matter get into police hands if he can help it?"

"What has become of the things though?" asked Comber quietly. "Some of you fellows seem sorry that you voted against Evans and Challenge, as far as I can make out. If that is so, why not try to find the watch and purse? They must be somewhere, you know."

"Unless it's nowhere, you know!" said one of the twins, mimicking Comber, "or some one has the things in his pocket. Suppose we all turn out our pockets?"

"Comber's idea isn't so silly as you think," said Parkinson,
who had recovered his breath again. "It's certain, whoever stole the things must have hidden them."

"Perhaps he spent the money, and dropped the watch and the empty purse into the river," suggested some one.

"I vote we search for the things," said Gammon. "Parkinson and Comber are right. We might carefully examine the dormitory boxes to-night, and then search about the school to-morrow. Perhaps the things are hidden in one of the caves in the Meads, or somewhere. It's certain the things ought to be found."

"Very well," said Comber, "as I suggested it, I offer my box to be searched first."

"And you may examine mine second," said Parkinson.

"It's a bounce," whispered Margarine to Gammon. "It's my opinion we shall find something in Comber's box. I've suspected him all along."

"Very well," said Margarine. "Who's for having their things overhauled?"

Every one in the dormitory agreed.

Just then in came Lawson.

"Now then, get into bed, will you?" he said, sullenly. Lawson did not care for the task of watching the Fourth Form.

"We want to find out who's got the Black Cadger's things," explained Parkinson. "Let us search the boxes."

Lawson, to please Parkinson, consented, but with the proviso that if the search were not successful in half an hour, it should stop and be continued the next morning.

Accordingly, several of the beds were wheeled away so as to make a good clear space for the purpose, and into this space Comber's box was brought. The boys gathered round in their nightshirts, and watched eagerly the proceedings. Margarine took the key, but found there was no need of it. Comber's box was unlocked.

Eager eyes scanned the various articles taken from the box,
and there was a thrill of expectation as Margarine carefully unrolled a package at the bottom. It proved, however, to merely contain some new fishing tackle which had been given to the bully on his last birthday, and which he had not yet used.

"Nothing in Comber's box," was Margarine's verdict.

"We'll examine Parkinson's next," said Margarine, who had constituted himself as searcher.

Accordingly, Parkinson brought his box into the ring, and it was unlocked and carefully examined, but with no result. Several others were tried, but nothing was found. Lawson, who was getting sleepy, ordered the boys to bed, and there the matter rested.

Next morning the boys were astir before the bell went for getting up, and one after another the boxes were brought.

Some one took Evans' box into the clear space, but it was found to be locked. Gammon, however, had a key which was found to fit it. The box was opened in a strange silence, even Lawson looking on with interest. But again nothing was found.

"There's one more to examine," said Parkinson, "and that's Bob Challenge's."

"He's got it with him in the infirmary," said Gammon.

"No, it's over there," said Chutney, pointing to where the box stood.

"I don't like the idea of looking into fellows' boxes when they are not present," said Comber, hypocritically.

"I'm quite sure neither Evans nor Challenge will object," said Parkinson.

"Dick and Bob have nothing to fear, so why should they?" replied Margarine, backing up Parkinson's remark, and a little surprised at Comber's sudden qualms.

So Bob's box was carried across the room and examined as the others had been.

Margarine took out article after article until at last he came to the handkerchief. He felt something hard inside, and
his fingers told him instantly that it was shaped like a watch. He dropped the package into the box and went on examining the other things. But the watchers' eyes were too sharp for him.

"What's that you dropped back into the box, Margarine?" asked Parkinson, suspiciously.

Margarine felt there was no help for it, and so he reluctantly fished the package out of the box again.

Margarine unrolled the handkerchief, and there, disclosed to the view of the wondering boys, was the Black Cadger's watch!

For a minute it was impossible to hear anything clearly, such was the discordant babel of cries which broke out.

"It was Bob Challenge!" "Dick Evans is innocent!" "You've only found the watch as yet!" "Some one put it there!" "Not likely!" "Hurray! the rest of us are cleared!"

Such were some of the cries as the watch was handed round to the boys for examination.

"So you've found the watch at last, have you!" cried Lawson, genuinely surprised. "Whose box was it in, do you say?"

"Bob Challenge's!" answered Parkinson, who was completely overjoyed at the discovery.

Comber said nothing. One part of his plot had succeeded; it remained for him to see that the second part did also.

"Go on, Margarine. Turn everything out; there's the purse with the money in it to be found yet!" cried some one.

Clang! clang! clang! It was the getting-up bell.

"Take your time," suggested Parkinson; "the bell's only just going. We've got half an hour yet, and this is the last box."

Margarine went away from the box.

"You do it, Parkinson," he said, "I can't; I feel sick."

Poor Margarine! He was so much upset at what he had
discovered, that he went away from the box and sat down on
the edge of the nearest bed, watching with a white face what
should next be discovered.

Parkinson, who was quite ignorant of Comber’s plot,
examined everything in the box most carefully. Not once did
he do this, but twice; he did not find anything else though,
and at last reluctantly gave up the search.

“It’s pretty clear to me,” said Lawson, “if one part of the
property is hidden here, the other part is likely to be. Is there
anywhere else where you fellows keep your concerns?”

“Only in the recesses,” said Comber; “no one is likely to
put anything there.”

“Why not?” asked Lawson. “How do you know that, I
should like to know? Don’t be quite so clever. It looks to
me as if you are trying to shield Challenge, I must say.”

Lawson was annoyed at Comber’s words, while, as a matter
of fact, nothing the monitor could have said was more likely
to ward off suspicion of his crafty trick from Comber. The
latter felt that he was lucky beyond his most sanguine ex-
pectations.

“Let us search the recesses. Come on!” cried Parkinson,
and he went to Bob’s first. Nothing was found there, of
course, so the boys made a thorough search of the rest.

It took only a few minutes for them to get to the recess
which belong to Evans, and once they were there eager hands
seized the various possessions of the boy and examined them.
Some one opened the zinc box.

“I’ve found the purse!” he cried.

Instantly all eyes were turned to where the boy stood, with
the little zinc box in one hand and the purse in the other.

“We were right, after all, then!” cried Parkinson.
“Margarine fought me last night; but to-day he’ll have to
own that the House of Commons did not make a mistake.”

Margarine, who heard his name mentioned, got up from the
bed and went over to the excited group of boys.
"How do you know that is the Black Cadger's purse?" he asked.

"You read the bill again, and then look at the shape of this purse, and you'll see," said Parkinson.

Comber was discretely quiet. He was getting very cautious. He had succeeded so well in his evil designs that he must use all his discretion to the end.

"Turn the money out; let us count it," said Margarine.

"That won't take much time to do," retorted Parkinson, who had the purse in his hand at the time, the finder of it having passed it to him.

"Why, what do you mean?" several voices asked.

"There's nothing in it! The purse is quite empty!" answered Parkinson. "Now, I want you all to recollect what I said when we tried Dick Evans. I told you all that he had a great deal of pocket-money this term—and now you can understand where he got it from!"

"I know better than that, though," said Margarine, "for I saw Evans with a sovereign the first day of term, and the Black Cadger hadn't been robbed then."

"It doesn't matter who robbed him, or in the least what Dick Evans spent," said some one; "the fact remains he had the purse hidden—and very artfully too, in my opinion."

"Well," said Margarine, "I don't believe it now; no, I won't believe either Bob or Dick stole the Black Cadger's things! It looks black enough against them, but still, I won't decide against them in a hurry."

"Well said, Margarine!" cried Gammon. "Somebody might have put the things there as a trick; who's to know?"

"That's just my idea," said Comber, calmly. "I shouldn't wonder if some one who had a spite against them tried to fix the charge on them in this way. I don't like Bob Challenge—I never pretended to—but I won't believe him guilty."

Anything more calculated to take the boys by surprise than Comber's cunningly devised speech it is difficult to imagine.
Those who had suspected Comber—and they were not a few—felt quite convinced of his innocence forthwith. As to Margarine, he was so pleased at Comber's behaviour, that he went up to the bully and held out his hand.

"Look here, Comber," said the fat boy, "I must say we haven't always been friends, because I don't like bullying, but there, you're behaving handsomely to my two chums, although neither likes you. I'm your friend from this morning."

Comber shook the proffered hand heartily.

"What shall we do with the things?" asked Parkinson at last, when there was a lull in the conversation.

"That matter is easily settled," said Lawson, who had suddenly found himself in a position of importance, and meant to make the most of it. "You will at once hand both the watch and the purse to me. After breakfast I will see the Doctor and enter into an explanation of the manner in which these things were found."

