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PENNANT ***

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THE CHUMS OF SCRANTON HIGH OUT FOR THE PENNANT
or
In the Three Town League
by Donald Ferguson

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CHAPTER I

SOME OF THE SCRANTON BOYS

"Too bad that rain had to come, and spoil our practice for today, boys!"

"Yes, and there's only one more chance for a work-out between now and the game with Belleville on Saturday afternoon, worse luck, because here it's Thursday."

"We need all the practice we can get, because if that O.K. fellow, who dropped in to see us from Belleville, tells the truth, both his club and Allandale are stronger than last year. Besides, I hear they have each set their hearts on winning the championship of the Three Town High School League this season."

"For one, I know I need more work at the bat. I've improved some, but I'm not satisfied with myself yet."

"You've improved a whole lot, Owen!"

"That's right, 'Just' Smith, he's made such progress in bunting, and picking out drops and curves and fast ones, under the watchful eye of our field captain, Hugh Morgan here, that several other fellows on the nine are below him in batting average right now, and I regret to say I'm one of the lot."

The boy who answered to the name of Owen turned red at hearing this honest praise on the part of his fellow students of Scranton High; but his eyes sparkled with genuine pleasure at the same time.

A bunch of well-grown and athletic-looking high-school boys had left the green campus, with its historical fence, behind them, and were on their way home. It was in the neighborhood of two o'clock, with school over for the day.

Just as one of them had said, a drizzly rain in the morning had spoiled all chance for that day of doing any practice in the way of playing ball. Mr. Leonard, second principal of the Scranton schools under Dr. Carmack (who was also county supervisor, with dominion over the Allandale and Belleville schools), had consented to act as coach to the baseball team this season. He was a Princeton grad. and had gained quite some little fame as a member of the Tiger nine that swept Yale off its feet one great year.

Besides Owen Dugdale, there were "Just" Smith, Thad Stevens, Hugh Morgan, Kenneth Kinkaid and Horatio Juggins in the bunch that started off from the school grounds in company, though they would presently break away as they neared their several homes.

"Just" Smith had another name, for he had been christened Justin; but he himself, in answering to the calls for Smith, would always call out "Just Smith, that's all," and in the course of time it clung to him like a leech.

Kenneth Kinkaid, too, was known far and wide as "K.K.," which of course was only an abbreviation of his name. Some said he was a great admirer of Lord Kitchener, who had recently lost his life on the sea when the vessel on which he had started for Russia was sunk by a German mine or submarine; and that Kenneth eagerly took advantage of his initials, being similar to those of Kitchener of Khartoum fame.

Horatio Juggins was an elongated chap whose specialty, besides capturing balloon fliers out in right field with wonderful celerity, consisted in great throwing to the home plate, and also some slugging when at bat.

Thad Stevens was the catcher, and a good one at that, everybody seemed to believe. He, too, could take his part in a "swat-fest" when a rally was needed to pull the Scranton boys out of a bad hole. Thad had always been a close chum of the captain of the team, Hugh Morgan. Together they had passed through quite a number of camp outings, and were said to be like twins, so far as never quarreling went.

This same Hugh was really a clever fellow, well liked by most of the Scranton folks, who admired his high sense of honor. He was averse to fighting, and had really never been known to indulge in such things, owing to a promise made to his mother, the nature of which the new reader can learn if he wishes, by securing the first volume of this Series. In so doing he will also learn how on one momentous occasion the peace-loving Hugh was brought face to face with a dilemma as to whether he should hold his hand, and allow a weaker friend to be brutally mauled by the detestable town bully, Nick Lang, or stand up in his defense; also just how he acquitted himself in such an emergency.

First "K.K." dropped away from the group as he came to the corner that was nearest his home. Boy-like, he sang out to the rest as he swung aside:

"I'm as hungry as a bear, fellows, and I happen to know our hired girl's going to have corned beef and cabbage for noon today. That's said to be a plebeian dish, but it always appeals to me more than anything else."

"Huh! you needn't boast, K.K.," said the Juggins boy, "over at *our* house Thursday is religiously given over to vegetable soup, and I'm good for at least three bowls of it every time. Then it's also a baking day, so there'll be fresh bread rolls, as brown on the outside as nuts in November. Whew! I just can't hold back any longer," and with that Horatio started on a dog-trot through a short cut-off that would take him to a gate in the back fence of his home grounds.

So presently when Owen and "Just" Smith had also separated themselves from the balance there were only Thad and Hugh remaining; nor did they waste any time in talking, for a high-school boy is generally ferociously hungry by the time two in the afternoon comes around; although at intermission, around eleven in the morning, in Scranton High they were given an opportunity to buy a lunch from the counter where a few substantial things, as well as fresh milk and chocolate, were dispensed by a woman who was under the supervision of the school directors.

"Since our baseball practice is off for today, Thad," remarked Hugh, as they were about to separate, "suppose you drop over and join me. I've got an errand out a short distance in the country, and we can walk it, as the roads are too muddy and slippery for our wheels."

"Yes, I have hated riding on slippery roads ever since I had that nasty spill, and hurt my elbow last winter," replied the other, rubbing his left arm tenderly at the same time, as though even the recollection after months had passed caused him to have tender memories of the pain he had endured. "Lucky it wasn't my right wing that got the crack, Hugh, because it sometimes feels sore even now, and I'm sure it would interfere with my throwing down to second. But of course I'll join you. I've nothing else that I want to this afternoon."

"Mother asked me if I'd go out to the Sadler Farm for her the first chance I got, and already it's been put off too long, owing to our keeping continually at practice every afternoon this week. She gets her fresh sweet butter from Mrs. Sadler, and their horse is sick, so they don't deliver it nowadays. Look for you inside of half an hour, Thad."

"I'll be along, never fear," sang out his chum, as he hurried off, doubtless smelling in imagination the fine warm lunch his devoted mother always kept for him on the back of the stove.

Thad was at the back door of the Morgan house inside of the stipulated time, and being perfectly at home there he never bothered knocking, but stalked right in, to find Hugh doing something in his own room. Like most high-school boys' "dens," this apartment was a regular curiosity shop, for the walls were fairly covered with college pennants, and all manner of things connected with athletic sports, as well as pictures that indicated a love for fishing and gunning on the part of the young occupant; but every illustration was well chosen, and free from the slightest taint of anything bordering on the vulgar or the sensational. There was not a single picture of a notorious or famous boxer; or any theatrical beauties, to be seen. Evidently Hugh's fancy ran along the lines of clean sport, and healthy outdoor exercise.

So the two chums started off for a walk, their pace a brisk one, because the air after that recent spell of rain was quite cool and invigorating. Indeed, once Thad even deplored the fact that Mr. Leonard had thought it best to call off practice for that afternoon.

"Well," remarked Hugh on hearing him say that, "Mr. Leonard was of the opinion we were rather overdoing the matter, and might go stale. He told me so, and said that in his experience he had known more than a few teams to overdo things, and lose their best gait in too much work. He says one more test ought to put the proper fighting spirit in us, and that he feels confident we'll be keyed up to top-notch speed by tomorrow night. I think our pitcher, Alan Tyree, is doing better than ever before in his life; and those Belleville sluggers are going to run up against a surprise if they expect him to be an easy mark."

In due time they reached the farm, and securing several pounds of freshly-made butter that had not even been salted, and was called "sweet butter," they started back. Thad proposed that they take a roundabout route home, just for a change; and this small thing was fated to bring them into contact with a trifling adventure that would cause them both considerable bewilderment, and be a cause for conjecture for days and weeks to come.

"I smell wood smoke," remarked Thad, after they had gone about a third of the distance; "and as the

wind is almost dead ahead the fire must be in that direction. There's no house in that quarter that I remember, Hugh. There, now can see smoke coming out of that thin patch of woods yonder. I wonder if they're meaning to cut those trees down and clear more land?"

"No, you're away off there, Thad," remarked Hugh, just then. "I can glimpse the fire now, and there's just one chap hanging over it. Don't you see he's a Weary Willie of a hobo, who's getting his dinner ready with wet wood. Here's a chance for us to see just how the thing is done, so let's make him a friendly call!"

CHAPTER II

THE MAN WITH THE COUGH

Thad seemed quite agreeable.

"Do you know I've never come in close contact with any tramp," he went on to remark, as they turned their faces toward the patch of trees where the smoke arose, "and I've always wanted to watch just how they managed. I note that this fellow has a couple of old tomato cans he's picked up on some dump, and they're set over the fire to warm up some coffee, or something he's evidently gotten at a back door. Perhaps he'll be sociable, and invite us to join him in his afternoon meal. I guess they eat at any old time, just as the notion seizes them, eh, Hugh?"

"They're a good deal like savages in that respect, I understand," the other told him. "You know Indians often go a whole day without breaking their fast; but when they do eat they stuff themselves until they nearly burst. There, he has seen us coming in, for he's shading his eyes with his hand, and taking a good look."

"I hope we haven't given him a scare," chuckled Thad, "under the impression that one of us may be the sheriff, or some indignant farmer who's lost some of his chickens lately, and traced them feathers to this camping spot."

The hobo, however, did not attempt to run. He watched their approach with interest, and even waved a friendly hand toward the two lads.

"Why, evidently he's something of a jolly dog," remarked the surprised Thad, "and there are no chicken feathers around that I can notice. Hello, bo', getting your five o'clock tea ready, I see."

At these last words, called out louder than ordinary, the man in the ragged and well-worn garments grinned amiably.

"Well, now, young feller," he went on to say in a voice that somehow was not unpleasant to Hugh's ear, "that's about the size of it. I haven't had a bite since sun-up this morning, and I'm near caving in. Out for a walk, are you, lads?"

"Oh! we live in Scranton," Hugh explained, "and I had an errand up beyond. We went by another road, and came back this way, which is why we sighted your smoke. Fact is, Thad, my chum here, has never seen a knight of the railroad ties cooking his grub, and he said he'd like to drop in and learn just how you managed, because he's read so much about how splendidly tramps get on."

"That's all right, young feller," said the other, cheerily. "Find seats on that log yonder. I ain't got much in my larder today, but what there is will fill a mighty big vacuum in my interior, let me tell you. This here is coffee in the first can—mebbe not just what you boys is accustomed to at your breakfast tables, but good enough for me when it's piping hot. I don't take any frills with wine either, in the way of cream and sugar, leaving all that for those that sit at white tablecloths and have silver as well as china dishes. In this other can I've got some soup. Never mind where I got it; some ladies, bless their hearts, are pretty kind; and I always make it a point to carry several empty tomater cans with me wherever I go. Besides that, in this newspaper here I've got some bread, and two fine pieces of bologna sausage that I bought in a village I came through. So altogether I'm expecting to have a right swell feast pretty soon."

Thad looked interested in these things. He even peeped into the two cans, and decided that wherever

the tramp got that coffee it certainly could be no "slops," for it had the real odor. The warmed-over soup, too, smelled very appetizing, Thad admitted. On the whole, he concluded that tramps were able to make out very well, when they knew the ropes of the game, and how to beg at back doors.

Hugh, on the other hand, was more interested in the man himself than in his limited possessions. He saw that the other was past middle age, for his face was covered with a bristly beard of a week's growth, verging on gray. His cheeks were well filled out, and his blue eyes had what Hugh determined was a humorous gleam about them, as though the man might be rather fond of a joke.

He was the picture of what a regular tramp should be, there could be no getting around that, Hugh determined. He rather believed that, like most of his kind, this fellow also had a history back of him, which would perhaps hardly bear exploiting. Doubtless there were pages turned down in his career, things that he himself seldom liked to remember, giving himself up to a life of freedom from care, and content to take things each day as they came along, under the belief that there were always sympathetic women folks to be found who would not refuse a poor wanderer a meal, or a nickel to help him along his way.

Apparently he had been just about ready to sit down and make way with his meal at the time the boys arrived on the scene; for he now took both tin carts from their resting places over the red embers of his fire, and opening the package produced the bread and the bologna. This latter looked big enough to serve a whole family of six; but then a tramp's appetite is patterned very much on the order of a growing boy's, and knows no limit.

Having spread his intended food around him as he squatted there, the hobo gave the boys a queer look.

"You'll excuse me if I don't ask you to join me, youngsters," he went on to say. "I'd do the same in a jiffy if the supply wasn't limited; besides, I don't know just what sort of a reception I'm going to meet with in your town."

"Oh! no apologies needed, old chap," said Thad, quickly. "We had our lunch only an hour or so ago and couldn't take a bite to save us now. But say everything seems mighty good, if the smell counts for much. So pitch right in and fill up. We'll continue to sit here and chat with you, if you don't mind, Bill."

"That's all right, governor, only my name don't happen to be Bill, even if I belong to the tribe of Weary Willies. I'm known far and wide as Wandering Lu; because, you see, I've traveled all over the whole known world, and been in every country the sun shines on. Just come from the oil regions down in Texas, because, well, my health is failing me, and I'm afraid I'm going into a decline."

At that he started to coughing at a most tremendous rate. Thad looked sympathetic.

"You certainly do seem to have a terribly bad cold, Lu," he told the tramp, as the other drew out a suspicious looking red handkerchief that had seen better days, to wipe the tears from his eyes, after he had succeeded in regaining his breath, following the coughing spell.

The man put a dirty hand in the region of his heart and winced.

"Hurts most around my lungs," he said, "and mebbe I've got the con. I spent some time in a camp where fifty poor folks was sleeping under canvas down in Arizona, and I'm a whole lot afraid I may have caught the disease there. So, being afraid my time would soon come I just made up my mind to look up a sister of mine that I ain't heard a word from for twenty years or more, and see if she was in a position to support me the short time I'd have to live."

Thad heard this with evident interest. At the same time it occurred to him the stalwart tramp was hardly a fit subject for a speedy death; indeed, he looked as though he might hold out for a good many years still, except when he fell into one of those coughing spells, and seemed to be racked from head to foot with the exertion.

Hugh saw that the fellow had an engaging manner, and a smooth tongue. He was trying to make out just what sort of a man this same Lu might be, if one could read him aright. Was he crooked, and inclined to evil ways; or, on the other hand, could he be taken at face value and set down as a pretty square sort of a fellow?

"Listen, young fellers," remarked the still eating hobo, later on, "didn't you tell me you lived in the place called Scranton, when you're to home?"

"Yes, that's so," Thad assured him. "Know anybody there, Lu, and do you want us to take him your best compliments?"

The tramp grinned amiably.

"I reckon you're something of a joker, younker," he went on to say. "Now, about the folks in Scranton, I suppose you boys know about everybody in town?"

"Well, hardly that," Hugh told him, "since Scranton is a place of some seven or eight thousand inhabitants, and new people are constantly coming in."

"All the same," added Thad, "we do know a good many, and it's just as likely we might be acquainted with your friend. What's his name, Wandering Lu?"

"First place, it ain't a he at all, but a lady," the other explained, looking a little serious for once.

"Oh! excuse the mistake, will you?" chuckled Thad, highly amused at the airs the disreputable looking grizzled old chap put on when he made this statement. "Well, we have some acquaintance among the ladies of the town also. They're nearly all deeply interested just now in helping Madame Pangborn do Red Cross work for her beloved poilus over in brave France. I suppose now you've traveled through that country in your time, Lu?"

"Up and down and across it for hundreds of miles, afoot, and in trains," quickly replied the old fellow, "and say, there ain't any country under the sun that appeals more to me than France did. If I was twenty years younger, hang me if I wouldn't find a way to cross over there now, and take my place in the trenches along with them bully fighters, the French frog-eaters. But I'm too old; and besides, this awful cough grips me every once in so often."

Even the mention of it set him going again, although this time the spasm was of shorter duration, Hugh noticed; just as though he had shown them what he could do along such lines, and did not want to exhaust himself further.

"But about this lady friend of yours, Lu, would you mind mentioning her name, and then we could tell you if we happen to know any such person in Scranton?" and Thad gave the other a confiding nod as if to invite further confidence.

"Let's see, it was so long back I almost forget that her name was changed after she got hitched to a man. Do you happen to know a chap who goes by the name of Andrew Hosmer?"

The boys exchanged looks.

"That must be the sick husband of Mrs. Hosmer, who sews for my mother," remarked Thad, presently. "Yes, I remember now that his first name is Andrew."

"Tell me," the tramp went on, now eagerly, "is his wife living, do you mean, younker, this Mrs. Hosmer, and is her name Matilda?"

"Just what it happens to be," Thad admitted. "So she is the lady you want to see, is she, Lu? What can poor old Mrs. Hosmer, who has seen so much trouble of late years, be to you, I'd like to know?"

The man allowed a droll look to come across his sun-burned face with its stubbly growth of gray beard. There was also a twinkle in his blue eyes as he replied to this query on the part of Thad Stevens.

"What relation, you ought to say, younker, because Matilda, she's my long-lost sister, and the one I'm a-hopin' will nurse me from now on till my time comes to shuffle off this planet and go hence!"

The two boys heard this stunning announcement with mingled feelings. Thad looked indignant while Hugh on his part tried to read between the lines, and understand whether there could be any meaning to the tramp's declaration than what appeared on the face of it.

CHAPTER III

HUGH HAS SUSPICIONS

"Well, old man," remarked Thad, "I'm afraid you're in for a disappointment about as soon as you strike Scranton; because if Mrs. Hosmer is your long-lost sister, she isn't in any position to help you pass the time away till you kick the bucket. Why, even as it is, she has a hard time getting along, and

my mother as well as some of the other ladies give her sewing to do to help tide over. She can hardly make enough to keep herself and her husband going."

The tramp shook his head sadly.