Clang ! clang ! clang ! The breakfast bell was ringing.

"To breakfast at once!" commanded Lawson; and the boys went down the stairs talking in excited clusters.

Before breakfast had been in progress five minutes the discovery had leaked out, and every boy at Littlebury knew Evans and Challenge had been proved, more clearly than ever, to be the culprits.

Mr. Bright, to whom Lawson told the news, was dumb-founded; he went across to Stokes, as the latter sat at the head of the Sixth Form table, and communicated the news to him. Mr. Bright also reported the discovery to the masters at the table upon the raised dais, and it was plain to see the astonishment the discovery caused them.

"I think the two culprits should be expelled to-day, without waiting for to-morrow to come," remarked Mr. Lamb.

"There is no need for such precipitancy," replied Mr. Bright, who was trying to think, even then, if some solution could not be found that would free Evans and his chum from
the charge. Connie Castleton's visit had affected him strongly. He felt assured that Evans would not have written the letter he had read unless it really represented the true facts of the case. If he had not been bound to secrecy, Mr. Bright would have gone direct to the head-master and told of his visitor and the letter.

Meanwhile, Lawson found his way to the head-master, who was breakfasting alone, and communicated his discovery. He enlarged on the fact that Jackson, with all his astuteness had not been able to discover anything, while he, Lawson, in one single night and morning, had cleared up what he considered to be the important part of the mystery.

But Lawson was wrong.
CHAPTER XX.

COMBER CLAIMS THE REWARD, AND IS MESMERISED.

The head-master of Littlebury had a busy morning after the stolen property was discovered. For some time he was engaged with the inspector of police of the town, for whom he had sent.

Doctor Chapple explained everything, and, having sent for the Black Cadger, that worthy agreed, on receipt of his watch and purse, to say no more of the matter. The money which was missing was refunded by the head-master out of his private purse. The inspector was very loathe to hush the matter up at first, but as the men of Littlebury were usually present at the annual concert given in aid of the police orphanage, and Doctor Chapple hinted that future support might be withdrawn otherwise, the affair was allowed to drop. The head-master promised, moreover, that the culprits should be expelled. This last won the Black Cadger over; he felt that it would be a complete recompense to him, for all his annoyance and suffering, to know that the causes of it were no longer in the great public school.

Having arranged matters in this way, the head-master's visitors departed, and then telegrams were despatched to the parents of both Dick and Bob, saying that their sons would be at home on the Friday; that is, the day after the expulsion. The Doctor wisely thought that if he sent the boys home immediately they were publicly expelled, they might feel the disgrace so keenly that they might leave the train at one of the intermediate stations, and not return home. He knew that
even a day makes all the difference in one's feelings concerning even such a disgraceful episode as being expelled.

Letters were written to follow the telegrams, explaining the reason of the expulsion.

When the midday break came, Comber, who was quite ignorant of the visitor the head-master had received, waited till the rest of the boys of his Form had left the class-room, and then sat down and wrote a letter to the detective. His letter which was brief, read as follows:—

"DEAR SIR,

"The stolen things have been discovered. They were found in the possession of two boys, named Robert Challenge and Richard Evans, both in the Fourth Form of Littlebury School. As they are to be expelled to-morrow (Thursday), if you want to arrest them, you must do so to-day. As I am giving you the information required, I shall expect the reward. I will call and see you at the Spotted Dog, if you will be there, next Tuesday at three o'clock.

"Yours sincerely,

"THE ONE WHO FOUND THEM OUT."

Having written this letter, Comber began to think how to get it to the station. Tripp, who was now back in his own dormitory, was nowhere to be seen. Comber went into the quad. and looked for him, but the fag was not there. The fact was, Tripp was keeping carefully out of the bully's way.

Comber dared not take the letter himself, and yet he was quite determined that it should be delivered. How was it to be done? There was a pillar-box just outside the school; but at first it seemed too dangerous a proceeding to post the letter there. However, Comber went that way, and sauntered about idly, in the hope that a chance to do so would occur.

"Hullo, Comber, coming to the Meads?" asked Margarine, who passed the bully just then.
"I don't feel inclined for anything; I'm too much upset about the discovery this morning," answered Comber, with a very serious face.

"If it comes out all right, after all," said Margarine, "I'll tell Bob and Dick what a trump you've turned out. Never mind it now, though; we can't mend matters by howling over them. Won't you come?"

"I'd rather not," said Comber; and with that Margarine and those who were with him passed on.

They had hardly gone a few yards when several other boys emerged from the Middle Gate and passed the same way. Comber watched them with annoyance, for, by some strange fatality, one of the fellows stuck his back against the very pillar-box itself, and, as he leant there, the others got round him, and began to talk excitedly. Comber knew what the subject of their conversation was, and heartily wished they would move on.

The bully was afraid to go to the post-office itself, for it was near the police-station, and he specially wanted no one to meet him going or coming that way that day.

At last, despairing of being able to post the letter for a while, Comber determined to go for a short walk and then see if the coast was clear. He went along the road for about ten minutes, and then turned back. Hardly had he done so than he encountered Christmas, the keeper of the tuck-shop.

Christmas touched his hat, which was green with age, as he observed Comber.

"A beautiful day, sir," said Christmas. "A sad thing this I hear up at the school."

"Ah," said Comber, a sudden thought flashing across his brain, "it's a very sad thing indeed. So you've heard all about it? Who told you?"

"Servants, sir; they knows everythink, of course."

"Of course," echoed Comber. He looked attentively at
Christmas's face as he continued, "Did they tell you the names of the men who are going to be expelled?"

"Yes, they did so," said Christmas, emphatically; "and, in my opinion, it serves 'em right."

"Look here, Christmas," said Comber, lowering his voice, "you have always been a friend to the men of Littlebury. If you got a chance to serve them, you would, wouldn't you?"

"I'd do anything I were asked," replied Christmas.

"Then listen to me," said Comber, who was now walking by the side of Christmas. "It's believed among us that this is all some dreadful mistake. We think some outsider did it. Both the fellows accused are innocent."

Christmas looked into the boy's face, and whistled incredulously.

Comber replied by speaking more impressively than before. "We've always dealt at your shop, and we spend a good deal with you, you know. Now, suppose that these fellows' special chums, of whom I am one, have an idea of putting the blame off them by means of a letter. Would you deliver the letter, and say nothing of where you got it?"

"You want me to keep it dark—eh?" asked Christmas, who was always willing to be of service to such good customers as the men of Littlebury were. "Very well, sir, I'll do it; dash my hat, but I will so! Ain't you young gentlemen bin my customers, and ain't Christmas grateful?"

Comber took the letter from his pocket.

"Deliver that as you see it addressed, say nothing about it, and I'll see that your tuck-shop gets plenty of custorn," he said.

"I can't read very well," said Christmas. "Who's the letter directed to?"

"Take it to the police-station, and give it to the first person you see there," said Comber, who began to feel a little nervous at the boldness of his stratagem.

"I say, this is all fair and square, isn't it? No hanky-panky"
is there? It isn't some lark of you gentlemen, is it? You do get up to some funny things; but this isn't one, is it?"

"Not a bit of it," said Comber, confidently. "You just deliver that letter, and I'll see that you are rewarded before long. But, mind, it's a dead secret."

"Dead as a door-nail," said Christmas; "and I'll take it at once."

Comber watched eagerly as Christmas put the letter in his breast-coat pocket, and then started off towards the police-station. Although he felt it was risky to send the letter by Christmas, in case the latter should ever mention the occurrence, still Comber was convinced that it was much better than posting it. It might have been lost in the post, he fancied, and he wanted to see Bob and Dick not merely expelled, but imprisoned. The thought of the thrashing Bob had given him rankled more keenly every day in the bully's breast.

Having got rid of the letter, Comber went back to Littlebury, and joined the boys who were in the quad, still talking about the latest phase of the mystery, which was apparently no mystery any longer.

While Comber was walking with Christmas some one was watching him, little as he knew it. From a turning off the high road Connie Castleton had witnessed the passing of the letter from Comber to Christmas. She knew that Dick was to be expelled the next day, and also knew that the stolen property had been found, and where. Consequently, she hoped for a letter from Dick, and as Christmas was the usual go-between, although the boys suspected one of the twins, she thought that Dick had entrusted Comber with the letter to give to Christmas for her.

Consequently, thinking that the letter Christmas had was for her, Connie Castleton followed the man, and a few minutes afterwards overtook him. After a few words of conversation, the girl said suddenly—

"And now, will you give me the letter?"
"LOOK HERE, MR. CHRISTMAS," SAID CONNIE, TAKING OUT HER PURSE, 'I WILL GIVE YOU EVERYTHING IN MY PURSE IF YOU WILL GIVE ME THAT LETTER. I KNOW THE BOY THAT GAVE IT YOU MEANS TO RUIN DICK EVANS AND HIS FRIEND, BOB CHALLENGE. . . ."
Christmas stared. "What letter?" he stuttered out in surprise.

"Why, the letter that Mr. Comber gave you just now."

"But he asked me to take it to the police-station," said Christmas, who was taken off his guard.

In a second Connie understood her mistake. Swiftly she remembered that Dick had often spoken against Comber, and called him a bully and many other hard names. She had always discountenanced such expressions—but now! She felt that they were all true. What was Comber sending a letter to the police-station about? Could it be about Dick? She felt sure Dick was innocent; perhaps this letter would explain all. From that moment she determined to get possession of the letter.

"I know the letter is not for me, Mr. Christmas," said Connie; "but as I am going past the police-station, will you let me deliver it for you?"

Christmas, who suffered from rheumatism a good deal, and who would, as a rule, have been glad of the kind office, became suspicious.

"Why should you deliver it?" he asked. "But there, I'm going that way myself, so it isn't necessary."

"Look here, Mr. Christmas," said Connie, taking out her purse, "I'll give you everything in my purse, if you will give me that letter. I know that the boy who gave it you means to ruin Dick Evans and his friend Bob Challenge; but I hope you won't help him. Do give me that letter!"

Christmas was taken aback at the girl's outburst of excitement, but he was determined to carry out his promise to Comber.

"I'm very sorry, miss," said he, "but I heard a very different story, and as I've promised to take the letter, I must do so. I know that them who are concerned in sending this letter are friends and not enemies of the two boys you name. Depend on't it's best I should deliver it."
Christmas touched his hat respectfully and went on, walking as fast as he could. Connie still kept by his side, pouring her entreaties into deaf ears when, as they passed a stile across the fields, Mr. Bright and Stokes got over. In an instant Connie Castleton ran to Mr. Bright and told him in a few words about the letter. Christmas meantime walked doggedly on.

"A most strange proceeding on the part of Comber," said Mr. Bright. "The letter must be secured."

With a few sharp steps he overtook Christmas. Mr. Bright put his hand on the old man's shoulder. Christmas stopped and faced him.

"What is this about a letter which I hear?" asked Mr. Bright.

Christmas was too agitated to speak. He was afraid to have a difference with any of the masters at the school, since he sold a quantity of things at Littlebury, and the Doctor might at any time remove his custom elsewhere.

"I wish to have the letter in your possession," said Mr. Bright, as Christmas did not answer him.

The old man put up his hands entreatingly. "I'm very sorry, sir, but a promise is a promise. I must deliver the letter."

"I insist upon your giving it to me at once," said Mr. Bright firmly. "The head-master of Littlebury will not allow any pupil of his to write letters to any one at the police-station. You must see clearly, Christmas, that this is a most serious matter."

"I can't help it, sir," said Christmas, imploringly. "I always keeps my word, and I must do so now. It will ruin me if the Doctor removes his custom; but what am I to do? I promised to take it."

"Then deliver it," said Mr. Bright, who had mean time thought of a plan out of the difficulty. "Take the letter, but I will go with you."

Christmas could not demur to this, and although he thought
he would have to pay dearly for his loyalty to Comber, still he persisted in delivering the letter.

When the police-station was reached, Christmas, followed by Mr. Bright, entered. The letter was given to the inspector who had visited the head-master that morning, and then Christmas withdrew.

"I happened to find out that this letter was being sent here by one of our pupils," said Mr. Bright to the inspector. "As I understand the whole matter has been settled, may I ask you, on behalf of the head-master of Littlebury, to hand the letter over to me?"

"I think it should be read first to the one to whom it is addressed," said the inspector.

He called up a tube, and the man with whom Comber had had that conversation in the Spotted Dog came into the office a few minutes afterwards. He took the letter, read it, and returned it to the inspector.

"It's about that affair up at Littlebury, that's all. As the matter is out of my hands, will you keep the letter?"

The inspector took the letter, and the detective went out of the room again. After perusing it, the inspector handed the letter to Mr. Bright.

"You may have it, and welcome; it is of no use to us. The writer, whoever it is, is apparently anxious to get ten pounds out of the other boys' misfortune."

Mr. Bright took the letter and, thanking the inspector, withdrew.

Outside the station Stokes was waiting for him. He had persuaded Connie to return, assuring her that Mr. Bright would secure the letter.

"This is an interesting document," said Mr. Bright, showing it to Stokes. "Whose writing is it, do you suppose?"

"I'm afraid I don't know," said Stokes. "I never saw the writing before."

"It is the handwriting of Comber," said Mr. Bright, very
seriously; "I am certain of it. And I am also certain that we are on the verge of a discovery."

"What do you think we shall find out?" asked Stokes.

"I don't know; I am afraid to say what I think," answered Mr. Bright. "The matter is more serious than ever. It looks to me as if Dick Evans and Bob Challenge are the victims of a horrible plot, and that Comber is implicated in it."

"We must act promptly," said Stokes.

"We certainly will," answered Mr. Bright. "Come with me to the head-master."

Doctor Chapple, who had remained in his study the greater part of the day, was fortunately there when Mr. Bright, accompanied by Stokes, arrived. A long discussion ensued. The result of it was that Stokes was given permission to carry out his idea of mesmerising Comber, and a plan for carrying this out was arranged.

When tea was over that evening the head-master announced that there would be no prep., in consequence of which the boys had the evening to themselves.

Stokes sent word to Bob that the head-master would allow him to spend his last evening at Littlebury with his chum Dick. Bob, therefore, grateful for this little concession, hurried down to Stokes' study.

"Now, you youngsters," said Stokes, after listening to the promises of continued friendship whatever happened which Dick and Bob made to each other, "just behave like two rational human beings. You know you are not expelled yet, and so don't despair."

"There is no chance for us to escape, now," said Dick. "In trying to save each other, we have tightened the net round us."

"Whether we are guilty or not," said Bob—"and I won't depart from my confession to the Doctor—there's one thing very certain. If we had hidden the stolen property as the other men think we did, I'm sure we should have found a safer
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place than they were discovered in. Never mind, Dick, we will run away to sea together."

"And come back in a week looking washed out, half-starved, and with your good clothes exchanged by the skipper for some old ones," laughed Stokes. "Don't do anything so silly. Running away to sea is only the first step to the second."

"And what is the second?" asked Dick.

"Running away from sea, and don't you forget it," said Stokes. "But there, I want you two to help me. I've got a plan of my own on, which I shall not explain to you, but which you must assist me in, if I find it necessary. Help me and ask no questions—that's all I have to say to you."

The two chums in misfortune looked at each other in surprise. What was it Stokes wanted them to help him in? Their anxiety was soon banished. Stokes rang the bell, and when the servant appeared, he asked for Comber to be brought to his room.

Comber went readily enough to Stokes' study. He knew that Dick was there, and as all the boys had suddenly turned very friendly towards the bully, owing to his standing up, apparently, for the accused, he expected Stokes had sent to thank him.

"Come in, Comber," said Stokes.

Comber was a little surprised to see Bob there.

"I sent for you, Comber," said Stokes, "because I hear you have been taking Evans' and Challenge's part since the discovery of these things. Of course, we all have our ideas on this strange matter, but my idea is this, I don't think Evans or Challenge stole the things. At all events, I don't believe they would have been so foolish if they did, to hide them in the dormitory."

"That's what I maintain," said Comber, stoutly. "It looks to me as if it is a plot against the two of them. I'm sorry the head-master doesn't see it differently. I suppose he still means to expel both of you?" Comber turned to the accused boys.
“The head-master means to have less men in the school to­
morrow than he has to-day,” answered Stokes, enigmatically.
Comber was deceived by the Sixth-Former’s words.
“TI’m awfully sorry,” said Comber. “Can nothing be done? ­
Couldn’t we get up a petition to the head-master, for­
instance?”
“I’m afraid not,” said Stokes. “But there, I sent for you­
because I thought you would like to spend the evening with us.”­
“I shall be very pleased to do so,” said Comber, who was,­
however, very sorry.
“Then I’ll get out my bagatelle-board, and we’ll play a­
game,” said Stokes; and forthwith he did so.
After a time the game flagged, and then Stokes suggested, in­
a most matter-of-fact tone, that he should mesmerise some one.­
To this even Comber agreed with alacrity, especially as Bob­
offered himself to be operated upon. He was only kept under­
Stokes’ influence for a few minutes, and then Stokes told them­
how it was done, and invited Comber to try to mesmerise him.­
Comber tried but failed.
“You don’t do it carefully enough,” said Stokes. “Just let­
me explain more carefully. There, I’ll mesmerise you, and­
then you will understand the whole process.”
Comber, who was anxious to learn the method, was taken off­
his guard, and, without thinking of consequences, consented.­
He accordingly sat in a chair, and Stokes having made a few­
passes with his hands, sent Comber into a mesmeric sleep.
Bob and Dick watched curiously. Their curiosity, however,­
soon gave way to surprise, for Stokes no sooner saw that Comber­
was overcome than he abruptly left his study. While the two­
boys were wondering what Stokes was about, the latter returned,­
and with him Doctor Chapple and Mr. Bright.
“You will please to keep quite still,” said Mr. Bright to­
Bob and Dick. “Unless you do so, you will both be sent from­
the study.”
The head-master said nothing. He sat down opposite to
where Comber was, and waited for Stokes to begin his strange experiment.