"Say, I'm right grieved to hear that, son," he went on to observe, seriously. "Course it's goin' to be a hard blow to poor old Lu, after working his way up here all these months, and nearly coughing his head off at times, to find out that his only relation in the wide world ain't well off in this world's goods. But then Matilda she always was soft-hearted, and mebbe now she might find a hole in her humble home where her poor old brother could stay the short time he's got in this world of trouble and sorrow. I could do with less to eat if I had to, gents; and blood was always thicker'n water with Matilda."

Thad felt indignant. The idea of this sleek-looking old rascal settling down on his poor sister, and making her support him, was too much for his temper.

"Well, I'd be ashamed if I were you, Wandering Lu, to even think of letting any woman earn my living for me, no matter if she did happen to be a sister. As it is, she's hard pushed at times to get enough food together for herself and her husband."

"Why, what's the matter with Andrew; why can't he do his share?" demanded the other, boldly, and Thad thought he looked disgusted at the poor prospect before him.

"Mr. Hosmer is really sick," explained the boy; "and there's no humbug about his ailment, either. I heard the doctor tell my mother that it was partly due to a lack of substantial food for years. You see, the woman herself was ill for a long time, and her husband worked himself to skin and bone trying to provide for her. Then she got over her trouble, and now it's his turn to go under. He has tried to work a number of times, but fainted at his bench in the shop from sheer weakness."

"Gee! I'm sorry to hear that," muttered the other, shrugging his broad shoulders as he spoke, and shaking his head from side to side, as though he feared some hope he had been cherishing was on the point of vanishing. "But then mebbe Andrew he may get better again, and be able to work at his trade, because if I really got consumption there ain't any chance for me to be doin' in this world."

Thad showed signs of growing angry, but pinched his arm, and muttered in his ear:

"Just hold your horses, Thad. We can't stop him, if he's set on seeing his sister, you know. And besides, perhaps they'll turn him away from the door. He's a queer sort of a chap, and I just can't quite make out whether he's a scamp or a big joke. Let's keep quiet, and see which way the cat jumps."

Thad heaved a sigh, but did not say anything to the tramp that he may have had in his mind, and which possibly Wandering Lu might have resented. The man had continued his meal and was in something of a reflective frame of mind apparently. Hugh supposed he was wondering what he was going to do after coming so far in hopes of finding a snug nest for the remainder of his idle days, and meeting with a possible disappointment.

"Say, young fellers, I'm going to ask a favor of you," he suddenly remarked, as he brushed the back of his hand across his mouth, signifying that he had finished his meal, and did this in lieu of using a napkin.

"What is it you want?" asked Thad, a bit ungraciously, it must be confessed.

"Of course, you know just where Matilda lives in Scranton," observed the man, insidiously; "and mebbe now you wouldn't mind if I walked along with so you point out her home to me when we get near it?"

"Ought we do it, Hugh?" flashed Thad, turning toward his chum.

"What's the harm?" asked the other, instantly. "He can soon find it by asking at some house, whether we help him or not. Why, yes, we'll accommodate you, Lu; but I wouldn't be too hopeful if I were you, about their asking you to stay over, because the times are out of joint nowadays, food getting higher every day, and money hard to pick up, since Uncle Sam's just jumped into the big war game."

"But my sister Matilda she always did have a tender heart, and wouldn't see a poor stray cat go hungry if so be she had a bite of food," the tramp went on to say in the most unblushing way possible. "Unless she's changed a heap she'll let me stay a while with her anyhow. Mebbe I'll pick up some if I get good care, and can go on the road again if the worst comes. But I'm much obliged to you for saying as how you'd show me her humble home. It'll be mighty fine for a poor old rolling stone like me to get under the roof of a blood relative, which ain't been my luck for over twenty years."

He hastened to gather his scanty belongings together. When the pack was complete he slung it across his back, and gave Hugh a nod. Somehow even this tramp seemed to understand that Hugh Morgan was the leader among his mates; perhaps it was his expression of firmness that told the story, for there was certainly nothing of the "boss" air about the boy to indicate as much.

"I'm all ready, if you are, younkers," the tramp said.

"Then we'll be off," remarked Hugh, Putting his words into action.

Thad began to wonder what any of their acquaintances would say should they happen to see them in company with Wandering Lu. The tramp looked so utterly disreputable that Thad disliked being discovered with him; and yet Hugh, who looked deeper than his companion, was surprised to notice that this dirt had the appearance of being rather new and fresh. The fact caused him to take further notice of the man, about whom he felt there rested quite a little air of mystery.

As they walked along the road headed for town, Thad's curiosity got the better of his dislike and suspicion.

"In all this twenty years of knocking about, ail over the world, as you claim, I suppose now there have been times when you've struck pay dirt—what I mean is that I sort of think you haven't always been what you are now, just a tramp? How about that, Wandering Lu?"

"What, me?" chuckled the other. "Say, I've dug gold in Alaska, hunted pearls down near Ceylon, been at work in the diamond fields out in South Africa, and in lots of other places in the world took my turn at playing for high stakes with old Dame Fortune. Why, younkers, I've had fortunes several times, and let the same slip out of my hands. Some time, mebbe, if so be, I conclude to stay around this section of country, which pleases me a heap as far as I've seen the same, why I'd like to spin you a yarn or two that'd make your eyes look as big as them there individual butter plates they use in restaurants. I've run up against heaps and heaps of queer adventures. In fact, it's a wonder I didn't die long ago with my boots on. That's what peeves me, to think a feller who's been so close to death by violence so many times should after all be snuffed out with the pesky con."

Then he had another spell of violent coughing that quite aroused the sympathy of Thad afresh, while Hugh observed and took note. According to his mind, these fits of near strangulation were almost too methodical to be genuine; still, he did not wish to condemn any one without positive proof, though laboring under the impression that the said Lu could not be as far gone as he tried to make them believe.

Presently they arrived in the environs of Scranton. The boys went out of their way to accommodate their disreputable looking companion, for they would have struck across by another street if going home direct.

"Mrs. Hosmer lives in that small cottage ahead of us," Hugh was saying, pointing as he spoke.

The tramp stared, and nodded his head.

"Looks right neat, accordin' to my notion," he said. "Matilda was always a great hand for keeping things clean. Now, I rather reckon I'll like this place a heap."

Thad burned with fresh indignation to hear him so coolly signify his intention of burdening the already hard pressed sister with his keep.

"Oh! is that so?" he snorted, "then I kind of think you'll have to get a move on you, Wandering Lu, and remove a few pounds of superfluous earth from your face and hands."

The man did not show any sign of being offended at this attack; simply looked at his hands, and grinned as he remarked:

"Reckon that I will, younker; but then soap is cheap, and I wouldn't want to soil Matilda's clean sheets and towels. Yes, if I'm going to become domesticated and give up all this roving business I suppose I'll just have to clean up a bit. Wonder now if Andrew he would have an extra suit of clothes he could turn over to me. I'd sure hate to make my poor sister blush to introduce her brother looking as tough as I do just now."

"There's Mrs. Hosmer coming along the street," said Hugh at that juncture. "She's got a bundle with her, so I expect she's been getting more sewing to do from your mother or mine, Thad. And that's Mr. Hosmer just opened the door to let her in. He's been watching for her, no doubt, because they say he's always been a mighty good husband, and it nearly kills him to see her working so hard while he keeps on being too weak to be at his trade. We'll meet her at the door."

They walked along, and stopped just as the good woman came up. Mrs. Hosmer had snow-white hair, and a most amiable countenance. Every one who knew her understood that the poor woman possessed a big heart, and would share her last crust with a hungry man or child. Thad, gritting his teeth at what he anticipated he would see, watched the meeting. Hugh answered her pleasant greeting by saying:

"We chanced to come across a man who was inquiring for you, Mrs. Hosmer, and as he asked us to show him where you lived we have fetched him along. He can speak for himself now."

The woman turned to look at the tramp. Up to then she had hardly noticed him, but now something seemed to stir within her bosom. They saw her start, and bending, look more closely, at the same time turning paler than usual.

"Oh! who can it be?" she said, weakly. "I seem to see something familiar about the figure, and the face, but it's impossible, for my brother Lu has long been dead."

"That's where you're mistaken, Matilda, because I'm that same Luther Corbley, and still alive and in the flesh, though pretty far gone, I'm afraid," and he acted as if about to start into one of his hysterical coughing spells, then thought better of it, because Matilda was rushing toward him, dropping her bundle as she came.

Paying no attention to his soiled and ragged clothes, the good woman threw her arms about the neck of her long-lost brother, and actually kissed him again and again on his rough cheek. Hugh, watching closely, could see the man assume a pleased look, and once he thought he caught Wandering Lu actually winking his left eye in his direction, as though to say: "You see, she never will let me die on the road!"

CHAPTER IV

THE BARNACLE THAT CAME TO STAY

The man in the doorway, Andrew Hosmer, had watched this remarkable scene with a variety of emotions. He realized that something in the nature of a calamity had come upon them, for if his poor, hard-working wife had found it difficult, even with the generous help of good friends in Scranton, to provide food for the two of them, however could she manage to add still another to the household, and feed a third mouth?

Still, this man was undoubtedly Luther Corbley, the brother of whom she had so often talked, and who was believed to be long since dead, because he led such an adventurous life. And surely they could not be so inhuman as to deny him at least temporary shelter, and a share of their slender meals.

So, greatly to the disgust of Thad in particular, Mr. Hosmer now came forward to offer his hand to the tramp, who took it eagerly. The look on Brother Lu's face impressed Hugh as one of strange import. He could not make it out at all, and even found himself vaguely wondering whether this man might not after all be some sort of artful impostor, who, having learned about the lost brother, chose to play the part simply to be well taken care of for a time.

But then surely Matilda would soon be able to tell, when she got to talking of their childhood days. A thousand things were apt to come up, and even a cunning schemer could not help betraying his vast ignorance along such lines.

About this time Brother Lu seemed to have one of his periodical outbursts of violent coughing. Indeed, he rather outdid himself on this occasion, as though determined to make a good showing before his newly-found relatives, and thus enlist their full-fledged sympathy in the start.

Matilda seemed fairly shocked as he strained, and writhed, and almost burst a blood vessel with his efforts. Thad stood and watched, his lip curling as though he could no longer be deceived. To him the whole thing was now very much in the nature of a fraud, a delusion, and a snare. He did not doubt the identity of Brother Lu, but as to the genuine nature of his malady, that was another question entirely, and Thad could not be impressed again. He fully believed the man was faking sickness just to gain the sympathy of these simple people, and work out the game he had in view, which Thad was convinced was to make a snug nest for himself during the rest of the summer, perhaps for all time.

"Let's be going along, Hugh," he said, as he wheeled on his chum, the light of honest indignation glowing in his eyes; "this thing is making me feel sick, and I can't stand much more of it!"

Hugh himself was agreeable. He intended, however, to see considerably more of Brother Lu in the immediate future, and expected to be able to gauge the fellow for what he really was. If he felt positive that there was a chance of his being an impostor, Hugh would consider it his duty to warn Mr. Hosmer, so that with the help of his wife they might catch the fellow in some sort of trap and expose him. Even though he did turn out to be the genuine article, Hugh felt that it would be a shame to have him hanging on the poor couple, and causing Matilda to work harder than ever to provide food, while possibly this able bodied tramp led a lazy sort of an existence.

Accordingly the two boys strolled on, not having far to go in order to reach Hugh's home, where he could deliver the "sweet butter" he had gone out to the farm after. Just as Hugh anticipated, Thad "boiled over" as soon as they were out of earshot of the Hosmer cottage. Turning to look back he had seen the wretched hobo being tenderly escorted into the little dwelling, hardly more than a dove-cote in point of size, Matilda on one side, and her husband on the other; and the sight caused Thad to grit his teeth savagely.

"I tell you it's a burning shame for that husky fraud to impose himself on that poor old couple the way he has done," grumbled Thad. "He's no more sick than I am. Didn't you see how he devoured all that food at a sitting? No man wasting away with consumption could stuff like that. And see how fat he is in the bargain; why, he'd make two of old Mr. Hosmer. Yet they are ready to take him in, feed him three meals a day, give him the best bed in the house, most likely, and for an indefinite time. Uh! thunder! it makes me furious just to think of it."

Hugh was amused at seeing Thad act in this way, because it was so unlike his usual cool demeanor. Undoubtedly he was, as he had said, indignant from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet.

"We'll both of us keep an eye on Brother Lu," remarked Hugh, "and try to learn his little game. You know he asked us to come over and see him, when he would keep his promise to tell us some thrilling yarns about his adventures in many lands."

"Oh! I've no doubt the fellow has a slick tongue in his mouth, and can spin stories that haven't a particle of foundation except in his brain. He's no ignoramus, that's sure, and if he hasn't traveled in all those countries he's read about the same, and can talk everlastingly about things he imagines he's seen."

"But all the while we'll be watching to trip him up, don't you see?" the other continued. "I'll set Matilda to fixing a trap or two that will settle the question about his being the man he says he is."

"Oh! I'm not thinking so much about that!" burst out Thad, "even if he is Luther Corbley, her own brother, that isn't the main trouble. It's about his fastening himself like a barnacle or a leech on them that I hate to consider. It makes me think of bow the Old Man of the Sea, after being helped by Sindbad the Sailor, refused to get off his benefactor's shoulders when asked. That's what this chap means to do, get so comfortably settled that nothing can dislodge him."

"We'll see about that," snapped Hugh, his eyes sparkling now. "Some of the good people of the town who are interested in the welfare of Mr. Hosmer and his wife will object, and so Brother Lu may have to trudge along again."

"I'm afraid you'll run up against a snag when you try that sort of thing, Hugh. That snag will be the affection of Matilda. She's *awfully* tender-hearted, you can see, and would rather go hungry herself than that any one related to her should suffer, even a little. Just think of that beast being installed in their home. Every time he thinks it necessary to stir up a little extra sympathy he'll start that old gag of coughing to work again. Oh! I feel as if I could willingly help duck him in Hobson's Mill-pond, or give him a ride out of town on a rail some fine night."

Hugh had to laugh at hearing this honest outburst.

"No use talking, you don't seem to have much feeling for the woes of a poor old homeless tramp, Thad," he told his chum.

"Well, I haven't, if you want me to give you the honest truth," said Thad, bluntly; "in my humble opinion any husky man who is willing to loaf around and let a delicate woman like Matilda Hosmer labor for his support doesn't deserve a grain of pity. Remember, Hugh, I'm not referring to her husband, who is a good fellow, and doing all he can to get his strength back again, so he can go to his trade, and allow her to take things easier. I'm going to tell my folks all about it. The women of this town ought to do something to influence Mrs. Hosmer, if she persists in letting that hulk of a lazybones stay

with her, and be fed at her expense."

"That might be a bright idea, in good time," assented Hugh. "Surely our mothers would know how to manage, and could get Matilda to give the man his walking papers; though on second thought I really believe she would refuse, even if they declared they would have to decline to assist her further unless she chased Brother Lu away from her cottage home. He knows her character, too, because you remember how he told us Matilda always was a tender-hearted thing, and would not stand by and see a wretched dog suffer if she could prevent it by any personal sacrifice."

Thad did not reply immediately, but made a number of highly significant gestures, of a nature to cause Hugh to fancy the other were punching some fellow's head in a satisfactory fashion. And somehow actions spoke louder than words in that case.

"Don't let this queer business weigh too heavily on your mind, Thad," warned the other, as they prepared to separate. "We've got a game ahead of us, remember, and it's mighty important that the catcher behind the bat should keep his wits about him."

"I guess I know all that, Hugh," chuckled Thad. "Once I get to playing ball, and there's going to be nothing interfere with my work as a backstop. I'm feeling in tip-top condition right now, and everything working right expect to be a factor in bringing Belleville down into the dust day after tomorrow."

"Once we get that game pulled off," observed Hugh, "and we won't have another championship one for two weeks, because Allendale and Belleville meet the next Saturday, though we expect to play another team from Jenkintown, just to keep our hands in, you know. Our next job will be to hustle with that strong Allendale combination, that broke up everything last season, and went through with only one defeat."

"But next week, with nothing on our hands, Hugh, we can turn our attention to this miserable business again, can't we?"

"Why, I know of no reason to prevent it," observed the other. "Let's hope that by then Brother Lu will have decided town life is too dull for him, and be once more holding down the railroad ties in his journeying through the country. I've read that it's mighty hard for a genuine tramp to settle down to any civilized sort of existence. You see, they're of a sort of migrating gypsy breed, and get as uneasy as a fish out of water when stalled for any length of time."

"Course that would settle it all beautifully," agreed Thad, with a relieved look on his honest face; "but according to my mind it would be too good to come true. That sly chap means to play the game to the limit. As long as he isn't half starved he'll hang on there, and work upon the sympathy of those poor people. The only sure way to get him dislodged would be to cut his rations short; though to do that you'd have to hurt Matilda and her sick husband. But give me a little time, and I'll fix him, that's right, I will!"

If Brother Lu could only have seen and heard all this he might have been made a bit uneasy, under the conviction that his soft berth in his sister's home was not going to prove such an easy snap as the conditions seemed to imply. Hugh found himself wondering just how the fellow would take it. Brother Lu was becoming something of a mystery to Hugh, and he was already making up his mind that it would afford him great pleasure to study the rogue still further, and see what that sly gleam or twinkle in his blue eyes really stood for.

"Come over tonight, Thad, and we'll talk matters over again—baseball matters, I mean, of course," Hugh called out as his chum started away.