"Comber," said Stokes, "do you hear me?"

"Certainly," answered Comber, slowly, and in a far-away voice.

"I want to ask you some questions," continued Stokes; "will you answer me?"

"I will answer anything you ask me," said Comber.

The head-master, Mr. Bright, and Stokes held a long whispered conversation together; then the last-named put this question to the mesmerised boy—

"How came Tripp to go into the wood that night when he was found there by Mr. Bright?"

"I made him go," was Comber's answer.

Every one in the room started at the bully's words.

"How was that done?" asked Stokes; "just explain."

"I woke him up and sent him after the other boys to watch, because I was vexed they had left me out of the affair. I twisted Tripp's arm round till he promised to go."

"What else have you done to Tripp?" asked Stokes.

"I got into the infirmary one night by the window, and made him promise never to say anything about my sending him into the wood. I said I would kill him if he did. Tripp promised he would not tell any one, especially the head-master."

Doctor Chapple looked on in sheer amazement as he heard Comber making these damaging admissions. Only the fact that the bully remained as still as if he were dead convinced the head-master that this was not some strange trick.

"Have you ever done anything else to Tripp?" asked Stokes, who little knew what the boy's next confession would be.

"Yes, I made him hide the watch and purse in the dormitory. He put the watch into Bob Challenge's box, and the purse into a zinc box belonging to Dick Evans."

Bob and Dick started up from their chairs; but the head-master moved his hand towards them, and at the signal they
subsided again. The scene was becoming strange in the extreme.

"How did Tripp get the watch and purse?" persisted Stokes, who was determined not to spare Comber in the least.

"He found them in the Meads, in a hole where I had hidden them."

"You!" cried Mr. Bright.

Stokes turned to the master. "Please do not speak loud. I do not wish Comber to be confused by two voices; it often spoils everything," he whispered.

Mr. Bright nodded significantly, and Stokes went on with his examination of Comber, who still maintained a rigid stillness, only his lips moving as he answered, without hesitation, whatever was asked of him.

"What became of the money?" asked Stokes, to whom Doctor Chapple whispered the question first.

"I spent it all but one sovereign, and that I sent to a friend at home to mind till the holidays came. We are going to buy a cricket bat and pads with it," answered Comber.

"Now be very careful about your answer to this question, Comber," said Stokes, "because I should like to be sure what you say is true; you understand me, don't you?"

"I understand you quite well, and I will be careful," replied Comber, to the others' astonishment. He seemed to be almost anxious to confess his crimes.

"Where did you get the watch and purse from?" asked Stokes.

"I stole them from the Black Cadger's house," Comber replied.

Comber's answer surprised even Bob and Dick. Bad as they thought Comber, they never expected this. The Doctor, to whom Bob and Dick had confessed the crime, glanced angrily at the two boys, and then whispered to Stokes to repeat the question. Stokes did so, but Comber answered exactly as he had done before.
"Would you like me to ask him anything else?" Stokes whispered to the head-master.

"I should like to hear how it came about that he stole the things," said Doctor Chapple.

Stokes accordingly put the question to Comber, who answered—

"It was this way. I hate Bob Challenge, and I shall always hate him, because he licked me behind the fives' courts, and since then I have not been able to bully half the men I used. So when we went to pay out the Black Cadger, I saw the watch and purse on his mantleshelf, and thought I would steal them and put the blame on Bob Challenge. I went back afterwards and stole the things, and so as to get back to school quickly, I ran all the way. Bob Challenge and Dick Evans came back after every one else. When the news came out I put the blame on Bob Challenge and Evans, getting Parkinson to help me."

"Did Parkinson know anything about the robbery?" asked Stokes.

"Nothing at all; but he dislikes Dick Evans, and has had a share of the tuck I bought with part of the Black Cadger's money which I spent, although he did not know where I got it from. I also promised he should be invited to my home at the Easter holidays—and so Parkinson did all he could to put the blame on the two who were accused, in order to please me."

"But what did Dick Evans do to you that you wanted to put the blame on him also?" asked Stokes.

"He became Bob Challenge's great chum, and that was quite enough to make me hate him."

"Now, how about this letter that you sent to the police-station? what did you do that for?"

"It was all done for the same reason. The detective stopped me and had a talk, and we went to the Spotted Dog. There is a reward offered of ten pounds, and if I get it I mean
to buy a boat to row on the river at home with. It will be fine fun when Parkinson comes down. I mean to see that the detective pays me the money. I think I have earned it. Besides, no one will ever know that I stole the things. I shall not tell, and as every one suspects Bob Challenge and Dick Evans, I am quite safe. I shall have a fine laugh at them to-morrow when they are expelled."

"Is there anything else you would like me to ask?" said Stokes, who was delighted that his plan had met with such signal success.

"Nothing," said the head-master, to whom the question was addressed. "Challenge and Evans, I shall want you at once in my study."

The Doctor rose and left the room, followed by Bob and Dick. Each of the two chums looked at the other, wondering what was going to happen.

"I wish to ask you, Richard Evans," said the head-master, "if I am to understand that you have told me a deliberate untruth about this matter?"

"I did it to save Bob, sir," pleaded Evans.

"I am not aware that I asked you why you did it, but if you did it," said Doctor Chapple. "Be good enough to answer my question."

"Yes, sir, I did; and I am very sorry." That was Evans' answer.

"And you, Robert Challenge—am I to understand that you, too, have told me an untruth to purposely deceive me?" the head-master asked.

"I am sorry to say I did, sir," answered Bob. "It was a terrible mistake, and I promise you—and I know Dick will promise you also—that it is the first and last time what is not the truth shall pass our lips."

"I promise that, sir; I do, indeed," said Dick, readily.

"I do not think it will make much difference so far as your presence at Littlebury is concerned what you promise. I have
no intention to ask you to do so. You have chosen, both of you, a most foolish and wicked path to tread. You have trodden it, and you have arrived at your destination in consequence. What I have to say concerning the heinousness of your behaviour I shall say before the rest of the school tomorrow morning."

Bob and Dick stared aghast at the head-master. After finding Comber out, and after their characters being cleared, Doctor Chapple still intended to expel them!

"There is one wish I have to express," said the head-master, "and it is this. Say nothing to any one about what Comber has confessed to to-night. I will not ask you to promise even that, because your word cannot be relied on. I merely express my wish, that is all. Now you may go, both of you, to bed at once."

The Doctor held his study door open, and the two boys crept past him dispiritedly to bed. This was an ending to the suspense they had endured far different from what they had expected.

Neither Bob nor Dick spoke to any one of what had transpired. They obeyed the Doctor's commands to the letter. They parted at the foot of the stairs in silence, shaking each other's hand, and then went off to bed.

Mr. Bright went away, leaving Comber with Stokes, who promised to rouse him.

Meanwhile Stokes, as soon as every one had left his study, woke Comber up.

"Where am I?" asked Comber. "Have I been to sleep?"

"Well, you can see that Evans and Challenge have gone to bed, so you may guess that is so," said Stokes, laughing it off.

"I feel very sleepy," said Comber, who did not seem to recollect that Stokes had mesmerised him.

"Then I think you had better follow the other fellows' example, and go to bed, too," said Stokes.

"I think I will," replied Comber, getting up from his chair. "I say, won't it be exciting to-morrow to see two fellows
expelled? I've never seen any one sent away from school before. Do they generally cry, or what?"

"It depends," answered Stokes, evasively; "I haven't had much experience that way myself. Good night."

"Good night!" echoed Comber, and he went up to the dormitory where the rest of the boys were just going to bed. The boys were still as excited as ever, but Comber did not feel inclined to talk to them. His head ached very much, although he did not conjecture in the least what had happened.

There was certainly a very great surprise in store for the whole of Littlebury next morning.
CHAPTER XXI.

"BOYS WILL BE BOYS."

The long-after-remembered morning at Littlebury came. There was no need, indeed, for the bell to clang its warning notes, nor for the monitors to rouse the sleepy boys from bed. Every one was quick to dress, while their absorbingly interesting conversations were carried on by the boys in hushed tones. At Chapel that morning the Doctor seemed to be more than usually earnest as he read the prayers, and the responses were answered in tones that betokened the perturbation of both masters and scholars.

It was noticed, too, that Bob, who had hitherto been exempt during his illness from prayers, was present that morning, a seat being set apart for him and his chum Dick.

Even the twins were affected by the impressive silence which reigned in Chapel from time to time, broken only by the Doctor's sonorous voice, and the answering of the responses. Chutney, however, during the few minutes' address, found time, while the boys were seated, to sketch a couple of very creditable beetles, standing on their hind claws fighting, on the back of Parkinson's collar, while Curry was content with sticking three matches into Comber's hair, where they bristled like feathers in an Indian's war-decorated wig. But for all that the twins were very downcast, and their tricks brought them no pleasure.

Parkinson watched the Doctor's face, wondering if, after all, he would relent, and let Dick and Bob stay at school. Comber smiled sure of his revenge, and each time he got the chance he
kicked the knees of one of his fags who was in the seat behind him. This was easy to do, for when Comber knelt his feet reached well under the open-backed seat, to the discomfort of the one behind.

At breakfast the boys' tongues were loosed once more. Tripp sat watching Comber till the latter asked him what he was staring at, and flung a piece of bread-crust at the fag's head, whereupon Margarine, who sat next to Comber, contrived to touch the latter's milk with his elbow and upset it. Comber growled, and the rest of the Form laughed, but it was a ghost of a laugh to those the Fourth-Formers usually indulged in.

After breakfast, the boys went into their Form-rooms immediately, by the Doctor's express wish, but the monitors were in charge, for a meeting of the masters was being held.

A short time afterwards Tripp was sent for, to the astonishment of Comber. Somehow this made him uneasy. Still, he reflected, Tripp, if even questioned, would say nothing, and moreover, knew nothing of the actual theft. Comber persuaded himself that the sending for Tripp had nothing to do with him at all. Tripp was probably gone to see the doctor, who still physicked the fag.

By the time the boys had settled down to work the great bell of Littlebury began to ring ominously. Not in its usual brisk tone was the bell clanged, but slowly, like the toll of a passing bell. It was one of the customs at Littlebury to summon the boys to the Great Hall in that manner, whenever the unpleasant necessity of expelling any of their number arose.

"They're going to be expelled!" cried Margarine, starting up, forgetful of the monitor and everything else but his chums, as he heard the ominous sound.

The monitor made no effort to control the boys. He, too, was greatly excited.

"How do you know that?" some one asked.

"The bell always tolls like that, so a fellow in the Fifth
told me,” answered Margarine. “He said it was just the same when Pickering and Scott were expelled two years ago.”

“They might be going to be buried in the corner of the cloisters,” said Comber to Parkinson. “It makes me shiver to hear that bell.”

“Goat!” said Parkinson. “It would take a lot of bells to make me shiver, or expulsions either! I wouldn’t care much if I were in those fellows’ places. When you’ve been expelled from a school, your people always have to keep you at home a bit before trying to get you into some other school. So you get six months’ holiday!”

“I dare say you know, Parkinson,” answered Comber. Somehow the bell rang in his ears with a strange presentiment of coming evil.

“You will get into single file at once,” said Lawson, who was acting as monitor; and the boys immediately flung their books hurriedly aside and formed up outside the class-room.

“Heads up! Right turn! Quick march!” cried Lawson; and the Fourth Form went tramping up the great corridor, till the boys fell in behind the Fifth.

The masters were all assembled upon the great platform of the hall, the Doctor wearing his robes, while each master, in addition to wearing his cap and gown, wore his university hood as well.

It was an impressive scene. The body of the Great Hall and the gallery were filled with the pupils of Littlebury, and, viewed from the platform itself, the whole hall presented a sea of heads.

The head-master sat in a carved chair, one of the famous relics of that great historic school, while the rest of the masters sat on each side of him.

When all the boys had entered and taken their places, the bell ceased tolling. There was breathless silence as Doctor Chapple rose and, after standing quite silent for a minute, began—

“Masters and men of Littlebury, it is a sad task which I am
called upon to perform to-day. Nothing but a sense of duty to this venerable pile, a sense of duty to those who teach and are taught within its walls, and a sense of duty to the parents whose sons are entrusted to my care, could induce me to take the step I am about to take."

The Doctor paused to take breath, and then continued, "I will deal with the case of Edward Tripp first."

There was considerable surprise at this. What had Tripp to do with it?

Tripp was brought forward by one of the monitors until he stood in front of and below the platform.

"You, Tripp," said the Doctor, "have acknowledged to me, that at the bidding of some man of Littlebury you have acted as a spy and a sneak upon your fellows. You have suffered considerably in health through this, and I call you forward here, simply to publicly discountenance the habit some men have formed of acting as spies in order to ingratiate themselves with stronger and older men of their own or higher Forms. You, I say, have been already punished. You may resume your seat."

Comber was taken by surprise at the Doctor's words. Had Tripp told about his midnight adventure? Yet, as the name of the boy he had toaded to was not mentioned, Comber soon felt a little relieved. The next words of the Doctor brought a surprise for him.

"I am always ready to consider school escapades simply as such," continued the head-master, "for I know that boys will be boys, in spite of all efforts to the contrary. Nor do I wish them to be otherwise. I remember my own schooldays too well."

Some of the boys glanced at the Doctor. It had never occurred to them that he was ever a boy; who could think of that learned, pompous man as a schoolboy, playing leapfrog and fighting in the dormitory with pillows?

"But there is a limit to school escapades, and that is when boys plot against each other, when boys lie either for or against
each other, when boys steal. Men of Littlebury, I grieve to say
that three of your number have been guilty of these most
serious offences."

"Three! Which three? He can't mean Tripp! Who is
the third?" whispered Margarine to Gammon.

"Shut up and listen, can't you?" was Gammon's whispered
reply.

"I will deal with the offenders according to their several
offences," the Doctor went on. "First, as to the men who
have proved themselves liars. Robert Challenge and Richard
Evans, come forward!"

There was a murmur of astonishment at these words of the
head-master. They were accused of lying, not theft! What
did the Doctor mean?

"You, Richard Evans," said the Doctor, "as head of the
Fourth Form have formed a friendship with a new man. So
ardent has this become that, to shield him from the bare charge
of being a thief, you have owned to a crime of which your
school-fellows mostly believe you guilty, but which decision of
theirs has been proved to be a mistake. Of the theft you are
entirely absolved. The same may be said of you, Robert
Challenge. You are innocent of this theft, but you and your
companion have spoken untruths to me that I cannot pass over
in silence or leave unpunished. A lie is always a lie, under
any circumstances, and brings with it certain detection and
punishment sooner or later. I believe you have both been
taught a very severe lesson, and I am sure the rest of the
school will think so too, when the whole facts are known.
The punishment I inflict upon you both is that you return to
Littlebury one week before the end of the coming holidays,
and that you be excluded from all clubs and games of the
school for the entire summer term."

This was a severe punishment indeed for public schoolboys to
undergo, but both Bob and Dick were only conscious of one
fact—they were not to be expelled! Had they known, it was
the influence of their Form-master which had saved them. Mr. Bright had not only begged hard for them, but he had been supported by several of the other masters, who knew how keenly he felt the disgrace fallen upon his favourite pupils.

With the exception of Comber and Parkinson, every boy in the Fourth Form felt inclined to cheer at the result. Indeed, some incautious youth, forgetting himself, did openly cheer the Doctor's words, with the result that he was promptly seized by a monitor and led away out of the hall, to repent his rashness by being unable to witness the rest of the proceedings.

"I have yet to deal with the most serious case," said the head-master. "It is the case of a man who has behaved worse, I think, than any one ever has in this school during the years I have had the honour to be at its head. This man of Littlebury has persistently bullied the weaker boys whom he ought to have protected; he has stolen the property of Lord Dunsandle's gamekeeper; and, worse than all, he has allowed the blame to fall upon the innocent, without even then confessing his offence. I will pass over the fact that he has added hypocrisy and deceit to his offences. His career here is ended—his sin has found him out. Comber, stand forth!"

"Comber! Comber!" cried boy after boy, quite unable to repress the exclamation. Nothing could have been more astonishing.

Comber turned deathly pale, his knees shook, and he had to be led to the place where the other culprits had stood. Once there, the bully and thief hung his head down. He was so afraid, so utterly dumbfounded, that it is questionable whether for a time he understood or heard one word of what the Doctor said to him.