"Just as you say, Hugh, though I was expecting that you'd favor me with a call. There are a few little things that had ought to be straightened out before we hit that slugging nine over in Belleville. I hope Alan Tyree keeps up his good work in the box. Lately he's seemed to be doing finely, and Mr. Saunders declares he could mow down a lot of heavy hitters in the college league. Well, we'll know more about a heap of things when Saturday night comes around. See you later, then, Hugh!"

CHAPTER V

There was quite a big crowd at Belleville when the time came for the game to start on Saturday afternoon. Scranton had sent a hustling delegation of many hundreds of enthusiastic people, most of whom were young folks, deeply interested in the fortunes of their school team, led by Hugh Morgan.

The scene was a pretty one, for, it being a warm day, the girls were out in force, dressed in all the colors of the rainbow, and waving their school pennants with a patriotic fervor that did them full credit.

Then there were the groups of students belonging to each of the rival high schools, with some fellow to lead them in cheering; they promised to make it a day long to be remembered with their collective noise and hearty concerted shouting.

Already the two teams were in evidence, Scranton being at practice, with the use of the field for fifteen minutes. Some were knocking out flies and fierce ground balls to the fielders; while the catcher varied the monotony of things by sending down speedy balls to second to catch an imaginary runner from first, after which Julius Hobson or Owen Dugdale would start the ball around the circuit like lightning before it reached the hand of the batter again.

All this preliminary work was being watched with more or less interest by the vast crowd of spectators. There were many who pretended to be able to gauge the capacity and fielding power of a club in this stage, but experienced onlookers knew the fallacy of such a premature decision. Often the very fellows who displayed carelessness in practice would stiffen up like magic when the game was actually started, and never make a sloppy play from that time on, their throwing being like clock-work and their stopping of hard hit bounders simply gilt-edged.

The umpire was on the ground, and would soon be donning his mask for work behind the bat. He was a former Yale graduate, and as he lived in Jenkintown, would not be inclined to favor any one of the three clubs representing the High School League. Besides, Mr. Hitchens was a man held high in esteem by everyone who knew him, and his decisions were not likely to be questioned, since everyone felt certain he would be strictly impartial, and say what he believed to be so.

When the time limit had expired the players came in, and the two field captains were seen in consultation, as though there might be something in the way of ground rules to be settled before play was called. The crowd was so large that in several places it had worked over into the field, and a rope had to be stretched to keep the spectators from bothering the players.

It was understood that a hit in a certain quarter amidst the spectators would be counted a two-bagger. To secure a home run on the Belleville grounds the batter must send his ball in a direct line for center, and far above the fielder's head. The ground has a slight slope there, and once a good start was made it was likely to elude the running fielder long enough to allow a fast sprinter to circle the bases.

Hugh had never played on the Belleville grounds before, but he always made it a practice to closely examine every field before starting a game, and discovering its weak spots. Now he realized that Belleville must be well aware of that small slope, and the possibilities it had for a home run. Doubtless the Belleville boys had all been trained to aim their guns in that direction, with the hope of accumulating a number of four-base hits during the progress of a game. The visitors, not being wise to the fact, would waste much of their surplus energy in sending out hits to the side of the field where, no matter how vigorous the wallops might be, still they would only count for two bases.

So Hugh gave each and every one of the boys the secret, and the "heavies" were implored to do their utmost to send their hits straight ahead, and high over the head of fielder Major, who did duty in the middle garden. They assured him they would not be found wanting when the time came, though, of course, much must depend on how they were able to gauge the slants and drops of the artful Kinsey, pitcher for Belleville.

When the two high-school nines took the field they were found to consist of the following players in their batting order:

Scranton High Player

Position

"Just" Smith Left Field

Joe Danvers First Base

Horatio Juggins Right Field

Owen Dugdale Short Stop

Hugh Morgan Third Base (Field capt.)

"K.K." (Ken Kinkaid) Center Field

Julius Hobson Second Base

Alan Tyree Pitcher

Thad Stevens Catcher

Belleville High Player

Position

Conway Left Field

Gould First Base

Wright Right Field

Waterman Shortstop

"O.K." Kramer Third Base

Major Center Field

O'Malley Second Base

Kinsey Pitcher

Leonard Catcher

Of course the home team elected to go into the field in the opening inning. This brought "Just" Smith to the bat to start things moving. Well, he proved to be the "round peg in the round hole," for what did he do but tap the very first ball up for as pretty a single as any one would want to see. This was certainly a good beginning. Joe Danvers "whiffed out" after knocking several foul strikes. That was one down, but the eager Scranton fans were saying to each other:

"Notice that our fellows don't seem to have any trouble as yet in getting to Arthur Kinsey this fine afternoon! Oh! wait till they limber up, and you'll see them knock him out of the box."

"Yes, just wait," some of the local rooters would call out, "and see how he mows your fellows down in one, two, three style. Arthur always starts in easy and stiffens up as he goes along. He has pitched two games in an afternoon, and won both. They do say he was better at the end of the eighteen innings than when he started. Yes, please don't take snap judgment on our poor pitcher. There, did you see how Joe Danvers nearly broke his back trying to hit a ball that didn't come within a foot of the plate. He'll have them all guessing pretty soon and eating out of his hand. The game is long, my brother, don't settle it in the first inning."

Owen got in his little bunt, all right, and succeeded in advancing the runner to second, as well as saving his own bacon. So there were two on the bags, and as many down, when Hugh stepped up and took a chance at the offerings of the wily Kinsey.

Hugh managed to pick out a good one and sent it like a bullet straight at the shortstop, who knocked it down; and finding that he could not reach first in time, as Hugh was jumping along like the wind, sent it over to second, where he caught Owen just by a fraction of an inch, and Mr. Hitchens waved him off; so after all the brave start, no score resulted.

In their half of the first, Belleville did no better. In fact, they only got a man on first through an error on the part of Joe Danvers, who unfortunately slipped in reaching for the ball, and as his foot was not on the bag the umpire called the runner safe. But he died there, Alan Tyree cutting the next two men down as a mower in the field might the ripe grain with his scythe.

Again did Scranton make a bid for a run in the next deal, but once more slipped up when hope had begun to grip the hearts of many of the anxious home rooters. In this inning "K.K." struck out, Julius Hobson was sent to the bench on a foul that Wright out in the field managed to settle under after a lively run; Tyree got a Texas league hit that allowed him to plant himself on first, and Thad slipped one over into the bleachers in right that, according to the ground rules, allowed him to go to second.

With men on two bags up came "Just" Smith, who had done so bravely before; but alas! as that Belleville fan had truly said, the local pitcher had tightened up and was not such "easy pickings" now; so Smith only whiffed, and the side was out.

Belleville, much encouraged, started hitting in their half of this inning. Two good blows, added to a couple of errors, allowed them to send a brace of runners around the circuit. It began to look serious for Scranton, and Hugh bade his men brace up and do something worth while.

With Scranton at the bat Joe Danvers cracked out a clean single, after he had had seven fouls called on him. Juggins tried to do the same but failed to connect. Owen, after two strikes and three balls, again bunted. He succeeded in shoving Joe down to second, but it went as a sacrifice after all, because they got Owen before he could cross the initial sack.

Again history repeated itself, and it seemed up to Hugh to do something to save the inning from being a goose-egg again. He braced himself for an effort. Kinsey apparently considered Hugh

dangerous, and was for passing him, in hopes of being better able to strike out the next man up, "K.K." But Hugh refused to be denied, and stepping out he smote one of those curves a blow that sent it spinning far out in left, allowing Joe to come in, and placing Hugh on second.

Things began to look a bit brighter now. Encouraged by the aspect, and possibly the cheers of the Scranton fans, "K.K." put one over second that allowed Hugh to reach third, no attempt being made to nip the batter at first.

Then up stepped Julius Hobson. As he was so fond of saying, it was "Hobson's choice" with him, because he could not bunt, but had to hit out. Well, he succeeded in doing a mighty thing, for the ball went whizzing far over Major's head out in center, and started rolling down the little incline. Hugh and "K.K." raced home amidst thunderous plaudits, and after them came Julius, plodding along "like an ice-wagon," some of the anxious ones declared, though after all he had abundance of time to make the complete rounds.

There were no more runs garnered that inning, but then Scranton was not greedy. Four against two looked mighty good to the visitors.

So the game went on. It became a regular see-saw sort of affair, first one side being ahead and then the other.

At the end of the seventh, after considerable excitement, the two rival nines found themselves just where they had started in the beginning of the game, for they were tied, eight to eight, and both fighting tooth and nail to keep the other from adding to the score, while also endeavoring to secure a few runs on their own account. Both pitchers had warmed to their work, however, and runs were likely to be a scarce article from that time on.

When Scranton was going into the field for the beginning of the eighth inning, the vast crowd settled down for an interesting close, because when two teams are as nearly matched as these seemed to be, it is a toss-up which will win the game.

CHAPTER VI

A HOT FINISH

"It's anybody's game so far!" one of the Scranton boys was calling out.

"Well, I told you that Kinsey would grow better the longer he was in the box," laughed the local rooter, who had spoken before. "Why, he's just getting warmed up by now. Your fellows will be lucky to touch him again from now on. It's as good as sewed up already."

"Don't crow too soon," Scranton told him, unflinchingly, for boys are not to be so easily bluffed; and the Scranton fellows still had great confidence in their team, led by Hugh Morgan, as strong finishers.

It began to look very much like a pitchers' battle from that time on. Kinsey was fast becoming invulnerable, and batter after batter failed to connect with his wizard delivery. He would smile at them, and then proceed to give them something they were not expecting, so that the heaviest Scranton batters struck out.

On the other hand, Alan Tyree was doing almost as well, and if he fell a trifle short his teammates made up the difference, for they performed splendidly. Several hummers that apparently were ticketed for two-baggers, perhaps more, were hauled down by expert fingers before they could get out of the diamond, while the fielders caught several particularly vicious flies that would have counted heavily against Scranton were they allowed to fall safely.

The ninth inning saw no change, for the tie was still unbroken. This sort of thing pleased the crowd immensely, as an extra inning game always means additional excitement, and added thrills for the money.

Even the tenth did not break the monotony, although at one time it looked as if Belleville might add a tally to their score, and possibly clinch matters. Leonard, their hard-hitting backstop, sent one out in short center, failing to give it enough force to take advantage of that incline back of "K.K." Then Conway, who had been hitting savagely latterly, tried to knock the cover off the ball, but only

succeeded in popping up a high foul which Thad smothered in his big mitt after dancing around for several seconds, as though the twister were difficult to gauge correctly.

Gould bunted unexpectedly when the stage was set for a mighty blow, with the fielders playing away out. He advanced Leonard, although caught himself, thanks to the quick work of the pitcher, who closed in on the ball, and tossed it to first ahead of the sprinting Gould.

So Leonard was on second, with two out, and another slugger at the plate in the person of Wright, with Waterman to follow.

Some of the Belleville boys started cheering and they appeared to be almost certain that a run was as good as counted, but for once they made a mistake, because after Tyree had gotten himself into a bad hole, with three balls and one strike called, he forced the batter to foul, and then shut him out on a dizzy inshoot that he failed to connect with, being called out by the watchful umpire.

The eleventh inning saw no difference in the prevailing score, which after both clubs had had a turn at bat remained the same, eight to eight.

"Why, anything is possible with those two boys going as strong as they are right now," the Belleville rooter was saying. "That pitcher of yours, Scranton, is no slouch, believe me. He isn't hardly in the same class as Kinsey, but your fellows are supporting him in great shape, and saving many a run by fine field work. But of course we'll win in the end; we're bound to. One of our boys will put in the big wallop and circle the bases on a trot, and then it'll all be over but the shouting. It's no disgrace to be whipped by a Belleville team, Scranton."

"Spell able first!" taunted the visiting fan, still filled with implicit faith in his school representatives.

It was now the beginning of the twelfth. Hugh had again talked to his fellows, and once more implored them to get busy with their bats.

"Don't ever get the notion in your heads that you can't hit Kinsey's shoots and drops!" he told them, as Julius Hobson selected his bat, being the first man up. We've just *got* to work a man around the circuit this inning."

"If we don't we never will next time, because it's the unlucky thirteenth," remarked another, who, like many baseball players, seemed to have a touch of superstition in his make-up.

"The thirteenth is as good as any other," Hugh told him, reprovingly; "and if we reach it I hope you'll not lie down on that account. Julius, you're due for a wallop, remember."

"Sure thing, Hugh, watch my smoke!" chuckled the other, as he stepped blithely out and tapped his bat several times on the plate after a fashion he had, while Kinsey was eyeing him reflectively, as though trying to remember what the long and short suit of the Hobson boy was.

Then he sent in a screamer which Julius as promptly sent far out in the heavens, and started running like mad for first. They could see the long-legged Conway out in left field sprinting like a huge grasshopper in hopes of getting under the soaring ball in time to set himself for the catch. As if by a preconcerted signal everybody in the grandstand and the bleachers stood up, the better to see what happened, because it was a most critical point of the game.

Julius was half-way down to second and still going strong when Conway was seen to fairly leap up into the air, then take a headlong fall; after which he hastily scrambled to his feet, holding up his hand to signify that he had a ball, which he then threw in to the pitcher, amidst a roar of cheers. Even Scranton fans joined in the applause, being able to appreciate a fine bit of work, although it gave them the keenest sort of disappointment to realize that after all Julius had had all his run to second for nothing.

But at least his mighty blow would serve to encourage some of his team-mates, who latterly had not been doing much with Kinsey's weird offerings.

Of course, nothing was expected of the pitcher, for Tyree was a notoriously weak man at the bat. He tried the best he knew how to connect, but after three attempts had to go back to the bench. So two were down, and Thad Stevens at bat. Hugh said something to his chum as the latter stepped forward to the plate. Thad looked very grim as though he felt that the whole fate of the game rested on his young shoulders just then. He waited for his ball, had a strike called, and then connected. The sound of that blow would never be forgotten by those eager Scranton fans. It was as loud and clear as the stroke of a woodsman's ax on a hollow tree. And they saw the ball speeding away out dead ahead. Everybody started up again to watch its course, while shouts rent the air.

Major was making along like mad. No use, Major, because that ball is ticketed for a home run, and nothing on earth but a collapse of the part of the fellow spinning around the bases can prevent it. When the ball struck the ground Major was not within thirty feet of it. He did not even attempt to jump up and tag the fleeting sphere as it passed far above his head, realizing the absurdity of such a proceeding. His business was simply to recover the ball, and get it in home as rapidly as he could.

But before this could be accomplished Thad Stevens was lying on the ground among his mates, panting for breath, but a pleased grin on his face, while some of the fellows were patting him happily on the back, and telling him that he had saved the day for good old Scranton High.

That ended the scoring for Scranton, although "Just" Smith did manage to get on first by means of a scratch hit. Joe Danvers tried to equal the performance of the backstop, but while he met the ball and sent it far afield, unluckily. It went too high, and this enabled Major to get beneath, with the result that the fly was caught, and the side went out.

The excitement started all over again when Belleville came to bat for their turn. It was plain to be seen that they had "blood in their eye," and meant to redouble their efforts to score.

An error, together with two fair hits, put a couple of the locals on the bases. Only one man was down in the bargain. Everybody looked anxious on both sides, for the game was likely to be ended, one way or the other, in that same twelfth inning.

A single would tie the score, a double give the game to Belleville.

Hugh signaled to his infield to play close. He wanted a double play so as to put an end to the intense strain, which was beginning to tell upon every player.

It was the great Conway at bat again. He looked particularly dangerous, for he had a way of standing there like a mighty warrior, flourishing his club, and watching the pitcher like a hawk. Conway had shown himself to be the most consistent hitter on the Belleville team when up against the deceptive shoots of Alan Tyree. Would he again succeed in connecting with the elusive ball, and sending one or both runners home?

Tyree appeared perfectly cool, but of course he was far from being so. He delivered his first offering, and the umpire called it a ball. A second followed likewise labeled. Some thought he feared Conway so much that he meant to pass him, to take chances with Gould, who had been less able to connect with the ball.

But with the third effort they heard again that suggestive "crack" as Conway struck, having finally received the ball he wanted. The crowd gave a convulsive gasp, but that was all; there was no time for anything more, so rapidly did events occur. Three runners were in motion, Conway heading down for first, Leonard making for second and O'Malley beating it along the line full-tilt toward third.

Owen Dugdale was seen to leap frantically up into the air, then almost fall over with the force of the ball which he held tightly in his right hand. He did not make any attempt to cut the runner down at first, partly because Conway was already out through the catch, and then things were better fixed for him closer at hand. O'malley was coming down like a hurricane. He saw what had happened and tried to get back, but Julius was at the bag and ready to take the toss like lightning.

When the spectators saw him touch the bag, and that the umpire had made the motion to indicate that Leonard was easily out, a great shout arose; for the game was over.

After all the intense anxiety Scranton had won the first of the series of three games which she expected to play with Belleville, unless the other team failed to take the next one there would be no necessity for playing the "rubber."

So Scranton boys were able to wend their way homeward in the coming dusk, singing their school songs, and feeling all the airs of conquerors. A happy crowd it was, taken in all, and rosy visions of the future naturally filled the minds and hearts of those boys who had fought so valiantly that day to overcome the enemy.

They could even look forward confidently now to the next game, which would be with Allendale, two weeks off; and some there were who already saw in imagination the championship pennant of the Three Town High School League floating from the flag-pole on the dear old campus during the Fall session of school.

CHAPTER VII

WHAT THAD SAW

Some days passed.

As there would be no championship game the coming Saturday for Scranton High the town settled back into its ordinary condition, so far as the young people went. There were afternoons for practice, of course, when the full team was expected to be on deck, and renew their acquaintance with the many intricacies of the game as taught by Coach Saunders.

Still every other day the boys were at liberty to go and come as they pleased. Some made it a religious duty, as well as pleasure, to show up regularly at the ball grounds, where there were always enough fellows handy to get up a scrub game, for baseball aspirants were as thick as blackberries in August around Scranton that season. A great revival of interest in outdoor sports had struck the town, and promised to stick far into the fall and winter.

On one of these off-days—it was Friday, to be exact—Thad showed up over at the home of his chum, evidently laboring under some unusual stress of excitement. Hugh had walked home with him from school, and being busy with certain things had stayed in his den for two hours or more. Then in burst Thad, his face red with suppressed news.

"What's happened now?" demanded Hugh, realizing instantly that the other was in a perfect "sweat" to communicate something he had learned. "Have the Germans landed on the coast, or is little old New York being bombarded from giant airplanes? There's something amiss, I can see from your way of bursting in on me."

"Oh! you know what I've been bothering my head over lately, Hugh," snapped the panting Thad. "Of course it's that hobo!"

"Meaning Matilda's now quiet and respected brother Lu, eh?" the other chuckled. "Well, what's he been doing now—cut stick, and lit out, as we hoped would be the case, finding life in and around a sleepy town like Scranton too dull and commonplace to please the fastidious notions of such a wonderful world traveler?"

"What! that leech clear out, and free his poor sister from the load he's gone and fastened on her? Well, it's just the contrary; he can't be shaken off, try as you will. Why, Hugh, even my respected Ma and two of her friends couldn't do the first thing toward getting Matilda to say she'd chase him off."

"Oh! that's the way the land lies, is it, Thad? Then some of the good ladies of Scranton have been over trying to convince Matilda that blood isn't thicker than water, and that she is under no sort of obligation to give her wanderer of a brother a shelter, either temporary or permanent, under her little roof."

"I hurried so after the show was over, Hugh, that I'm out of breath; but I'm getting the same back now, and can soon tell you all about it. In one way, it was as good as a circus, though it did make me grit my teeth to see how that miserable sinner acted. Oh! I just wished for a chance to give him a good kick or two. Why, honest, Hugh, I believe I could willingly assist in tarring and feathering a scamp like Brother Lu, who can settle down on his poor relative, and expect to be waited on and fed and treated like an invalid the rest of his life, while all the time he's as strong as anything, and as sleek as a well-fed rat!" Hugh laughed outright at the comparison.

"Go to it, then, Thad, and relieve my curiosity. You've got me so worked up by now that I'll surely burst if you don't spin the whole story in a hurry."

"Well, it's this way," began the other, as he fanned his heated face with a paper he picked up from Hugh's table. "I happened to know that Ma and a couple of the other ladies who have been so kind to Matilda during the last year had decided it was a duty they owed her to pay her a visit, take a look for themselves at this Brother Lu, to decide if he was really an object of pity, or a big fraud; and also advise Mrs. Hosmer that she ought to give him his walking papers right away.

"Hugh, I decided not to say anything to you about it, because I knew you had laid out something you wanted to do at home this afternoon; but I was resolved to be around the Hosmer shack when the ladies called about three today, and try to learn just how the friendly scheme came out.

"They showed up fine and dandy on time. I was hidden behind some bushes close by, and no sooner

had they passed inside, Mr. Hosmer coming to the door to welcome them, than I found it convenient to creep up still closer. The window was open, and I could hear the chatter of women's tongues as they chatted away. Mr. Hosmer came out and went downtown on some errand; I suspect that, like the wise man he is, he smelled a rat and wanted to leave a clear field to Ma and Mrs. Lund and Miss Carpenter. Perhaps Mr. Hosmer isn't just as much in favor of entertaining Brother Lu the rest of his natural life as he may have been in the start, for he must know deep down in his man's soul that the fellow is only working his sister for his keep.

"Well, anyway, I could hear them talking for a little while, after which who should come out of the house but our former hobo, Brother Lu. Say, he's actually wearing Mr. Hosmer's best suit, would you believe it, and he seems to like to pose as a sort of retired gentleman; it must be nice after getting such a precarious living walking the railway ties, and begging or stealing as he went, to drop down here in a snug nest where he has the best bed, is sure of three meals a day, wears his brother-in-law's only Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes, and I guess smokes Andrew's little stock of tobacco in the bargain."

Thad certainly did manage to put considerable emphasis and scorn into his vivid description of the contemptible actions of the reformed tramp. Hugh was laughing to himself over his chum's righteous indignation; nor did he have any doubt but that, given the opportunity, Thad would most heartily have assisted in a little operation calculated to furnish the said Brother Lu with a nice warm coat of down from a pillow, plastered on with a liberal coating of sticky black tar.

"Of course, after he came on the scene, I lost all interest in the folks inside the cottage, and kept watching his antics," continued Thad, after giving vent to his feelings as he did. "I couldn't make out anything that was said, anyway, but it was easy to tell from the way the voices dropped after he came out that the ladies were getting in their work, and trying to show Matilda she had no business to add to her burdens.

"Brother Lu, he acted like a sneak from the Start. I could see that he was taking it for a big joke, because he was grinning like everything. I guess he knew what a grip he'd managed to get on his sister, and felt sure not even a dozen ladies of Scranton could cause her to throw him out.

"What did he do but slide around the wall of the house, get down on his hands and knees, and creep right under that open window, where he could hear every word that was said. What do you think of that for meanness, the skunk; now, it never occurred to me to try that dodge, you know."

"I could see him as plain as anything, Hugh. He'd listen a bit, and then just as like as not hear something that tickled him a heap, for he'd double up and seem to just shake with silent laughter. Oh! I was just burning like fun, and boiling over, I was so mad to see how he carried on; because I just knew Matilda was holding the fort against all the batteries the three ladies could bring to bear, and telling them that it was her sacred duty to take care of her poor, poor brother in his last sickness, because the rough world had used him so harshly.

"Well, in the end he crawled away in a big hurry, so I knew the three ladies must be coming out. Sure enough they came in sight, and both Mrs. Lund and Miss Carpenter were looking as though they felt highly indignant because Matilda she chose to stick by her good-for-nothing brother, even when they told her they could hardly be expected to go to the trouble to furnish sewing just to help feed such a lazy-looking man, and keep him in smoking tobacco. Ma, she seemed dreadfully hurt, and I guess she hardly knew what to do, for she thinks a heap of Matilda and Mr. Hosmer.

"They went away, and Matilda, she stood there and looked after them sort of sad like. She knew she had offended three of her best friends, and it cut her to the quick. Still, I could see from her face that she didn't mean to turn on Brother Lu, and tell him he'd have to clear out; for she gave her head a stubborn little flirt as she turned and went indoors again.

"Hugh, this thing is really getting serious, seems to me. If those ladies think it their duty to quit giving Matilda work the poor things will starve, because all they've got to depend on now is what she earns by her needle. Something ought to be done to rid her of that wart that's fastened on her bounty; if she won't give him up of her own will, then some of us ought to see to it that he's chased out of the neighborhood."

"Hold on, Thad, go slow," warned the more cautious Hugh. "I feel pretty much the same as you do about it, but we mustn't think of trying any White Cap business around such a respectable town as Scranton. There's still lots of time to investigate; and if the worst comes we can appeal to the mayor to help. Perhaps the police could look up the man's record, and make him clear out on the plea that he's got a bad reputation. That would answer our purpose, and at the same time keep within the law."

Thad looked wonderfully pleased.

"I didn't tell you something more I saw, Hugh," he now went on to say. "When the three ladies came out, Brother Lu he managed to be there in plain sight. He tried to be polite like, and was of course seized with one of those fake fits of coughing right before them. Matilda ran to his side, and put her arm around him looking defiantly at Ma as if to say: 'There, don't you see how far gone he is, and how can you ask me to be so inhuman and unsisterly as to tell him he must go out again into the cold, cruel world that has treated him so badly?'"

"The ladies looked after Brother Lu as he staggered away, as if they hardly knew what to think. But it happened, Hugh, that I could watch the man from where I was snuggled down, and would you believe me, he had no sooner got behind the little building they use for a woodshed than he started to dance a regular old hoe-down, snapping his fingers, and looking particularly merry. I tell you I could hardly hold in, I was so downright mad; I wanted to rush out and denounce him for an old fraud of the first water. But on considering how useless that would be, besides giving it away that I suspected him, and was spying on his actions, I managed to get a grip on myself again.

"After things had sizzled out, Hugh, I came away, and ran nearly all the distance between the Hosmer cottage and your house, I was that eager to tell you how the land lay. And now, once for all, what can we do to bounce that fraud, and free poor Matilda from the three-big-meals-a-day brother who's fastened on her like a leech?"

Hugh nodded his head as though he had been thinking while his chum continued to tell of his experiences. From his manner Thad jumped to the conclusion that Hugh might have something interesting to say, and in this he proved to be right.

CHAPTER VIII

A BAD OUTLOOK FOR BROTHER LU

"Now that you've told me such an interesting thing about this queer tramp we ran across the other day, and who turns out to be Mrs. Hosmer's only brother," Hugh was saying, "I want to return the compliment, and explain that I've been doing a little missionary work or scouting on my own hook."

Thad showed signs of intense interest.

"I sort of thought you'd be wanting to cultivate his acquaintance so as to study the chap at closer range, Hugh," he hastened to say. "Well, did he entertain you with some accounts of his adventures in different parts of the world, as he promised he'd do if we'd drop around at his new home and see him?"

"He certainly can talk a blue streak, once he gets started," admitted Hugh, with a little whistle. "Why, that man would have made a splendid lawyer, if he'd ever had the ambition to try; and as a promoter for land schemes he'd take the cake. But he says he was born with the wanderlust in his veins that would not let him rest anywhere for a decent length of time. No sooner would he get settled nicely, and perhaps own some big piece of land, down in Brazil once, or it may have been out in our own West, than along would come that awful yearning to be on the move again; and so, unable to resist, he would sacrifice his property, and get on the jump again."

"If you could only rely on all he says, Hugh," admitted the deeply interested Thad, "he'd be a mighty interesting character; but for one, I firmly believe it's a great big lie; he's never been anywhere but around this country, and that traveling on freight-car beams, and walking the ties."

"Well," Hugh went on, "he certainly has a mighty intimate acquaintance with all sorts of countries, for he can describe things in the most minute way you ever heard. He kept me fairly chained while he was talking of Borneo, Sumatra, Hong Kong, China, Japan, the Philippines, and all those far-away countries in the South Seas. If he's only read about them, the man has the most astonishing memory I ever ran across."

"Oh! he's no doubt a character," admitted the skeptical Thad, as though he begrudged acknowledging even this much; "but I still believe him to be a fake. Keep right on telling me what you did, Hugh."

"For that matter, I didn't do much of anything except listen to his stories, for he kept up a steady stream of talk for a whole hour or more, and covered a wide territory in that time."

"I sort of think Brother Lu has conceived a liking for me which is hardly returned in the same ratio; though I confess there's something almost fascinating about the fellow."

Thad acted as though alarmed.

"Be careful, and keep on your guard, Hugh, or else he'll be hypnotizing you just like he seems to have done with poor Matilda and her husband. That slick tongue of his can do all sorts of stunts. Why if you don't look out we'll have you going around taking up a subscription to fit Brother Lu out with a brand new suit of togs; and perhaps buying the poor chap a bully meerschaum pipe; for it must be dreadful that he is now compelled to use one of Mr. Hosmer's old corn-cob affairs."

His sarcasm was lost upon his chum, for Hugh laughed merrily at the gruesome picture Thad drew of his complete subjugation to the wiles of the schemer.

"Of course," he continued, calmly, "I didn't forget what I was there for principally, and all the while he was talking so fluently and holding my interest, I kept watching him and trying to study his real character. Thad, I own up to failure. Once I thought I was a pretty clever hand at that sort of thing, but now I'm mixer-up, and have lost considerable confidence.

"I kept changing my mind again and again. When he'd tell some of the most astonishing stories of the strange lands he'd roved through, I'd begin to say to myself that he must surely be just lying. Then the fellow'd mention some little happening that he'd describe so vividly, would you believe it, I felt the tears in my eyes, for it would be sort of pathetic. So during that whole hour I sat there and changed my mind every ten minutes, now blowing hot, and again cold. I came away in as muddled a state as I went there. His actions seem to stamp him a rogue if ever there was one; and yet, Thad, I seemed to see something different in the depths of his twinkling blue eyes."

"Oh! thunder! however are we going to get rid of such a sticker?" groaned Thad, as though at a loss to know what next to do.

"Listen," resumed Hugh. "Among other things he mentioned was an account of his adventures down in Texas in the big oil field there, where he said men make fortunes one day and lose them the next in speculation. He went into some details to tell me of a strange thing he had witnessed there, and among other names mentioned, he chanced to speak of a Marshal Hastings, who, it seems, is much feared by the bad men of that community. Somehow, I thought I could detect a little quaver in Brother Lu's voice whenever he spoke of this party; and, Thad, do you know, the idea flashed through my brain that perhaps he'd had an unpleasant half hour with that same Marshal Hastings himself."

"I take it that you mean the officer may have warned Lu to shake the dust of that region off his brogans, and make himself scarce, if he didn't want to pull hemp; is that your idea, Hugh?"

"Something along that order," came the steady reply. "At least he could not think of Marshal Hastings without some memory that was unpleasant, making him shiver."

Thad's eagerness increased by jumps, and showed itself on his face, which was now lighted up with anticipation.

"I'm beginning to sense something coming, Hugh," he hastened to say. "What you saw gave you a sort of idea, didn't it? You reckon right now that there may be a way to frighten this lazy loafer, so that of his own free will he'll cut stick and clear out. Well, perhaps after all something like that would be the best way to get rid of him. I don't believe the people in this civilized section of country would stand for any night-riding business like they did in the Kentucky tobacco district; or such a thing as that tar and feather picnic. So go on and tell me your scheme."

"Well," Hugh continued, "you could hardly call it by such a name as yet, because the idea is hardly more than half hatched. But when he told me about the way the bad men used to shake at mention of that brave marshal's very name, and I saw him doing something along the same order, why, I began to figure out that if only Brother Lu could be made to believe Marshal Hastings was here from Texas, looking for *somebody* he meant to take back with him, why, he might get such a bad scare he'd skip by the light of the moon between days, and never, never come back again."

Thad gave his chum a vigorous pound on the back that made the other wince; but then he was accustomed to taking things of this nature from expressive Thad.

"Oh! that sounds good to me, Hugh!" he burst out with. "I honestly believe you are getting close to a bully scheme that may pan out firstclass. Argument and all kinds of pleading wouldn't influence that man a bit, because he's selfish, I know he must be, or else he wouldn't burden his poor sister, and see her working for his miserable comfort every day, and all day long. But, Hugh, he could be moved by

fear. If so be he has ever done anything down there in Texas that he could be arrested for, why, just the mere knowledge that this marshal, who always gets those he goes after, has come north, and is looking for some one, ought to start Brother Lu on a gallop for another distant section of country."

"It might," said Hugh, reflectively, as though the exuberance of his comrade was having an effect on his mind.

"It surely would," repeated Thad, pounding a fist into his other palm to express his convictions. "And, believe me, he wouldn't dare show his smiling face in these parts in a hurry again, because he'd feel pretty sure the marshal would have arranged it with the local police to notify him in case Brother Lu ever turned up. Why, Hugh, we've got the scheme right now; and it ought to work to beat the band. I can see that hobo trailing along over the ties again at a hot pace; and while poor Matilda may grieve for her brother, she'll heave a sigh of relief to know it's all over, and the ladies are her friends again."

"Let's go a step further, then," insinuated Hugh, "and if we decide to try out this little plan, which you're good enough to call a scheme, how can we fix it so that the reformed hobo will take the alarm?"

"That's where the hitch may come in," agreed the other boy, as he allowed three separate lines of wrinkles to gather across his forehead, which was always reckoned a sure sign that Thad Stevens was concentrating his brain power upon the solution of a knotty problem. "One thing sure, we can't very well up and inform him of the fact ourselves, or he'd understand the motive right away."

"And even if a letter could be sent," continued Hugh, "how would we be able to get the right post-mark on the envelope, unless we asked the postmaster down in a town of Texas close to the oil fields to mail it for us?"

Suddenly Thad started to smile. The said smile rapidly broadened into a positive grin that spread all over his face, while his eyes fairly sparkled with delight.

"Hugh, I've just grabbed a bright idea!" he said, explosively.

"Let's hear about it before the same gets away from you, then," his chum advised.

"Listen. Perhaps you may know that I used to go some with little Jim Pettigrew more or less before you and I became such chums. Jim is considerably older than me, but his stature always made folks think he was a kid. Well, of course you also know Jim he's graduated into a regular cub reporter, as he's so fond of calling it, because that word *cub* is used so often in the movies, when they show up a big newspaper office in New York or Chicago, and the latest greenhorn on the staff is given an assignment that allows him to make the greatest news scoop ever heard of. Jim, to tell the truth, works on our local weekly here, the *Scranton Courier*. He rakes the entire country for news, writes things up that have never occurred, so as to fill space, and draw his weekly pay, attends weddings, funerals, and all sorts of events, not forgetting baseball games and such things.

"Well, Jim is still a good friend of mine, although he now feels himself so mighty important that even the mayor sends for him to communicate something he wants to appear in the next issue of the paper. The idea that flashed into my brain, you must know, Hugh, is to tell Jim of our great trouble with this pesky hobo, and enlist his aid in scaring Brother Lu off."