Before anything else was said to Comber, the Prefect of Hall was sent to get the bully's books. He brought also his cap, and indeed everything belonging to Comber which bore the name of Littlebury upon it. There, in sight of the whole school, the crest was torn from his cap, his cricketing and
football colours were formally rent, and then his name erased from every book allotted to him by school rules.

The great register was brought, and the Doctor, before every one, crossed out Comber’s name.

“Men of Littlebury,” said the Doctor, “I have followed out the duties of my office. Comber is no longer one of you—he is herewith expelled. To-morrow he will leave Littlebury, never to return. May it be many years before I am again called upon to perform such an onerous and distressing task. You will now go to your Form-rooms and resume morning school.”

“Spare me—oh, spare me!” suddenly cried Comber, who seemed to have awakened from his dream to the reality of what had happened. He ran up the stairs of the platform and flung himself at the feet of the head-master.

“Take him to your study, Stokes,” said the head-master to Stokes, who was sitting in the front row.

Stokes went upon the platform and led Comber away.

The boys filed out of the Great Hall as they had filed in, and went off to their class-rooms.

In the Fourth Form room the rejoicing was exceedingly great. Mr. Bright sent for Evans and Bob, and when they entered, shook them both warmly by the hand.

“I am very glad the result has been so,” he said; “you will both be able to remain at Littlebury, and show by your absolute truthfulness in the future that you have a deep and lasting desire to purge away your past offence.”

“We will indeed, sir,” said Bob; “nothing will ever again induce us to say what is not true.”

“And we will remember this day to the end of our lives,” said Dick, “and all the kindness we have both received from you.”

Anything like steady work in the Fourth Form that morning was out of the question. Indeed, for the half-hour which remained, Mr. Bright found it convenient to have a letter to write, while the boys crowded round Bob and Dick and shook
hands with them till the latters' hands were sore with the pump-handling they received.

"I tell you what it is, men," said Margarine at dinner that day; "we ought to celebrate this event in some way. What shall we do? It's half-holiday; suppose we get in a lot of tuck and have a grand time of it up in the dormitory to-night?"

"Let's make a subscription," said Chutney; "I'll give half a crown. Who will follow?"

"When Chutney can give half a crown, his brother can follow suit," said Curry, modestly, "and so I will give the same."

"Good old twins!" said Gammon. "It's so near the end of term, or I'd give one as well. I'm short of cash, but you can have a shilling, and welcome."

"The smallest contributions thankfully received, as the man said when a slate fell off a house top on to his head," said Margarine, who had taken a letter from his pocket and torn off the clean half-sheet. "I've got paper and pencil, so I'll put it down, and then we'll know what we've got to spend."

The list was soon made up, every one contributing what he could spare. The total came to twenty-seven shillings, and with this a tuck-in on a very liberal scale was provided. The boys were busy all the afternoon getting the things for the feast, and after Chapel that night went off to the dormitory in high glee.

Doctor Chapple, who understood the feelings which prompted the boys to such a feast, privately instructed Lawson not to take charge of the Fourth Form dormitory that night. He thought it best to let the occasion be a memorable one in the boys' minds, and thought, too, that such a rejoicing over the clearing of the innocent, and the punishment of the guilty, a fitting ending to such a memorable day.

Up in the Fourth Form dormitory the fun was tremendous, and after the usual tossing and pillow-fighting, the boys held a concert, which consisted mostly of songs with very short verses and extremely long choruses.

When everything else had been sung, Gammon sang the
famous school song which Bob had heard first that day when he had beaten Comber in the famous fight behind the fives' court. Then Evans, not to be behind-hand, suggested "Dulce Domum," after which, as a grand finish up, Bob and Dick were shouldered and carried round the dormitory all the boys singing lustily that other famous Littlebury song, "Here's a Health":—

"Here's a health to all good lasses,
Merrily, merrily fill your glasses,
Let the bumper toast go round!
May they live a life of pleasure,
Without mixture, without measure,
For with them true joys are found!"

"Now we'll have one more verse of Dulce Domum," cried Margarine; and accordingly the boys all sang—

"Concinamus ad penates;
Vox et audiatur;
Phosphore! Quid jubar,
Segnius emicans,
Gaudia nostra moratur?
Domum, Domum, Dulce Domum."

"We'll have three cheers for Bob and Dick!" cried Gammon, and accordingly the boys cheered their loudest.

"And three hisses for Comber!" cried Parkinson, to which the boys responded, and then, thoroughly tired out with the fun, they went to bed and slept as soundly as only boys can.

There was some one at Littlebury who did not sleep that night. While the boys were singing and cheering, he was listening outside the door. He even heard Parkinson, who he had thought was at least his friend, call for the hisses for him. That was the last straw!

The boy who was listening was Comber. He was fully dressed, late as the hour was, for Comber had made his mind up not to go home.

Next morning, when the bully was sent for, he was nowhere to be found, and Littlebury was soon to have another startling surprise in store for it.
CHAPTER XXII.

COMBER'S LAST ADVENTURE.

STOKES conducted Comber to his study, where the expelled boy was left. Alone in the room, Comber thought over all that had happened to him, and pondered what he was to do.

How the Doctor had discovered his guilt he never knew, nor, when he had been brought face to face with it, had he raised one word of defence. He knew it would have been useless. The Doctor never acted until he was quite sure of his ground for so doing, and then he kept rigidly to his purpose.

Comber recalled that Tripp had been sent for that morning. He felt sure, then, that the fag had told the head-master what he knew of the affair, and he dared say Tripp had spoken of the visit paid by Comber to him when he was lying sick in the infirmary.

But how had the fact come out that he actually stole the money? Some one must have seen him, and all this time the secret had been kept which was to lead to his downfall. But who had seen him? Comber wondered. He racked his head for an idea, and at last it came. Tripp could not have seen him, he felt certain; of course, the others—Bob, and Dick, and Chutney, and Margarine—knew nothing. Who did see him, then? Comber concluded that Parkinson had!

The bully argued it out with himself, and the more he did so the more he felt certain that Parkinson, who had pretended friendship for him, had helped him to spend the money, and then had peached upon him! Parkinson was a very-vicious youth, Comber knew that very well; besides, Parkinson had
dropped hints to the bully that he suspected the money he was spending was the Black Cadger's. Comber had laughed at the idea, but Parkinson, who really believed it, and was right, had he but known, saw from Comber's face that the bully knew something about it. From that hour Parkinson, while stoutly defending Comber openly, secretly determined to get the upper hand of him. He meant to let Bob and Dick get expelled, and then openly tax Comber with the crime. He thought in this way he could make the bully afraid of him, and also get out of him whatever it might please him. It occurred to Parkinson that to bully a fellow who was himself a bully would be very fine sport indeed.

Comber's brain was very defective. As a child he had delighted in perpetrating cruelties upon every animal he could, but with increasing years, his parents thought this propensity to maim and kill had left the boy. Instead, Comber delighted in all his former ways, except that he did in secret what as a mere child he had done openly.

Once he was convinced that Parkinson had betrayed him, Comber determined to be revenged upon his false friend, as he supposed him to be. But how? The very next day he was to be sent home, and then he would not see Parkinson again all his life perhaps.

Comber sat in Stokes' study all that day, brooding over his supposed wrongs. He would have liked to have done something to Dick, Bob, and Tripp as well as to Parkinson, but it was impossible. No, he would pay Parkinson out alone, and his vengeance should be remembered at Littlebury as long as his expulsion. How to do it—that was the problem which puzzled the bully's brain.

Stokes came in from time to time, and much as he disliked Comber, he tried to cheer him up a little, saying many encouraging words. But Comber did not answer. He sat there stone deaf, to all appearances. The food that was brought to him he left untouched.
In the evening Mr. Bright came in to wish Comber good-bye, for he wanted to have a talk to him. He was grieved beyond measure at Comber's iniquity, yet he tried to comfort the bully, bidding him try to retrieve his character, and promised that he would befriend him if ever he wanted assistance. Mr. Bright's words might well have moved a far harder heart than Comber's, but they fell on deaf ears.

When the master had exhausted all he could say, he held out his hand to Comber.

"Good-bye—good-bye," he said. "I see that you feel your disgrace keenly, but in that I read a good sign. You will yet, I sincerely hope, become a good man. Ask God to help you."

Comber kept his hands in his pockets. He might have been blind, as well as deaf. Mr. Bright went away, sorely puzzled. After that Stokes went in again, but Comber would not talk to him.