"Suppose now, in the issue of the *Courier* that is due tomorrow morning there appeared an interesting write-up about a certain Marshal Hastings who was visiting Scranton, having come all the way from Texas to find and take back a certain party who was badly wanted there for some serious offense; the story could give little hints that would point to Brother Lu as the man, without actually saying so. Hugh, tell me, what do you think of that for a scheme; and might it do the work, would you say?"

CHAPTER IX

SETTING THE MAN TRAP

Hugh jumped up from his chair and clapped a cap on his head.

"It's now about four o'clock of a Friday afternoon," he remarked, "and if we could only run across Jim Pettigrew, and he got interested in our story, why it might not be too late to get the little write-up

arranged before they went to press tonight."

Thad was all animation.

"Fine! Let's rush around to the *Courier* office and see Jim!" he hastened to say. "I've an idea he's a sort of Jack-of-all-trades there, writing up news, setting type in an emergency, and even helping turn off the limited edition of about five hundred copies of the paper that are run every week. So, as Friday night is the climax to their week's work, we're likely to find Jim there with his coat off, and on the job."

They soon arrived at the small building on a side street where the local paper had its offices, and, indeed, every other thing connected with it, for that matter.

"There's Jim sitting in the editor's chair," observed Thad, looking through a dusty window.

"Must be Mr. Adoiphus Hanks, who owns and edits the *Courier*, is out of town just at present. Say, that would just suit us to a fraction, wouldn't it, Hugh?"

"It might make things easier for us," admitted the other; and then they burst in on the important if diminutive Jim, who received them with all the airs of a metropolitan editor.

"Glad to see you, boys," he told them; "just take seats, will you, and excuse me for three minutes. I'm winding up the main editorial for this week's issue. Hanks is out of town, and has left me in full charge; but then that happens frequently nowadays; and, say, some foolish people have gone so far as to say they can tell when he's absent because, well, the paper shows it; but I tell them they are only saying that to flatter me. Three minutes, boys, and I'll be at your service."

Whatever it was Jim was doing on the typewriter, he continued to pound laboriously away for about that length of time. Then finishing he drew the sheet out, glanced over it, made some corrections, smiled as though highly pleased, and called out to a boy who was working a hand press to come and take it to the lone compositor, standing at his case in a distant corner of the den.

"That'll make folks sit up and take notice I kind of think," said Jim, swelling out his chest with an air of great importance. "Don't ask me what it is all about, for I want it to be a surprise to the community. Read it in tomorrow's issue of the *Weekly Courier*. Now, what can I do for you, Thad, old scout? Anything connected with the Scranton High baseball team you want written up for next week? I'm always ready to favor the boys, because I used to play ball myself away back."

Hugh would have liked to laugh, but he refrained, not wishing to offend Jim, who was evidently suffering from an overweening sense of his own importance, since he had graduated into a temporary occupancy of the editorial chair. Jim was considerably short of twenty at that, so it could not have been more than a year or two since he used to play ball, and train with the other boys of Scranton High.

Thad got busy, and began to tell how they had first ran across the strange hobo in his camp, cooking a meal. He continued the story with a description of how the long wandering Brother Lu had been so warmly welcomed by Matilda and her sick husband, and thereupon deliberately settled down to enjoying himself at their expense.

Thad was a pretty good hand at narrating a yarn, and he worked the interest up by degrees until he had Jim's eyes as round as saucers, while he hung upon every word that was spoken. Hugh only broke in once in a while to add a few sentences to something his chum said.

Finally the climax was reached when Thad explained the scheme he and Hugh had concocted between them, and how much they would appreciate the assistance of Jim in this dilemma.

The temporary editor pursed up his lips and looked serious. He was thinking, and gradually a grin began to creep across his thin little face.

"Why, I guess it could be worked out, fellows," he finally remarked, greatly to the satisfaction of the eager Thad. "Course I can do the writeup part as easy as falling off a fence, because it comes natural for me to be able to put any old thing down on paper and hash it up in a most interesting way. I'll have a story that will make folks sit up and take notice all right."

"I hope, though, Jim," said Thad, "you won't overdo the thing, because you see we haven't a peg to hang it on, since we don't know what sort of a crime the man might have done away down there in Texas to make Marshal Hastings come so far after him. You'll draw it a bit mild, won't you, Jim? Just strong enough to strike terror to the heart of that rascal, Brother Lu?"

"That's all right, Thad, you leave it to me," asserted Jim, with a confidence born of experience, as well as reliance on his powers of description and invention. "Yes, I can do the thing to the king's taste. Why,

in such a case it's my habit to make myself actually believe in my work. Right now I can actually see the ferocious and not-to-be-denied Marshal Hastings. I could even describe how he looks so that you recognize the picture. And say, I'll give such broad hints, without actually saying it's Brother Lu he wants, that the poor old wretch will bump himself getting out of town on the first freight that pulls in here. It's a scream of a joke; and I'm obliged to you boys for putting me up to it. I need all sorts of practice, you understand, to fit myself for a prominent post down in New York City, where I expect to land a job as a star reporter on one of the big dailies."

Of course Thad and Hugh were pleased with matters so far as they had gone.

"I'm in with you, boys," continued Jim, as they arose to leave the *Courier* office, "to the limit; but there's one favor I want to ask of you in return."

"Name it, Jim!" cried Thad, grasping the cold hand of the reporter, for just at that moment he felt as though willing to do almost anything in return for this real kindness on the part of his old-time associate.

"Listen, then," said the other, briskly, for he at least had a rapid mind, and was in many other ways well qualified for the position which he meant to assume in the world of newspaperdom, besides, an abundance of nerve, or as Thad liked to call it, "cheek,"—"I don't believe Mrs. Hosmer ever sees our sterling paper, because the name isn't on our mailing list, or the carrier's either. But tomorrow morning I'll have Jenkins, our boy here, go around particularly to Matilda's cottage and leave a paper, telling her we are sending out a large number of free complimentary copies, hoping to induce more people to subscribe. Get that, boys?"

"Yes, and it sounds good to me, Jim; you know how to work the mill, all right," said the judicious Thad, well aware of the power flattery possesses to grease the wheels of human machinery.

"Well, the three of us will be in hiding close by, just as Thad was today when his mother and those other good ladies paid their unprofitable visit to the Hosmer home. If we're lucky we may see Brother Lu come dashing out of the place, and strike a blue streak for the railroad, distant half a mile or so. Should that happen, we can make up our minds it's all serene, and that Scranton, as well as his poor sister, will have seen the last of him. But you must promise to come around here and wait for me, as I may have a little business on my hands. Holding down all the positions on even a local sheet is no easy job, you must know; and I'm the PooBah of this joint right now."

Willingly Thad gave the desired promise. He would have done anything else which the autocrat of the enterprise chose to demand just then, since they looked upon Jim as their main reliance. Fortunately the other did not see fit to bind them to any further promises, and when they had left the newspaper office, it was with a sense of elation such as comes after a successful venture.

Thad was fairly bubbling over with delight.

"Why, Hugh, I think we ought to shake hands, with ourselves over getting up such a smart little scheme as that," he broke out with, as they walked along the main street of Scranton, meeting many persons whom they knew, and most of them ready with a cheery nod or a word of recognition, for both lads were well liked by the best people of the community, and particularly those who knew boy nature best, so that they could appreciate what manly fellows the chums were.

"You're a sanguine sort of chap, Thad," laughed Hugh. "Right now you believe we've as good as got Brother Lu on the run for the tall timber. Don't be too sure, or you may be disappointed. There's many a slip, remember, between cup and lip. But Jim took to the game like a terrier does to a rat, didn't he?"

"It was right in Jim's favorite line of business," explained the other. "He fairly dotes on writing up imaginary things, and making them seem real. He says it's his long suit, whatever he means by that. I only hope he doesn't make it seem too ridiculous, and so overdo the matter."

Hugh seemed to have pretty fair confidence in Jim's judgment.

"He's a clever chap," he remarked, "and will know just where to draw the line. I could that already he had drawn upon his imagination to supply him with something in place of facts. It'll be a thrilling bit of reading, and ought to give our pet aversion a cold shiver when he gets its import. Having Marshal Hastings come away up here after him will upset all Brother Lu's plans for a soft berth during the remainder of his fast-ebbing life; and he may suddenly determine that it's better to run away and live to eat another day, than to try and stick it out here, and be landed in a Texas jail."

"It'll seem an awful long time till tomorrow comes," sighed the impatient Thad. "We told him we'd be around by nine in the morning, didn't we? Well, let's call it eight-and-a-half, then. He may be able to get

off earlier than he expects, and that would cut Brother Lu out of another meal at the expense of Matilda, whose supplies must be running low by now, I should judge, and her money ditto in the bargain."

"Have it your own way, Thad, and drop in for me," said Hugh. "In the midst of all this fuss and feathers over that miserable hobo, we mustn't forget we promised to be on hand in the afternoon to play on the team against Mechanicsville; for you know there has been a switch, and the programme changed. That team is considered a strong aggregation from the mills over there, and, we may get our fingers burned unless we are careful. After knocking Belleville down last Saturday, it would look bad for Scranton to be snowed under by an outside nine without any reputation, as they have hardly played together this season so far."

"Oh! I haven't forgotten my promise to Mr. Saunders and you, Hugh," protested the reliable backstop of the high-school team "I'm too fond of baseball to neglect any chance for playing. But we'll try and put this other affair over in the A.M., and that'll leave us free to play ball after lunch. I wonder how far away our friend, Brother Lu, will be this time tomorrow?"

"Perhaps many miles," suggested Hugh, "and then again he may be taking things as easy as ever over there at Sister Matilda's cottage. It's going to be a toss-up whether our game works as we hope, or falls flat to the ground."

CHAPTER X

HOW JIM PETTIGREW FIXED IT

When Saturday morning came, the two chums of Scranton High met as per arrangement, and as Thad expressed it, made a "bee-line" downtown. They were fairly wild to get hold of the first copy of the *Weekly Courier* that was placed on sale.

As a rule, it was delivered to the several newsstands, and at the railroad station, around eight o'clock. Then the "printer's devil," who was also the carrier, delivering copies to most of the town folks who subscribed in that fashion, would start out with a first bundle in his bag, taking his time about leaving the same at different doors. Perhaps nowadays, however, when there was likely to be a baseball game in the afternoon to enliven things, the said boy might quicken his pace a bit, so as to get through, and have a chance to witness the struggle.

They were just in time to see a package delivered at the main news store, where sporting goods could also be purchased. Paul Kramer's was a place most beloved among the boys of Scranton, for the small store held almost everything that was apt to appeal to the heart of the average youth. Besides, all baseball, and in due season, football paraphernalia, as well as hockey sticks, and shin guards, the old storekeeper always carried a well-chosen stock of juvenile fiction in cloth; and those fellows who were fond of spending their spare hours in reading the works of old favorites like Optic and Alger, as well as numerous more recent additions to the ranks of authors, were to be found poring over the contents of numerous book shelves and racks, deciding which volume they would squander their latest quarter for.

Then at Kramer's "Emporium" there was always a huge stock of the latest music in cheap form; and the girls had also contracted a habit of dropping in to look this over, with an eye to adding to their lists. So that from early morning until nine in the evening, on ordinary occasions, if a boy could not be found anywhere else it was "dollars to doughnuts," as Thad always said, that he was rummaging at Paul Kramer's, and lost to all the world for the time being.

Eagerly, then, did Thad throw down a nickel, and snatch up the first copy of that week's issue sold that morning. It was virtually "fresh from the press"; indeed, the odor of printers' ink could easily be detected in the sheet.

There was no difficulty about finding the article they were most deeply interested in. It occupied a leading place on the front page. Jim Pettigrew had certainly seen to it that the head was next door to what is known as a "scare" head; for the type was black and bold enough to attract attention the first thing any one unfolded their copy of the *Courier*.

What Mr. Adolphus Hanks would say was a question, when later on he came to look over the latest

issue of the family paper, and discovered such liberties on the part of the "cub" reporter, raised for one day to the responsible position of editor. But then Jim was smooth-tongued enough to settle all that with his boss, for Jim could talk almost anyone into believing that black was white. Possibly he would think it the best policy to confide the whole story to Mr. Hanks, and explain just how it had been done in the public policy. Adoiphus was not such a bad sort of fellow, and really believed that he took a leading part in the upbuilding of the morals of Scranton; so he might forgive Jim's breaking away from the long-established policy of the family paper, which allowed of but little sensationalism.

Well, it was a great story! Jim had allowed his imagination full swing, that was certain. He spoke of actually running across the stern official from Texas, and making his acquaintance under rather dramatic conditions connected with a broken-down car on the road. Then he launched forth into a vivid description of how the minion of justice confided to him the reason for his being there so far distant from the field of his customary useful and perilous operations. Sly little hints were conveyed in his mention of the rascal whom he had vowed to find, and take back with him to Texas, there to pay the penalty for breaking the laws. Why, surely the guilty conscience of Brother Lu must discover a description of himself in every word that the imaginary marshal uttered.

The two boys finished at about the same time. Their eyes met in a stare, and Thad gave utterance to a whistle.

"Whew! Jim is sure a dandy when it comes to write-ups, isn't he, though, Hugh?" he breathed softly, for the proprietor of the "Emporium" happened to be bustling about the place, and was evidently a bit curious to know just what there could be in that week's edition of the *Courier* to so plainly interest Hugh and his chum.

"He certainly is," admitted Hugh. "Why, you can almost see that Marshal Hastings walking before you, and looking as if he had his eagle eye fixed on you for keeps. Jim's described him so smartly that it would apply to almost any Western sheriff or marshal we've ever seen in the movies."

"But just think how the cold creeps will chase up and down the spinal column of that miserable sneak of a hobo when he glimpses this article," chuckled Thad. "I can imagine him starting, and his eyes nearly popping out of his head as he gets busy devouring the whole thing. And, then, Hugh, what d'ye reckon his next move will be?" Hugh shrugged his shoulders as he slowly replied:

"Honestly now, Thad, I give it up. If he's really guilty, as we believe, why, of course, he'll not wait on the order of his going, but skip out like a prairie fire, and we'll be shut of him. But there's always the doubt. In fact, we never can be sure we've struck the right nail on the head until we see Lu hitting the high places, and never even looking back."

"I must read that wonderful article again," quoth the admiring Thad. "It's simply great the way Jim's written it up, and I'm sure that chap is bound to occupy an exalted place in newspaperdom down in New York one of these days when luck comes to him, and he emigrates that way."

They scanned it line by line until they could almost repeat the whole story by heart, it made such a great impression on them. Thad seemed more than amused over the idea that the good folks from Scranton would swallow it whole, and believe there was really a Texan marshal in their midst, looking right and left for a desperate character who had dropped down in that quiet and respectable neighborhood, thinking he would be safe from molestation there.

"Why, Hugh," he went on to say, exuberantly, "all today I warrant you hundreds of people here, women as well as boys and men, will be scanning every party who happens to be wearing a felt hat anything like the one Marshal Hastings is said to possess; and wondering if the stranger from Mechanicsville, or Allandale, or any other old place can be the wonderful Texan official, who according to Jim's graphic account has notches cut on the stocks of both his big revolvers to indicate just how many bad men he has been compelled to lay low during the course of his long and thrilling public career. Oh! I feel just as if I wanted to drop down and laugh till my sides ached, it's such a rich joke. That Jim will kill me yet with his wonderful write-ups."

Hugh was apparently also highly amused, but he did not lose sight of the main facts in the case, as his next remark proved.

"Remember we settled it that we'd be around to look Jim up about half-past eight, instead of nine o'clock this morning. Thad, it's getting near that time now, so perhaps we'd better be moving. Jim might feel like starting a bit early, so as to give him more time later on for his regular duties. You see, being left in sole charge of the office while Mr. Hanks is away makes him responsible for even the job printing."

Thad was only too glad for an excuse for an earlier start.

"If we have to do any loafing," he went on to say, philosophically, "we can put in the time at the *Courier* office, just as well as anywhere else. I always did want to mosey around that place, and while Mr. Hanks is away, perhaps I'll have a chance to handle a few type, and watch the regular comp work like lightning. The smell of printers' ink seems to draw me, Hugh, to tell you the honest truth."

Although Thad possibly did not know it at the time, that fascination has been responsible for many a noted editor's career, as the lure of printers' ink, when it gets a firm hold on any one, can seldom be shaken off in after years. Once a newspaper man and it becomes a lifetime pursuit. But then, of course, Thad might be only imagining such things, and the dim future hold out other possibilities for a career that would be far removed from an editor's chair.

They found Jim on deck, and buried up to his ears in work. He seemed to enjoy it to the limit, too, for it made him appear so responsible and tickled his vanity. He grinned at seeing his two young friends.

"I suppose now you've read my latest effusion, boys?" Jim remarked, with an assumption of extreme modesty, which, however, hardly suited his usual bold demeanor.

Jim had all a reporter's "nerve," and could coolly face a raging subscriber who had dropped in to ask to have his subscription closed because of a certain offensive article in the last issue—yes, and likely as not Jim could soothe the ruffled feathers of the enraged man, show him how he had really been paid a compliment, and finally bow him out of the office with another year's subscription left in the shape of a dollar and a half in good money.

"We've fairly *devoured* it, Jim," frankly admitted Thad. "Why, I can repeat it off-hand right now, I've read it so often. And Jim, I want to say that it's as clever a piece of work as I ever got hold of. That terrible Texan stands out as clear as print. Everybody in Scranton will be rubbering all today, thinking they can see Marshal Hastings in each stranger in town. I congratulate you, Jim; you're a peach at your trade, believe me."

Of course that sort of "gush" just tickled Jim immensely. He tried not to show it, but his eyes were twinkling with gratified vanity. It was fine to hear other people complimenting him so warmly, even though they were but boys from Scranton High. Praise is acceptable even from the lowly; and Jim made queer motions with his lips as though he might be rolling the sweet morsel over his tongue.

"Glad you like it, fellows," he said, in as unconcerned a voice as he could muster to the fore. "Course there was some hurry, because I'm rushed for time, and I could have done a heap better if I really tried to lay myself out. But I guess that ought to fill the bill, and give Brother Lu a little scare, eh, Thad, old scout?"

"I'm expecting he'll shake himself out of his shoes, or rather Brother-in-law Andrew's footwear," exclaimed the eager Thad. "But say, Jim, how about your going out with us, and watching him skip!"

Jim looked serious.

"H'm! got an awful bunch of work to do, fellows, this morning, as well as hold the editorial desk down for Mr. Hanks; but perhaps the sooner we get that little job over with the better. Yes, I'll call Philip, our boy here, who's rubbing the ink off his face and hands, and we'll all start out to finish Brother Lu's career in Scranton."

CHAPTER XI

SOMETHING GOES WRONG

It was in this confident mood that they made their start. Philip had the copy of the *Courier*, which Jim had deftly folded so that the headlines of his startling article would be seen immediately any one picked the paper up. He was also instructed to simply say that the management of the weekly, wishing to give more citizens of Scranton an opportunity to get acquainted with the feast of good things served up every Saturday, was sending out a supply of sample copies, and that a subscription would be much appreciated. As Philip was a shrewd little fellow he "caught on" to the idea, and would without fail carry it through all right.

It was not intended that any occupant of the Hosmer home should suspect the presence of the three

who meant to see what happened. Thad knew just how they could advance fairly close without being seen, since he had been "playing spy" before on his own account, and was, therefore, acquainted with every bush capable of affording shelter.

Accordingly, when they found themselves drawing near their intended destination, Thad was given charge of the expedition, and he seemed pleased to serve in the exalted capacity of pilot or guide. He led the way, and the other two followed as close to his heels as possible. In this manner they finally found themselves as close to the cottage as circumstances and a scarcity of sheltering bushes would allow.

"Here's where I hide," whispered Thad, coming to a sudden pause, and remaining in a crouching position. "We can see everything that goes on outside the house and, if the door should be left open on such a fine warm morning, perhaps hear something that might be said inside."

Both Hugh and Jim seemed quite satisfied with the prospect, if their nods could be taken for assurance.

"If everything is ready, and the trap set," remarked Jim, softly, "I'll give Philip the signal we agreed on."

"Go ahead, then," said Thad, eagerly, his eyes fairly dancing with expectancy; for somehow his heart seemed more than ever set on relieving poor Matilda Hosmer from the fresh load she had taken so generously on her already tired shoulders.

Accordingly Jim, without raising his head above the level of the bush that concealed his body, waved his handkerchief three times. He knew that Philip would be waiting and watching for such a sign, because before they left the boy Thad had taken pains to point out to him where they expected to hide.

Sure enough, hardly had Jim made the third and concluding wave than the carrier was seen to come in sight, bearing quite a load of papers; which in reality he expected to deliver on his first round to regular customers; for none of them saving that particular one were to be given away free as sample copies; and that had, as Thad expressed it, "a string tied to it."

Whistling in the most unconcerned manner possible Philip walked straight up to the cottage door and knocked. The boy was playing his part to perfection, all of them saw, and Jim in particular seemed much impressed.

It was Matilda herself who answered the summons. They could see that Philip was getting off the lines which he had committed to memory. Matilda asked him several questions, but she held on to the paper all the same, and seemed quite pleased at being picked out as a possible new subscriber; although times were just then too hard to admit of her indulging in such a luxury.

But perhaps she thought it would be such a pleasure for "poor Brother Lu" to forget all his troubles in looking over the town paper. Thad felt sure this must be in the mind of Matilda, for she was one of those persons whose first thought is always of some one beside themselves.

Philip having exhausted his schedule hastened to betake himself off before he said too much; because he was a wise boy for his years, Jim allowed. And Matilda went back into the house, glancing at the paper as she vanished from view.

"Now let's hope that hammock there will tempt Brother Lu to saunter forth and take things easy while he looks over the paper," said Jim, with just a touch of eagerness discernible in his well-controlled voice; for he prided himself on always "keeping cool" under the most trying conditions.

They did not have long to wait. Why, it seemed to Thad that the wonderful Jim must have some peculiar power, as of suggestion, with which he could influence other minds; for as they peeped through openings in the bushes, lo! and behold, out of the cottage door came the object of Thad's especial aversion. Yes, it was the hobo whom they had first met when he was cooking his meal in regular tramp fashion by using discarded tomato cans for receptacles to hold coffee and stew. But Brother Lu was a transformed tramp. He wore the Sunday clothes of Brother-in-law Andrew, and his face was actually as smooth as a razor could make it. In fact, he looked just too sleek and well-fed for anything; and Thad, as usual, gritted his teeth with savage emphasis to think how the fellow was imposing on the good nature of that simple and big-hearted couple.

Then, too, he had the paper in his hand, which evidently Matilda had given over to him immediately she entered. He made straight for that hammock, as though he had actually heard Jim suggest such a charming possibility.

"Now we're in great luck," Thad breathed, gripping Hugh by the knee, as they crouched in company behind their screen of bushes. "We can watch, and see just what effect that bombshell has on the skunk!"

"Keep quiet, Thad," warned Hugh; "or he might hear you."

The reformed tramp seemed to be very particular about his comfort nowadays. Time was when he could throw himself down carelessly on the hardest kind of ground and rest easy; but since he had taken to living under a roof things were different. They saw him fix the pillow in the hammock very carefully before he allowed himself to recline there. Then he raised the paper, and seemed to take a careless glance at it.

Hardly had he done this than the watchers saw him start upright again. He was undoubtedly devouring the thrilling news item on the front page with "avidity"—at least, that was what Jim Pettigrew would have called it, had he been at his favorite job of "writing up" the doings of Scranton society for the past week.

"Now he has got a body blow!" hissed the delighted Thad, unable to keep still any great length of time when his pulses were throbbing like mad, and his eyes round with eagerness.

Brother Lu read the article through. Then he lowered the paper and seemed to be meditating, to judge from his attitude. Hugh thought he could detect something akin to a wide grin on the other's face, but then he may have been mistaken. Thad, on his part, was positive that he knew what must be passing through the mind of the man after reading that suggestive news concerning the Texan marshal who never yet allowed an intended victim to elude his clutches, and who meant to get the guilty party so badly wanted "down below."

"Say, he's figuring on whether he'd best streak it as he is, or go in and gather a few things together that he may need," continued the irrepressible Thad.

Even as he spoke they saw the other scramble hastily out of the comfortable hammock, and start post-haste for the open door of the cottage. Thad was as certain of what was about to happen as that he knew his own name. Hugh suspended judgment, believing that it would be unwise to jump too hastily to a decision. Besides, there were a few little suspicious things connected with the actions of Brother Lu that he did not wholly like.

A minute passed, two of them, which doubtless seemed like so many hours to the confident Thad. Then they again saw the late hobo coming out. Thad stared harder than ever, and his heart felt like lead.

What did it mean? he asked himself. Brother Lu did not have his hat on, nor was he carrying any sort of hastily thrown together bundle. In fact, he showed not the first sign of the dreadful alarm Thad had anticipated.

He still carried the weekly paper in his hand as though he meant to look over that wonderful article of Jim's again. And what he had really darted into the house after was evident; for in the other hand he carried Mr. Hosmer's only good pipe, as well as his tobacco bag, now getting woefully depleted of its prized contents.

Then, as if totally unaware of the fact that three pairs of eyes were glued upon his every slightest move, Brother Lu calmly filled the pipe, struck a match on the sole of Brother-in-law Andrew's shoe, applied the flame to the contents of the pipe bowl, and puffed out a cloud of blue smoke with all the assurance in the world. Thad nearly took a fit trying to hold in; the fact was Hugh felt constrained to lay a warning hand on his chum's arm to keep him from bursting out in such a manner as to betray them to the smug hobo.

Brother Lu read the article again from beginning to end. Then he smote his knee with his open palm several times, and they could actually hear him chuckle, as if he might be highly amused. All this rather puzzled Jim, who had fully anticipated seeing the intruder making a bee-line for the railroad. Perhaps he even began to wonder whether, after all, he might not have "laid it on a little thicker" when writing up that story about the grim Texan marshal.

Presently Matilda was heard calling to Brother Lu, who, leaving his hammock, sauntered into the house with all the airs of one who had arranged to take life easy from that time on.

"Hey! let's beat it," mumbled the keenly disappointed Jim Pettigrew. "I've got heaps to do at the office; and I seem to tumble to the fact that, after all, our big game didn't pan out just as was expected."

Thad did not have a single word to say just then. He was, in fact, too dazed to collect his thoughts. But Hugh's active mind was grappling with the matter, and he apparently seemed able to figure things out.

They retreated in a strategic fashion, so that possibly no one was the wiser for their having been behind the bushes, unless Brother Lu chanced to take a notion to peep from behind some fluttering white dimity curtain.

"Well, what does it all mean, do you know, Hugh?" finally burst out Thad, after they had gone far enough away to make it safe to talk in ordinary tones.

"I think I have guessed why he seemed so tickled after reading the article which we figured would give him such a bad scare," said Hugh, with a grim smile. "The fact of the matter is he hoodwinked me when he told such whopping yarns about the terrible sheriff of the oil regions. There may be such a chap, all right, but his name isn't Hastings by a long shot. He just invented that name, you see; and when he read Jim's article about his being up here, he tumbled to the game."

"Oh! it's rotten luck!" groaned Thad; "after all that beautiful strategy we've fallen down flat. No use talking, Hugh. Jim, that fellow is a sticker, and it begins to look as if he couldn't be budged or pried loose with a crowbar. But I'm not the one to give a thing up because I've failed once or twice; just wait till I get my third wind, and I'll settle Brother Lu's hash for him!"

So they wandered back to town, sadder but wiser from their new experience.

CHAPTER XII

SCRANTON FANS HAVE A PAINFUL SHOCK

The nine from Mechanicsburg showed up that afternoon on time. They were a husky-looking lot of young chaps, accustomed to hard toil in the mills, and with muscles that far outclassed the high-school boys. But, as every one knows, it requires something more than mere brawn to win baseball games; often a club that seems to be weak develops an astonishing amount of skill with bat and ball, and easily walks off with the victory.

Mechanicsburg was "out for blood" from the very start. They depended a great deal on their slugging abilities, and declared that no pitcher the Scranton players might offer could resist their terrific onslaught.

When the first inning was over at last it began to look as if their boast might be made good, for the score stood five to one. Frazer was in the box for Scranton, Hugh not wishing to use his star pitcher unless it was absolutely necessary. He was a bit afraid that something might happen to Tyree that would put him on the bench and thus they would be terribly handicapped in their first game with Allandale on the following Saturday.

Now, Frazer was a pretty dependable sort of a slab artist, and if the Scranton boys had not had Alan Tyree they might have believed him a Number One. But while Frazer had a number of good curves and drops, and a pretty fair amount of speed, he seemed only able to deceive those huskies from Mechanicsburg in spurts.

Between times they got at him for successive drives that netted two and three bases each. Indeed, in that very first inning the fielders of the home team were kept on the jump at a lively rate chasing smashing blows. To tell the truth, all three outs were made on enormous flies that seemed to go up almost to the very clouds, and gave "K.K." out in the middle garden, and "Just" Smith, who had charge of left field, a big run each time before they could get their hands on and hold the ball.

In the second time at bat the visitors did not do as much. Perhaps Frazer managed to tighten up, and pitch better ball. He was very erratic, and could never be depended on to do consecutive good work. In every other inning the heavies could not seem to gauge his work at all, and he mowed them down. Then they would come at him again like furies, and knock his offerings to every part of the field as though he might be an amateur in the box.

Hugh watched the fluctuations of the game with more or less solicitude. They could hardly afford to

be beaten by a team like Mechanicsburg, he figured, as he saw Frazer "fall down" for the third time, and a catastrophe threaten.

It was the sixth inning.

Scranton had done more or less scoring on her side, so that the figures were mounting rapidly, and it promised to be an old-fashioned batting bee. It now stood nine to twelve in favor of the visitors; and as they had started another of their rallies no one could say what the result might be by the time Scranton once more came to bat.

There was a small but noisy delegation from the other town present, and they kept things pretty lively most of the time, cheering their fellows, and hooting the slightest opportunity when Scranton failed to connect, or one of the high-school boys did not make a gilt-edged pickup.

Nor were the Mechanicsburg rooters alone in this jeering. As usually happens, there were a number of fellows in Scranton who entertained feelings of jealousy toward the local nine, based on an idea that they had been purposely overlooked when the choice of players was made.

Chief among these malcontents was the town bully, Nick Lang, whose acquaintance the reader has already made in a previous volume, and under exciting conditions. Nick at one time had a good chance of making the nine, for he was a hustler when it came to playing ball, and indeed, in nearly every sport; but as might be expected, he managed to display his nasty temper in practice, and Coach Saunders, who heartily disliked and distrusted the big fellow, speedily turned him down.

Nick, as usual, had his two faithful henchmen along with him, Leon Disney and Tip Slavin; and the trio led the hooting whenever a chance came to rub it into Scranton. Some of the visitors hardly liked this; it smacked too much of rank treachery to please them. It was all very well for visitors to deride the home team in order to "rattle" the pitcher; but for fellows living in Scranton to indulge in this sort of thing did not seem right.

Hugh believed he had had quite enough of this see-saw business. If Frazer was going to "jump" in that miserable fashion the game was as good as gone. He disliked doing it the worst kind, but he saw the appealing look Frazer shot in his direction on third when the visitors once more started their bombardment. It meant Frazer had lost all confidence in his ability to stop the threatened rally; and that he was making signs for help.

So Hugh took him out.

It was Alan Tyree who stepped into the box, and began to toss a few balls to the backstop, in order to limber up his arm; while the visiting batsman waited the signal from the umpire to toe the home plate, and get ready to strike.

Just three times did Alan send in one of his terrific shoots that fairly sizzled as they shot past; three times the heavy batter cut the thin air with his club, and then walked over to where his companions sat in a clump, watching curiously to see how the change was going to work.

Up came the next visitor on the list, who also made light with the offering of poor Frazer. Did he start a batting bee all over again? Well, not that any one could notice it. The best he could do was to fan the air on two successive occasions, and then send up a twisting foul that Thad Stevens managed to hold, after a pretty erratic chase back and forth.

Now it was the loyal home fans who began to root long and hard. They scented victory, and it seemed good after so much bitter humiliation at the hands of this newly organized team, most of them strange to their positions, and capable of many fielding errors, but able to remedy this by their ability to bat.

The third out followed in quick succession. Scranton sighed with relief, and the fielders had had a rest. They were really getting tired of chasing wildly after all those terrific smashes, and of seeing the big fellows running the bases at will.

Hugh led off in the next inning, and the renewed confidence put in the whole team by the change of pitchers showed itself. When that inning was over the locals had reduced the lead of Mechanicsburg to one run; and they fully anticipated wiping that slight advantage out in the next round.

Tyree still held them close. They knocked several fouls, and one man actually went out through Juggins in far right, managing to sprint fast enough to grapple with a soaring fly that came his way across the foul line. The rest struck out, being almost like babies in the hands of the wizard Tyree.

Well, the locals not only wiped that lead out but went two better, so that it now began to look as though they had the game "sewed up," with Tyree pitching championship brand of ball, and every

fellow keyed up to playing his best. Wonderful infield work saved Alan from having the first hit marked up against him in the eighth frame, for several of the hard hitters were up again, and they managed to swat the ball with a vim; but only to have Owen, or it might be Morgan on third, intercept the speeding horsehide, and whip it over to waiting Old Reliable Joe Danvers on first for an out.

The game really ended with that inning, for Scranton made five runs, having a nice little batting bee of their own for a change. In the ninth the visitors got a man on first through a juggle on the part of Hobson on second, though Julius was really excusable, for the ball came down to him with terrific speed, and though he knocked it down he could not recover in time to get it across the infield so as to cut off the speedy runner.

But when the visitor started to make for second Thad Stevens had him caught by two yards, his throw down being as accurate as a bullet fired from a new Government army rifle.

After all, the boys were satisfied to come out of the scrimmage as well as they did, for those big Mechanicsburg chaps were terrors with their bats; and equal to making a home run at any stage of the game.

It had been good practice for Scranton, every one admitted, though some confessed that their blood had actually run cold when Frazer gave such palpable signs of distress.

Hugh was worried more or less. He wondered what would happen if Tyree could not play in the big game with Allandale. Frazer might redeem himself, it is true, for the pitcher that goes to the well, and is dented on one day, often comes back later on and does wonderful work. Still, as the following week passed day by day, and Saturday came closer, the field captain of the Scranton High team seemed to feel a strange premonition that there was trouble in store for them.

And his fears did not prove groundless, after all, as it turned out; for there was trouble a-plenty waiting for the local team, spelled with a capital T in the bargain.

The day came, and everything seemed all right as far as the weather went. It was hot enough to make the players feel at their best without causing them to wilt under the burning rays of the sun. Clouds at times also promised relief, and the immense throng that gathered on the open field where Scranton played, for there was no high fence around it, believed they were due to witness a sterling game, with the two teams well balanced.