At ten o'clock Comber got up, and having been told that he was to occupy a bed in an otherwise vacant room in the infirmary, he went there. It was the room where Tripp had been, and whither Bob had followed him. The latter's arm was now so much better that he had asked to be allowed to sleep in his own dormitory that night, and the request had been granted.

Comber was let in by Mrs. Myers. He went straight up to the room assigned to him. A lamp burnt upon the table by the bedside. His box and other possessions had been placed there. Comber saw that everything of his had been collected, so that they might be in readiness for his departure in the morning.

He sat up for some time, then went down the stairs noiselessly, left the door ajar, and went across to the school. He mounted the stairs to the dormitory. There he listened outside.

Comber heard the merriment going on inside, and it was as bitter as wormwood to him. He alone, of all that Form, was
in distress. No one gave him a thought. He heard the cheers for Bob and Dick, and even the hisses for himself!

Comber waited outside the dormitory, hoping to get into it when the boys were all asleep. What he was going to do, he did not dare to think. Parkinson was the object that had brought him there—Parkinson, whom he had heard call for the hisses!

When all was still, Comber turned the handle of the door. It was locked. How it came to be so, he could not conjecture. He crept down the stairs, got the key from Mrs. Myers' infirmary, and tried that in the door. It did not fit, and moreover, it met with resistance. Comber understood that the key was in the dormitory door on the other side. His object could not be carried out that night.

Suddenly the bully felt hungry. He groped his way to Stokes' study, and found that the food sent him was still upon the table. He took what he could, and carried it back to the infirmary with him. Once he was back in the room again Comber ate ravenously, for he had touched nothing since breakfast. Then he sat down to think again.

At last Comber had his mind made up. He opened his box and took from it his best suit, which he put on, and after making up a bundle he thrust the rest of the things into the box again, and locked it.

Counting his money, Comber found that he had a little over seven shillings, which was very little for his purpose. He wished that he had not sent the sovereign home to that friend of his. The head-master had said nothing to him as to what he had done with the Black Cadger's money. Perhaps because he felt quite sure Comber had spent it.

Comber stole softly to the door, and then went down the infirmary stairs. A few minutes afterwards he was clear of the school and had left Littlebury School, with its associations, for good or for evil, for ever.

Comber trudged steadily on during the night, so that when
his absence was discovered next morning, he was in a town some nine miles distant. There he went into a cheap eating-house which supplied workmen with breakfast at six o'clock, and had some cocoa and bread and butter.

"Out early, young master," said a man, who had called in to get a cup of coffee on his way to work.

"Yes," answered Comber, shortly. He had no wish to enter into conversation.

After his frugal meal, Comber walked through the town, trying to find out its poorer part. He came to a long narrow street, which was littered with refuse of all kinds, for in it a market had been held on the previous day.

There Comber saw what he was looking for. It was a second-hand clothes shop, where navvies and such obtained their clothes.

Comber saw a rough-looking pair of moleskin trousers which he thought would fit him, and then asked their price. After that he looked at a reefing jacket, which he tried on, and found fitted him very well. He then unfastened his bundle and took from it a silver inkstand which had been given to him as a present by an uncle of his, but which he had not used at Littlebury.

"I will give you this inkstand for the coat and trousers," said Comber to the man who kept the shop.

"And where might you have got the inkstand from?" asked the man, curiously, as he looked Comber carefully over.

The bully explained. The man took the inkstand up in his hand and weighted it.

"It's only metal; it isn't worth them," said the shopkeeper.

"It is silver; I know that perfectly well," answered Comber.

"If it is, it isn't worth these fine clothes," said the man.

"Can you give me anything else as well?"

Comber knew the inkstand was worth far more than the clothes, but he was not in a position to drive a bargain.

"Are you going to wear the things?" the man asked.
"Certainly," said Comber; "I want to put them on at once."

"Then give me the things you have on as well, and it's a bargain."

"I can't do that," said Comber, "but I'll give them to you if you will give me ten shillings as well. They cost three pounds this winter."

The man argued and grumbled, but as he was making a very good bargain, he at last consented, and took Comber to a room at the back of the shop, where the bully soon changed his attire. Comber knotted a handkerchief round his neck in place of the collar and tie he wore. He also exchanged his new boots and some things he had in the parcel for a pair of heavy boots and a slouch hat.

Having done this, Comber made haste to leave the shop. He looked into the glass as he went out, and felt satisfied that no one would recognise him at Littlebury.

As he passed down the street, he saw the man with whom he had effected the exchange watching him. To throw this man off the scent, Comber walked on southwards for a time, then doubled on his way and struck towards Littlebury.

Comber did not go to Littlebury itself, but made his way towards the riverside. There he smeared his clothes with mud, and soiled his face and hands.

After that his course was clear. He waited about the district till Sunday came, for it was Parkinson's habit to walk beside the river on Sunday afternoon. Comber got food at a little village close by, observing the same rigid economy that he had hitherto. He had a great deal to do with his money after he met Parkinson, if indeed he managed to do so.

When Sunday afternoon came Comber lay down beside the river, confident in the completeness of his disguise. He felt quite sure no one at Littlebury School would recognise him.

All that afternoon Comber waited and watched, but with no success. Several boys passed him, and he caught stray
references to himself, as he conjectured, when they saw what they thought to be a bargeman lying there by the river.

When evening came, Comber crept back dispirited to the village where he was in hiding, and going into a barn which he had found there, went to sleep. Next day he wandered to the town where he had bought the clothes, for he knew there would be no chance to see Parkinson before Tuesday half-holiday.

Monday passed slowly away, and Comber, whose vengeance was as yet foiled, grew sick at the delay. He wished he had not waited about so long. Still, he was persistent, and Tuesday found him lying not far from where he had been on the Sunday afternoon.

Again Parkinson did not come. Comber went back to his barn and counted his small stock of money. He calculated that in two days' time there would still be enough to carry him to the sea-coast town, which was to be his destination after—after what? Comber refused to think that out. He decided he could wait until the Thursday. If Parkinson did not come then, he must go away without avenging himself. The thought was intolerable; the bully ground his teeth with wrath at the delay and frustration of his plan.

On the Thursday afternoon Comber went into the barn by the riverside in which he once used to smoke. He saw the remains of the hay which had caught fire that day when Stokes had come upon him suddenly. He lay down and began to ponder over what was being thought of his disappearance, both at home and among the boys of the school. He pictured the excitement which must have ensued when he was found to be missing, the telegrams passing from the Doctor to his parents and back. What a—— Stay! Some one was coming!

Comber turned his face over so as to hide it well in the remains of the hay, but not so much that he could not see who came in or went by.
Some one came into the barn whistling. Comber's heart beat fast, and his fingers tightened on to a stout stick which had been his close companion ever since he had been lurking by the riverside.

Was it Parkinson? No; Comber saw it was not. The boy came into the barn, looked round as if expecting to find someone there, and, seeing only a bargeman lying apparently asleep, went out.

It was not Parkinson, but it was an enemy to Comber, for the boy was Bob!

All Comber's evil instincts rose up at once. If he could not wreak his vengeance on Parkinson, why not on this other enemy of his?

Comber rose up and went cautiously to the doorway of the barn. Bob was walking slowly back towards Littlebury, looking neither to left nor to right. Comber followed him, saunteringly at first, till he saw that no one else was about, then he began to lessen the space between him and Bob.

Yard by yard Comber drew nearer and nearer still to his unsuspecting victim. Then, with a sudden run and a leap, he was upon the boy, and madly beating at his head and shoulders with the stick. Comber rained down furious blows till Bob fell unconscious to the ground; then the assailant flung the stick into the river and fled.

On, in mad, desperate haste, Comber ran, putting his hands to his ears time after time to shut out the cry for help that Bob had raised when he was attacked, and which seemed to pursue the bully as fast as he went.

The evening was coming on apace. The day had been dull and heavy, with a settled gloom gathered over the river which began to grow deeper and deeper. Up from the water rose a fog, which spread itself upon the fields, and wrapped everything in its damp, ghostly cerements.

Comber, as he hurried along, was compelled to stop several times for fear of missing his path, for the river wound in
devious ways as it flowed south. He had planned to make his way to Southampton, and there to seek employment upon a vessel under an assumed name. But Southampton was a long way off—and the fog gathered closer round the flying boy.

Out of breath at last, Comber flung himself down on the damp bank of the river, and rested for a few minutes, then he got up and pursued his way. He did not run after this: the fog was too dense and the river too near. On the side of the river on which he was, and shelving down to it, were fields with low hedges separating them, while here and there a narrow ditch was the parting way.

Somehow Comber wandered from the tow-path beside the river, and finding himself breasting one of the hedges which bounded a field, he cautiously tried to retrace his footsteps, but without avail.