Of course Allandale had beaten unlucky Belleville easily on the preceding Saturday, while Scranton was "toying" with that aggregation of sluggers from Mechanicsburg, and almost getting their fingers burned while doing so. The "Champs," as the visitors delighted to call themselves, seemed to have an air of confidence that impressed many an anxious Scranton rooter, and made him wonder how Tyree would stand up against that mighty slab artist, Big Ed Patterson. This Allandale pitcher seemed capable of outwitting the smartest batter by giving just what he wanted least of all, as if he knew every fellow's weaknesses, and could take advantage of them at will.

Then the blow fell.

It cast gloom over the whole Scranton camp, as the horrible news was quickly circulated through the various groups. Boys turned to look at one another aghast, and the grins on their faces assumed a sickly yellow hue.

Word had been brought to the anxious Hugh that Alan Tyree would be utterly unable to be on the field that day, not to speak of pitching. An unlucky accident after lunch had injured his left leg, and the doctor absolutely forbade his getting into uniform, or even leaving the house, under severe penalty for disobedience.

It was in the nature of a dreadful calamity, after the way Frazer had been actually knocked out of the box by those crude players from Mechanicsburg. Still the game must be played, or forfeited to Allandale; and Scranton fellows are not in the habit of giving anything up without the hardest kind of a struggle. So with a sigh, and trying to appear calm, Hugh turned to his second-string pitcher.

CHAPTER XIII

"Are you game, Frazer, for a desperate fight?" asked Hugh, smiling in a way he hoped would inspire the other with confidence.

Frazer was a bit white, but he had his jaws set, and there was a promising flash in his eyes that Hugh liked to see. His Scotch blood was aroused, and he would do his level best to hold the Allandale last-year champions down to few hits. That humiliation which Frazer had suffered in asking to be taken out of the box on the preceding Saturday had burned in his soul ever since; and he was in a fit frame of mind to "pitch his head off" in order to redeem himself.

Hugh talked with him a short time. He told him all he knew about the various players on the opposing team, and in this way Frazer might be able to deceive some of the heavy batters when they came up. Unfortunately Frazer could not vary his speed and drops and curves with an occasional deceptive Matthewson "balloon ball," so called because it seems to look as large as a toy hot-air balloon to the batter, but is advanced so slowly that he strikes before it gets within reach.

Hugh on his part had always practiced that sort of a ball, and indeed he had nothing else beside fair speed and this "floater." But in practice, when Hugh went into the box, he had been able to fool many of his mates, and have them almost breaking their backs trying to hit a ball that was still coming. As a last resort Hugh meant to relieve Frazer, but only after the game was irrevocably lost; for he wanted to give the other every chance possible to redeem his former "fluke."

There was not any great amount of genuine enthusiasm shown by the crowd of local rooters when Frazer walked out to take his place, though many did give him a cheer, hoping to thus hearten the poor fellow, and put some confidence in his soul.

If he had not been able to hold those boys from Mechanicsburg, who were reckoned only "half-baked" players, as some of the Scranton fans called it, what sort of a chance would Frazer have against the Champs, who had toyed with Belleville just a week back, and looked tremendously dangerous as they practiced now upon the local field, so as to become a little accustomed to its peculiarities?

Ground rules were again in vogue, owing to the great crowd. This gave Scranton a little advantage, since they were used to playing on the home grounds, and would know just where to send the ball—providing they were able to come in contact with it, a matter in which one Big Ed Patterson meant to have considerable to say, judging from his confident manner, and the good-natured smile on his sun-burned face.

Scranton fought gamely, every one was agreed to that. They started off well, for Frazer actually got through the first without a hit being made, though twice the visitors met one of his offerings with a vicious smack that sent the ball far out in center, where the watchful and fleet-footed "K.K." managed to capture each fly after a great run.

And in their half Scranton did a little hitting, though it was mostly through good luck that they got one run—a Texas leaguer that fell among three players who got their signals crossed; then a poor throw down to second allowing "Just" Smith to land there in safety; a bunt that turned into a sacrifice on the part of Joe Danvers, followed by a high fly that let the runner on third come trooping home, did the business.

Owen struck out, and Hugh sent up a mighty foul over in right that was caught in a dazzling fashion by the guardian of that patch.

As the two clubs faced each other they ranged after this fashion, and it may be noticed that there was no change in Scranton's line-up except in the pitcher's box. The batting order was not the same, so it must be given as it came on either side:

Scranton High
Player Position

"Just" Smith Left Field
Joe Danvers First Base
Horatio Juggins Right Field
Owen Dugdale Short Stop
Hugh Morgan (capt.) Third Base
"K.K." (Ken Kinkaid) Center Field
Julius Hobson Second Base
Frazer Pitcher
Thad Stevens Catcher

Allandale High Player

Position

Farmer Left Field
Gould First Base
Wright Right Field
Waterman Short Stop
Norris Third Base
Whipple Center Field
Brown Second Base
Patterson Pitcher
Keeler Catcher

As the game progressed it became evident that Frazer was "pitching his arm off" in the endeavor to stem the tide of defeat that inning after inning seemed bound to overtake the Scranton nine, despite their most gallant uphill fight. Allandale proved to be all their reputation had boasted, and they seemed able to work a man around the circuit nearly every inning. Splendid fielding on the part of Hugh and his mates kept the score down, but nevertheless it continued to mount, in spite of all their efforts.

Frazer was beginning to show signs of exhaustion. He had tried every trick he had in his list on the batters who faced him. They had begun to solve his delivery more and more the oftener they came up. And there was a very demoralizing way about their confident attitude that no doubt added much to poor Frazer's distress. He began to believe they were just playing with him, and at a given time would fall upon his delivery, to knock the ball at will to every part of the field.

Hugh knew it was coming, and he hardly felt able to go into the box himself to stem the rising tide; but anything was better than to have Frazer submerged under an avalanche of hits. "Big Ed" seemed to be getting better the longer he pitched, and just the reverse could be said of Frazer, who was on the verge of a total collapse.

"Better take me out before I go to the wall, Hugh," begged the other, after the sixth frame showed the score to be six to two, with more runs looming up in the "lucky seventh" in prospect. "I'm ashamed to say I've lost my nerve. Those fellows mean to get at me in the seventh and it will be a Waterloo. I just feel it in my bones they've been waiting to lambast my offerings then, for I've seen them talking together, and laughing, as though they had a game laid out. You go in and feed them those teasers of yours. The boys will take a brace in batting, if you can hold Allandale; and in the end it may not be such a terrible calamity after all."

Hugh knew it must be. Frazer had gone to the wall, and would pitch poorly if allowed to go in the box in the next inning.

"I hate to do it, Frazer," he told the other, feeling sorry for him; "but any port in a storm; and it may be possible these sluggers will trip up on that balloon ball of mine, though I haven't much else to offer them."

That inning the locals did a little batting on their own account, with the result that the score looked a shade better, for it was three to six when once more Scranton went into the field.

When it was seen that Hugh walked to the box some of the local rooters cheered lustily, for Hugh was a great favorite. Cat-calls also greeted his appearance, coming principally from Nick Lang and his followers; though they were frowned upon by a crowd of Scranton boys, who threatened to hustle them off the grounds unless they mended their ways.

As Hugh left third one of the substitutes, named Hastings, was placed on that sack. Thad gave Hugh a queer look on discovering this, and followed it with a peculiarly suggestive grin; so that Hugh understood how his chum was thinking of another Hastings with whose name they had taken undue liberties.

Allandale seemed pleased to know that there was to be a change of slab artists.

"All pitchers look alike to us when we've got our batting clothes on!" one of them sang out blithely, as he swung a couple of bats around, being the next man up, and desirous of making himself feel that he held a willow wand in his hands when throwing one aside and wielding the other.

He was mistaken.

Hugh started in without delay feeding them some of what the boys were pleased to denominate his "teasers." He soon had them hitting at thin air with might and main, and looking surprised because they failed to connect.

One man, then two, went out on strikes, and neither had touched the elusive "fade-away" ball made famous by Christy Matthewson in his prime.

The crowd sat up and began to take notice. What did it mean? If Hugh could only keep up his good work by varying his offerings, so as to keep those slugging Allandale fellows guessing, and Scranton began to knock the ball around a little on their own account, why, there might be something like a good game yet.

The third man got a hit which should really have been an out, for "K.K.," reliable "K.K.," out in deep center, misjudged the blow, and started to run back, when he should have shot forward instantly. He could have scooped it up three feet from the ground had he done so; and while he did manage to keep the ball from getting past, the batter gained first.

However, he died there, for Hugh deceived the next fellow as he had done two previous batters, and the side was out. When the eighth inning ended the score was four to six, not so very bad. The local rooters got busy, and gave Hugh a round of hearty cheers when he toed the mark in the box again.

Allandale did get a run in this frame, but still Hugh struck two men out. And in their half of the eighth Scranton also tallied, making the score read four to seven. Then came the last inning. Hugh exerted himself to the utmost. One batter failed to connect, but the next got in a blow that netted him two bases.

Hugh kept cool and managed to deceive the next one. Then came a mighty heave and when Juggins in far right was seen running like mad it looked as if Allandale had clinched another brace of runs then and there. But Horatio proved himself to be a hero, for he gobbled that drive, and the side was extinguished with no damage done.

Scranton tried with might and main to do something wonderful in their last half of the final inning. Indeed, with two out and three on bases it looked as if there might be a fair chance, since a wallop would mean three runs to tie the score, and if Joe Danvers could only get in one of his occasional "homers" it would break up the game in favor of the local team.

Joe did connect and drove out a great hit, but alas! for the eccentricities of baseball, Whipple over in right had seen fit to play far back, and after quite a gallop he managed to clutch the ball and hold it.

Of course that gave Allandale the game. The Scranton boys seemed pretty "sore" over their first defeat, but considering the hard luck that had been their portion, they felt that they had not done so badly after all.

"Just wait!" they told the laughing Allandale fellows, "there's another day coming when you'll have to face Alan Tyree; and the chances are two to one you'll not find that boy such easy picking. You're in great luck today, Allandale; so make the most of it. He laughs longest who laughs last; and Scranton is wagering dollars to doughnuts that it'll be our turn next!"

CHAPTER XIV

FARMER BERNARD COLLECTS HIS BILL

"Come and go along with me, Hugh," Thad Stevens was saying, some days after the defeat suffered by Scranton High at the hands of the Champs, as he bounced into his chum's den about four in the afternoon.

"Where to?" demanded the other, looking up with a smile; and then noting the eager expression on Thad's face he hurriedly added: "But I guess I can get pretty close to the mark without your telling me. You're meaning to continue your campaign against our friend, Brother Lu—how about that for a guess, Thad?"

"Just what I'm up to, for a fact," asserted Thad, with his jaws shutting in an energetic fashion. "You ought to know that I never give over, once I'm worked up like that business got me. Day and night I've been trying to plan a way of ridding poor deluded Matilda and her sick husband from that sleek rascal who's fastened on them for keeps."

"Well, what's new in the game, Thad?" continued Hugh, picking up his cap, and in this way proclaiming his intention of joining his chum.

"Several things have happened," admitted Thad, "though honest to goodness I can't say that they have advanced the cause a whit. First of all Mom has capitulated, which word means she couldn't stand the strain any longer, worrying so about Matilda going hungry for lack of sewing to do to earn food for the three of them. So she and some of the other ladies sent out a bundle, and I've got another down at the door right now, to carry over to the Hosmer cottage."

"I must say I honor your mother, Thad, for being so tender-hearted," said Hugh, warmly.

"Of course you do, Hugh," sighed the other boy, "but it's too bad they had to give in before that big eater was starved out, and took to the road again, where he could always make sure of begging a full meal at back doors. Now he'll just decide to squat down and stick through the summer, yes and winter in the bargain, acting as if he might be almost dying every little while, and then recovering his appetite *wonderfully* soon again. Oh! it makes me furious, that's what it does."

"Well, as you've asked me to go along, Thad, I'll accommodate you; but have you any little scheme on foot today?" continued Hugh, leading the way toward the back door, since he understood that his chum had left his bundle there before hunting him out.

"I wish I did, Hugh," replied the other, eagerly, "but try as I may, it seems to me I just can't think up anything worth while. After that grand scheme of ours fell so flat it took all the wind out of my sails. I'm trusting mostly to luck to have something come up that we can grab hold of, so as to give him a boost."

They were soon on their way. Thad talked almost incessantly, and begged his companion to try his hardest to conceive some promising plan that might turn out a shade better than the one connected with that imaginary marshal from Texas.

So they presently arrived at the Hosmer cottage. Thad did the knocking. He had decided to go in at the slightest invitation, in hopes of meeting Brother Lu again, and ascertaining what the prospects were for his departing to the other world.

To the surprise of both boys, when they were admitted by Matilda they discovered the object of their thoughts seated in a chair, with a thick shawl across his shoulders. He looked as though he might be a trifle ill, too. At the sight of them one of his accustomed grins came over his face, now rough again with a three days' growth of gray beard.

"Hello, boys!" the reformed tramp called out, as though really pleased to see them again; "you find me under the weather this time for keeps. Had one of my little bad attacks, and just beginning to feel a shade better. Perhaps I'll go off in one of these spells some fine day, sooner or later. Matilda she's been a good nurse to me, and I'm beginning to believe I did the wisest thing ever when I decided to hunt my last remaining blood relative up, and stay with her till the end came."

Matilda looked pained to hear him speak in that way, but Thad was not in the least impressed. According to his mind the other had only caught a little summer cold, and which had caused him considerable distress, with its accompanying sneezing discomforts. He did not believe it was anything serious.

Determined, however, to stay a short while and study the man, in hopes of discovering some loophole through which he might be reached and made to give up his soft berth in the Hosmer home, Thad took a chair, and settled himself for a visit.

Hugh asked the man a number of questions concerning his illness, and took note of the fact that every time Brother Lu had occasion to glance toward his sister a wonderfully tender gleam would come into his blue eyes. Apparently he had learned what everybody in Scranton always knew, that Matilda Hosmer was the kindest and softest-hearted creature alive. Hugh wondered whether this knowledge might not in time cause the man to feel ashamed of imposing upon her strength and generosity, so that of his own free will he would take his departure for other scenes.

"Matilda is going to have a birthday in a few days," he confided to the boys, at a time his sister chanced to be in the kitchen, "and me'n Brother-in-law Andrew, we've made up our minds to surprise her with a little present. 'Course it can't be anything much, because we haven't a superabundance of ready cash; but Matilda, she's stood by her poor old wandering brother so handsomely I'd be glad to give her a whole hundred dollars, if only I possessed that sum."

Thad looked surprised, indeed he may have begun to suspect that after all the grizzled old hobo might not be quite so heartless as appearances would indicate. This unexampled spirit of self-sacrifice

shown by Matilda was beginning to have its influence on his hard nature. As for Hugh, he listened with considerable interest, listened and sat there, watching the play of emotions across the face of Brother Lu, and forming certain opinions of his own at the same time.

While they sat there a heavy knock came at the door. Upon Matilda venturing to open the same a big man pushed his way inside, and started talking roughly in a loud, almost abusive tone.

Thad recognized him as a certain well-to-do farmer and dairyman who had an unenviable reputation as a cruel taskmaster with his hired help. He was also known to be exceedingly harsh in his treatment of any with whom he had dealings, who chanced to be unable to meet their obligations to the minute. Because he had been able to accumulate his "pile," Mr. Abel Bernard seemed to believe everyone should be capable of doing the same. If they could not afford a thing they ought to do without it. He never took excuses from anyone. It was all business with Abel—pay up or quit, was his daily motto.

Hugh, listening, quickly determined that a little more fresh trouble had dropped down upon the poor head of Matilda. She had been taking a quart of milk a day from Farmer Bernard, and the bill had run two months and more now. He shoved an account at her in a most savage manner, Thad thought, and the boy felt as if he could have kicked the grim dairyman with rare good pleasure to settle the account.

As for Hugh, if he had chanced to have the money with him just then he would only too gladly have loaned or given it to Matilda, so that she might get rid of the abusive farmer, whose very tone was harsh and rasping.

"It's my rule never to let anybody get away with more than a second month's milk," the big man was saying in that loud, abusive voice of his. "You asked me to let the account go on another spell when I handed you the same before, and now you tell me you haven't got the five dollars it calls for because some old tramp of a brother that you haven't seen for twenty years has dropped down on you, and had to be taken care of. Well, Mrs. Hosmer, I'm not helping to run a hospital, let me tell you; I've got all I can do to look after my own folks. You mustn't expect me to deliver you any more milk till you can pay this; and I hope you'll get the cash soon, too, because I've some accounts of my own I want to settle."

Matilda was near tears, for such a scene as this frightened her. Poor old Mr. Hosmer tried to bustle forward and enter into the conversation; but the husky dairyman just brushed him aside as though he were no more than a child.

"I'm not talking to you about it, Mr. Hosmer," he went on to say, almost brutally; "it's your wife I do business with. I'll be looking to her to settle my account. And if what I hear honest folks a-sayin' is near true, the sooner she gets rid of her disreputable brother the better for all concerned."

Matilda's eyes flashed.

"You need not add insult to injury, Mr. Bernard," she flashed, showing a little touch of spirit that Hugh hardly believed she possessed. "He is the only living tie to bind me with my long past childhood. We were once very fond of each other; and now that poor Luther has fallen sick, and fears he has not long to live, I mean to stand by him, no matter how people talk."

Brother Lu looked as though this sort of thing gave him something akin to joy. He even shot a tender glance across at Matilda, and then a triumphant one toward the two boys, as though to say: "Didn't I tell you my sister had a tender heart?"

Then he got on his feet. He really seemed a trifle weak, showing that he had actually been under the weather latterly.

"How much does my sister owe you, man?" he demanded in as stern a voice as he could command.