It soon became quite dark; the chill of the dense fog seemed to benumb the limbs of Comber as still he struggled to find his way, for he was determined to go on at all costs. Anything was better than being caught, after what he had done!

Suddenly Comber saw a light shining feebly in the gloom towards his left hand. He turned and made directly for it, hoping that it was some cottage or farm, and that by locating it he might get upon the path he had lost.

The light was some distance away, and Comber walked swiftly towards it. When he seemed to be only a few yards from the gleaming light, the bully suddenly, to his horror, felt the ground fail beneath his feet, and the next moment he was struggling for his life in the river. The light was upon a barge moored there!

Comber was able to swim, and finding that he had floated out from the bank with the impetus of his fall, he turned and swam back to it, but could find nothing to seize, by which to pull himself upon the bank, for the latter was very steep at the spot.
The water seemed to be cold as ice, yet Comber still swam on, clinging anxiously to life, for he dared not die with that cry of Bob's still ringing in his ears.

The boy made one final effort as his strength began to fail him, and, hindered by the fog from finding a low part of the river bank, he swam towards the light, crying out for assistance.

The fog choked his cry, for no one on the barge heard him. Feebler and feebler became Comber's cries; the ringing of a thousand bells struck upon his ears, and then through them all he heard, or seemed to hear, the tolling of Littlebury bell, as it had tolled on the morning when he was expelled. The cry of his victim, too, mingled itself with the other sounds that beat upon his ears, and then Comber realised the fatal truth—he was drowning.

The boy by this time had reached the side of the barge, and touched its sides with one of his hands. He found a slimy chain by which the barge was moored, and caught at it—but it was too late. His fingers, even as they closed upon it, relaxed, and then came silence and darkness.

The waters swirled and played with their human toy, they hurried it to and fro, then down and down it sank, down to the bottom of the slimy river.

On that same afternoon, about an hour after Bob had been struck down, Tripp returned by way of the river from seeing his aunt, who lived near, as we have mentioned earlier in our story. He saw Bob lying there, and suspecting nothing, called out to him before he came to the spot. Getting no answer, Tripp approached, and then saw, to his great terror, what had happened. He did not wait to render any help, if that were of avail, but instead, he ran back to Littlebury as hard as he could.

Reaching the school, Tripp ran to the door of the headmaster's house, and rang the bell. To the servant who opened
the door, Tripp said something too incoherent for her to understand, but just as he tried to again explain, the Doctor himself came to the door, wearing his hat, for he was going to pay a call.

"Tripp!" cried the Doctor, seeing the fag's state of excitement, "what's the matter?"

"Bob, sir," Tripp blurted out. "He's murdered!"

"What?" cried the head-master in astonishment.

"Bob Challenge, sir," answered Tripp.

"Where? How? Who told you?" asked the Doctor, who plainly saw from Tripp's face that something was very much amiss.

"He's killed, sir; I found him lying by the river," Tripp managed to say.

"God bless me!" cried the Doctor. Then, seeing Gammon in the quad, he called him. "Gammon, tell Mr. Bright I want him at once—and Stokes."

Gammon ran off on the message, and within a couple of minutes he returned, accompanied by those he had gone to find, who, fortunately, were not away from Littlebury.

"Bright," said the head-master, greatly agitated, "I fear there has been foul play. Challenge is reported to be lying dead beside the river!"

"Challenge!" exclaimed Mr. Bright. "Why, I saw him less than an hour ago!"

"That may be, but we must see what truth there is in the statement," answered the head-master. He turned to Stokes. "Stokes, go at once for Mr. Coombs' partner, and beg him to follow us to the river bank at once. If he is out, get them to telephone to Mr. Coombs himself."

Stokes raised his cap, nodded his head significantly, then turned and went off for the doctor.

Meanwhile the head-master, Mr. Bright, and Tripp started for the river with all haste, several boys following, for somehow the evil news seemed to spread immediately.
Chutney, Curry, and Margarine were just entering by the Middle Gate when they saw the others passing out. Gammon went up to them, and hurriedly told them what Tripp had reported. They turned and followed the head-master's footsteps.

In a short time they came to the spot, to find that several workmen had discovered Bob, and were trying to find out if he were alive or dead.

Doctor Chapple and Mr. Bright brushed through the men, and looked at the prostrate boy. Bob lay perfectly still. Mr. Bright stooped down and felt his heart to see if it was still beating.

"There bean't now't alive left in un," said one of the men.

"Naw, he be stone dead. Who killed un?" said his companion.

"Dunno. There'll be crownner's 'quest, I reckon. Bean't it murder, mate?"

"Un looks loike it uncommon," said the first speaker.

All through this conversation Dick and his friends were watching Mr. Bright's face anxiously, to see if they could read there any sign of hope.

Mr. Bright looked up.

"Get me some water, Dick," he said.

In an instant Dick tore off his cap, and, dipping it into the water, contrived by keeping his hands beneath it to bring a little water for Mr. Bright to use. The master bathed Bob's face and forehead; those in the crowd, which had rapidly increased, giving him counsel of all kinds.

"It bean't much good to give un waater," said the man who had spoken before to his mate; "it ud take a tidy stoop on't to waake un."

Mr. Bright rose from where he was.

"I'm afraid it is all too true," he said to the head-master, quietly; but Dick heard him, and in a moment had flung himself beside the body of his chum, crying—
"Bob! oh, Bob! Dear old chum! it can't be true—it can't be!"

As he looked intently into Bob's face, Dick thought he saw a slight tremor in it, and sprang to his feet, crying—

"Bob's alive, Mr. Bright! he's alive! I'll get some more water!" and the boy ran to the river once more, bringing back the water as before.

The head-master watched anxiously for some sign of Stokes and the doctor to appear, but it happened that both Mr. Coombs and his partner were out.

"I think we had better try to get him back to Littlebury," said Mr. Bright a few minutes later; for, to the joy of all, Bob soon showed abundant signs of restored animation.

This advice was acted upon, the men who had interested themselves in the affair volunteering to carry Bob, and doing so with a tenderness that was a marked contrast to their rough exterior.

When, for the second time, strangely enough, that term, Bob was carried to the infirmary, a doctor arrived whom Stokes had succeeded in getting, and soon dressed the injured boy's wounds. Comber, in his blind anger, had struck at Bob without knowing or caring much where; but, although the boy was very much hurt, no dangerous symptoms set in, and Bob was soon declared to be out of danger. Had it not been for his injured arm—a fact of which Comber took full advantage—it is quite possible that, after the first blow, Bob might have given his ruthless assailant the worst of the encounter.

At the end of the week the head-master announced that the Easter holidays would commence, but, owing to the many strange occurrences of the term, as well as Bob's detention in the infirmary, no celebration of the event, such as usually took place, would be allowed. This decision met with full approval from all the men of Littlebury, while Dick wrote home and obtained leave to stay at Littlebury during the
recess, since he did not care to go away while his chum Bob was lying there ill.

It soon became known that Bob had told Dick he distinctly recognised Comber as his assailant, in spite of the fact that the latter had disguised himself; and the boys, knowing nothing of the bully's intention originally to waylay Parkinson, pondered over and frequently discussed Comber's strange conduct, wondering, too, what had become of him. They were soon to learn.

Towards the end of the Easter holidays, on a bright afternoon, Bob having sunk into a restful sleep, Dick went for a walk by the riverside, led by a morbid curiosity to see the place again where his chum had been so cowardly struck down.

He had not gone far when Connie Castleton, with whom Dick was faster friends than ever (and whom long years after he married) crossed the bridge and met him.

The two shook hands, and then went for a walk beside the river. The conversation naturally turned upon Bob and his assailant, Comber.

"What has become of him?" asked Connie during the conversation.

"No one knows," answered Dick; "but most of us think he went away to sea. His people have never heard a word from him; but I dare say he is afraid to write, for he is sure to think he killed poor old Bob."

"He was a very bad fellow," said Connie. "I am glad he has gone away; he might have done something to you, one day."

Dick grew thoughtful at this, and seeing some flowers growing by the bank, he got down among the sedge to gather them. As he did so, Dick started back in surprise and involuntarily cried out.

Connie Castleton came running towards him, thinking that he had lost his footing.
“Back! keep back!” cried Dick, his face as pale as death. “You mustn’t see him—it’s Comber!”

Yes, it was Comber. In spite of the ravages that death had made, and the tangle of weeds that covered his sodden clothes Dick recognised the upturned face in an instant.

He led Connie away from the spot.

Any one who visits Littlebury School may see, in that corner of the cloisters set apart for the purpose, among the stones that mark the resting-place of the dead, one on which is simply carved the unhappy Comber’s name.

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