"Oh! does that interest you at all, Mister Weary Willie?" sneered the irate farmer; "well, if you want to know, my account is an even five dollars. Perhaps, now, you'll put your hand into your jeans pocket and hand out that amount with pleasure."

"I've got that much tied up in my old bandanna handkerchief, it happens," said Brother Lu, to the astonishment of Thad. "It's true me 'nd Brother-in-law Andrew expected to do something different with my little fortune, but then let that pass. You wait till I get it, you grasping milk raiser."

He started from the room, followed by the admiring gaze of Matilda, who evidently saw in this wonderful offer of her brother a full settlement for all the tender care and affection she had bestowed upon him during the past weeks.

Presently, after a little delay, the reformed hobo came into the room. Sure enough, he was holding a brand-new five-dollar bill in his extended hand, and there was a look of actual pleasure to be seen on

his grizzled face.

"There you are, Mister Man," he said as he thrust the money at the farmer; "now you sign that bill in a hurry, and never show your face here again. We'll either find another party to deliver us milk, or go without."

Hugh saw something that gave him an unexpected thrill. It was a simple matter, and no doubt escaped Thad's attention entirely, yet it might mean a great deal. As he looked closely at the fresh and new bank bill of the denomination of five dollars, Hugh saw that it had only three distinct creases marked across its face, as though it might have been taken from some flat receptacle like a bill-book; certainly when Brother Lu declared that he had such a bill tied up in his bandanna handkerchief he prevaricated, for it would under such conditions have been crumpled instead of looking so smooth! Hugh from that moment began to smell a rat!

CHAPTER XV

THE PUZZLE IS FAR FROM BEING SOLVED

When, a little later on, the two chums came away from the Hosmer home, Thad seemed unusually quiet, for him. Hugh, noticing this, and wishing to ascertain whether the other had begun to get on the track of the truth, presently remarked:

"What makes you so glum, Thad? Coming over you rattled away like a blue streak, and now you haven't so much as said ten words since we started back home?"

"Well, to tell you the truth," admitted Thad, shaking his head after the manner of one who is sadly puzzled, "I just don't know what to say, after seeing that little affair."

"Do you mean you feel badly because Matilda was so reduced in finances that she couldn't even meet a small account like her milk bill?" asked Hugh, fishing for a bite.

"Why, yes, partly that," said Thad, slowly; "but it knocked me all in a heap to see that old rascal of a Brother Lu walk out with the last dollar he had in the wide world, and gladly hand it over to liquidate that same account. Say, if we didn't just know he was a bad one, I'd call that a really generous act."

"Oh," chuckled Hugh, "not so very generous, after all, when you come to examine things closer. Don't forget, Thad, that he's been sponging on that poor couple for a good many weeks already; and then, if our calculations are correct, he means to fasten on them for keeps."

"That's so," agreed the other, heaving a sigh as though he felt somewhat relieved in his mind to have his comrade point out a solution to the problem. "Of course, he's imposing on his relatives something shameful, and the least he could do was to toe the scratch when an emergency came along. But he did the thing up brown, I must admit."

"And then again, how do we know that five dollars was every cent he had in the world?" asked Hugh, insinuatingly.

"He said as much," declared Thad, instantly; and then laughed as he hastened to add: "though for that matter what would one little white lie mean to a fellow as case-hardened as an old hobo? There's another thing I'm thinking about, Hugh."

"I can guess it," the second boy immediately told him. "You're wondering what it was Brother Lu meant to buy with his little fortune, eh?"

"Well, five dollars isn't so *very* much when you come to think of it, Hugh, but to a tramp it might seem a pile. But didn't he tell us he and Brother-in-law Andrew had some sort of a little scheme hatched up to give Matilda a surprise on her birthday, tomorrow, Saturday?"

"Just what he did," admitted Hugh. "They've been plotting how to spend five dollars recklessly, so as to get the most for their money. Such men are apt to find heaps of enjoyment in blowing in their money a dozen times, and changing off just as often. I wouldn't be surprised a bit if they even calculated whether they could run across a nice little home that they could buy and present to Matilda for a birthday present—faithful, big-hearted Matilda."

"What! for five dollars!" ejaculated Thad, and then he laughed; "but, of course, you're joking, Hugh. Still, it looks like a big sum to men who've seldom handled as much at a time; and I guess a confirmed tramp never does. I hope, though, he didn't steal that money."

"What makes you say that, Thad?"

"Oh! I don't know, but it looked so nice and fresh and new. Great Jupiter! Hugh, you don't think for a minute, do you, that it might have been a counterfeit bill?"

Hugh shook his head.

"Lots of things may turn out to be counterfeit, Thad, men as well as bank bills, but that one was perfectly good. I could even see the colored threads of silk fiber that the Government uses in the paper to protect the currency. So don't let that bother you again."

"I'm glad to hear you say so, because it would be terrible if poor Matilda should get into more trouble on account of passing bad money. But is this going to alter our plans any, Hugh?"

"I don't see why it should," came the steady reply.

"We'll continue to do business at the old stand, shall we, then?" pursued Thad; "and try our level best to find out some way to force that leech to let go the hold he has secured on his sister?"

"We'll keep on trying to learn something about Luther that will give us an advantage, so we can make him do just what we want," explained Hugh; and it might have been noticed that he was now very particular just what words he used when he spoke of the reformed tramp.

"Huh! there's only one answer to that," grunted Thad; "which is to influence him to move on his way, and clear out. Scranton will never miss Brother Lu; and the wide world he loves so well beckons to him to come on. After all, once a tramp always a tramp, they say; and as a rule such fellows die in the harness."

"It's really a disease, I've read, like the hookworm down South, that makes so many of the poor, underfed whites in the mountain districts seem too lazy for any use. It gets in the blood when they are boys, and they feel a strong yearning just to loaf, and knock around, and pick up their meals when and where they can."

"Well, I can believe a part of that, Hugh, but the meal end is too much for me to swallow. Whoever heard of a tramp who didn't respond to a dinner-bell on a farm? Eating and sleeping are their long suits, and they can beat the world at both. When it comes to going in swimming now, they draw the line every time, for fear of taking cold, I reckon. But I own up Brother Lu Isn't a bad looker, now that he's reformed far enough to keep his face and hands clean, and wear Mr. Hosmer's Sunday-go-to-meeting suit of clothes, which just fits him by squeezing, and turning up the trouser-legs several inches at the bottom."

"Yes, he isn't a bad-looking man, and if we didn't know how fierce he seemed at the time we first ran across him in the patch of woods, we'd hardly dream he'd ever been down and out. Matilda's cooking seems to agree with him."

"Shucks! it agrees too well with him, and that's the trouble. Now, I wonder if there could be any way to make him sicken on his bill of fare. I'm going to think it over, and see if I can evolve a scheme along those lines."

"You'll find it hard to do," suggested Hugh, "because he eats just what Andrew does, I suppose; as for Matilda, I do believe she stints her appetite so as to be able to give her sick charges their fill."

"She does look thinner than before, that's a fact!" exclaimed the indignant Thad. "What a burning shame all this is, Hugh! Surely there must be some remedy for it. I've got a good notion to have a talk with Dominie Pettigrew, and spin him the whole painful story. He might find a way to separate Brother Lu from his quarry."

"Take my advice, Thad, and wait a little longer," Hugh told him. "Tomorrow will be Saturday and we play Belleville again in the afternoon. Besides, didn't he tell us it was going to be Matilda's birthday, and that he and Andrew had fixed it to surprise her a little? Well, don't say anything to the Parson until next week, and by that time perhaps we'll know a heap more than we do now."

Thad looked keenly at the speaker, but Hugh kept a straight face. If a glimmering suspicion that Hugh might know of something he was averse to confiding to even his best chum darted through Thad's

mind just then he allowed it to slip past.

"All right, Hugh, I guess it won't do any harm to hold up a few more days. Matilda has stood it so long now that it isn't going to hurt her to endure another week or so of her brother's company, and his appetite in the bargain. I'll try and forget all about it in thinking of our game with Belleville. We've just got to clinch that, as sure as anything, if we hope to have a look-in at that pennant."

"We're going to do it, Thad," said Hugh, with set teeth. "Once we put Belleville in the soup for keeps we can devote our undivided attention to Allandale. They have the jump on us, of course, owing to hard luck. But, thank goodness, Alan Tyree is all right again, and he told me this morning he felt that his arm was better than ever before. That means Belleville won't be able to do anything with his delivery tomorrow afternoon."

"This time we play on our own grounds," suggested Thad, "and the advantage is all in our favor. Everybody seems to think we should have an easy snap."

"I rather think everybody stands for Ivy Middletown, Sue Barnes and Peggy Nolan," jeered Hugh, causing his chum to give a confused little laugh, as though the shot had gone home. "But what do girls know about baseball? It's a game of uncertainties all the way through. Many a time a pitcher, believing himself safe and invincible, because his club is away ahead, has eased up a trifle, and the other fellows start a batting bee that nearly puts the fat in the fire, and gives him the scare of his life. Belleville went down to defeat last Saturday before Allandale, and the score looks rotten, but you remember they fought like tigers."

"You're right, Hugh."

"And only for some hard luck they would have started a streak of hitting that might have pulled them out of the hole. Half a dozen fierce drives were taken on the run by Allandale fielders, any one of which, if sent ten feet one way or the other, would have counted for a three-bagger easily. That's how luck has a hand in defeating a team, and there's no way of denying it, either."

"Well, we mean to put up our best sort of game, and not count it won till the last man goes down in the final inning," avowed Thad.

"It's always wise to play safe in baseball," declared the field captain of the Scranton High team, "and take nothing for granted. Hit as hard as you can every time you're at bat, and don't allow yourself to be tempted to ease up out of sympathy for the other fellows. It's scant sympathy they'll show you, once they get at your prize pitcher, to knock him out of the box. Instead it'll be jeers, and taunts, and every sort of thing calculated to sting."

"But after the game's been won?" expostulated Thad.

"Oh, that's a different thing," admitted his chum. "Then we feel that we can afford to be generous without being put in a possible hole. Every true player is ready to take off his cap and give a beaten rival a hearty cheer. It sort of eases up the sting of defeat a bit, too, as all of us know."

As they parted at the gate in front of Thad's home he once more returned to the subject that had such a strong hold on his mind.

"If anything crops up that you think would interest me, about that tramp, of course, I mean, Hugh, please give me the sign, won't you?" Thad asked.

Hugh did not seem disposed to take his chum into his confidence just then; perhaps he wanted to make more certain that his faint suspicions were well grounded before committing himself to a disclosure.

"Sure I will, if I learn anything positive, Thad," he merely said; "and in the meantime we'll keep tabs on Brother Lu's eccentric actions, hoping to catch him off his guard," and later on Thad realized that these last words were rather significant.

CHAPTER XVI

On Saturday morning Hugh had an errand that took him out of town. Once again it was to the farm where his mother secured that lovely sweet butter, without which the hot biscuits would never taste quite so fine. And as her customary supply had not turned up, with Sunday just ahead, nothing would do but that Hugh must take a little run out on his wheel, and fetch several pounds home with him.

It was about half-past eight when he threw himself in the saddle and started. A more charming summer morning could hardly be experienced. The sun might be a bit hot later on, but just then the air was fragrant with the odor of new-mown grass, the neighbors' lawns having been attended to on the preceding day, but not raked up; the birds sang blithely in the hedges and among the branches of the trees, and in Hugh's soul there rested the joy that a tired high-school scholar finds when the end of the week brings a well-deserved holiday.

As he rode quietly along, not desiring to be in too great a hurry, Hugh's mind somehow reverted to the last occasion when he had gone out to this same farm, in Thad's company, as it happened. He could again in imagination see the old tramp as he got his solitary meal, with the aid of those useful empty tomato cans, and the little blaze he had kindled among the trees alongside the road.

Passing the spot revived these memories vividly. To think that weeks had gone and all that time Brother Lu had stuck to his guns, holding out at the humble Hosmer cottage, and eating the bread of dependence!

"But something tells me the end is coming pretty soon now," Hugh muttered, as he continued on his way.

It was not so very far beyond that identical spot he discovered a large car standing at one side of the road, where the woods grew quite thickly. The chauffeur sat there, idly waiting, it seemed. Hugh had more than once known the same thing to happen, when parties touring from some neighboring town stopped to eat lunch in a spot they fancied, or, it might be, to gather wild flowers.

He was not much interested as he passed, with a nod to the man, who looked around at his approach, save to notice that the car was a pretty fine one, and which he remembered seeing once or twice in Scranton, always empty save for the driver.

Hugh had just turned a bend lying a little away from the car when he distinctly saw some one hastily jump aside, and disappear amidst a screen of bushes growing along the road.

"Now, that was queer," Hugh told himself; "whoever that fellow could be he didn't want me to see him, it looked like. And by the same token there was something familiar about him, though I only had a faint glimpse, he jumped so fast."

As he slowly rode past the bushes he heard no sound. Hugh considered it good policy not to betray the fact that he had noticed anything out of the way; he did not as much as turn in the saddle, but continued to look straight ahead along the dusty white road.

There was another bend a short distance away. No sooner had he turned this than Hugh was off his wheel like lightning, and running back to take a look, as though his curiosity might have been aroused.

What he saw caused him to give a low whistle. Out of the bushes came a form he recognized. It was a rather compact figure upon which he gazed, and the clothes greatly resembled Brother-in-law Andrew's Sunday-best. Yes, Hugh no longer had any doubts, for the man was no other than the reformed hobo.

"I've known that Brother Lu had taken to tramping about the country latterly," he muttered to himself, as he watched the other going off, apparently laughing as though greatly amused, "for a number of people have told me as much. That's all right, but why should he want to hide from me? I've got a good notion to chase after him, once he turns that other bend, and see what it all means."

The idea must have appealed more and more strongly to Hugh then, for two minutes afterwards, when the form of the tramp could no longer be seen ahead, he went back to his wheel, mounted, and retraced his course until he arrived at the second abrupt curve.

Again he dismounted and crept forward to see what he might discover. Strange to say, Hugh, usually steady-going Hugh, now found himself trembling all over, just as though he anticipated making a startling discovery.

Well, he did.

Brother Lu was in plain sight. He was just approaching the stalled car that stood at the side of the road. Watching, Hugh saw the chauffeur jump from his seat, and he plainly saluted the other most respectfully. Hugh paid particular attention to that part of the affair, because any pedestrian might

have stopped to pass a few words with a car driver, or ask a question; but the pilot would hardly have made that positive sign unless there was a reason for his action.

Now they seemed to be talking earnestly. Brother Lu made gestures, and Hugh took notice of the fact that he seemed to be speaking with authority, because the chauffeur constantly nodded his head, as if to say that he understood.

Then the man took something from under the front seat cushion of the car and handed it to Brother Lu. Hugh could not be positive, but he rather fancied it was a packet of folded papers.

Plainly, then, there was a conspiracy afloat. Brother Lu was other than he pretended to be, and he was undoubtedly hatching up some sort of plot that had connections with the peace of mind of the two simple Hosmers who had taken him in on the strength of his claim to blood relationship.

Hugh was quivering more than ever now, and his breath came in gasps as he continued to keep his eyes glued on the two figures not so far away. He wished that he were gifted with hearing keen enough to pick up what they were saying in such low tones, for then he would know everything; but this was out of the question, and he must await the subsequent turn of events.

It might have been noticed, however, that the boy's eyes glistened as with a growing delight, from which it was easy to judge that he did not see anything so very terrible in these strange actions on the part of the reformed tramp. Indeed, Hugh acted very much as though inclined to "shake hands with himself," as Thad was so fond of saying, when he had cause for self-congratulation.

How long they were carrying on that conversation! Once another car showed up down the road, and Hugh chuckled to notice how deftly Brother Lu assumed an humble attitude, just as though he might have simply halted to ask a question of the lordly chauffeur of the big and comfortable car.

"He's a dandy, that's all I can say," muttered the amused boy, who on his part stood there as the other car whirled past, as if he might be looking for something he had lost; but on the contrary, the opposite was really the truth, because Hugh had made a great discovery and a "find" in the bargain.

Now apparently the earnest conversation between chauffeur and Matilda's roving good-for-nothing brother had come to an end. The man entered the car again, turned in the road with the cleverness that comes from long handling of a touring machine, and, with a last respectful salute, his hand going to his cap military fashion, sped down the road, heading toward Scranton.

Brother Lu stood there as if lost in meditation. Hugh, still watching closely, and making up his mind to have it out then and there, because he could not stand the weighty load of suspense any longer, was sure the other must be in a merry frame of mind, for he laughed several times, and even slapped his hand against his thigh in a way he had, as if to emphasize his thoughts.

"Oh, you sly rascal!" Hugh was saying as he continued to observe all these significant things. "I'm beginning to size you up for what you are, all right. But just think how Thad will be stunned when I tell him all about my adventure! Why, he'll almost believe he's asleep, and dreaming it. There, I do think he's turning around as if he meant to come back this way. That suits me O.K., because I won't have to chase after him."

Hugh thereupon prepared a surprise for the reformed hobo. He secured his wheel and stood just around the bend, trying to look severe and knowing, though his heart was beating like a trip-hammer, and he felt that his eyes must be fairly dancing with all the excitement.

In imagination he could tell just how near the other man was as the seconds passed. Hugh wondered how Brother Lu would take it upon learning that his deep-laid schemes had been discovered. Apparently the boy did not see anything to fear, or else he would have sped away on his wheel instead of remaining to charge the other with his base deception.

Then the sound of footfalls came to the waiting lad. He caught his breath, and his eager gaze was glued on the bend around which the man must speedily appear. As he walked Brother Lu had his head lowered, and consequently did not at once see that some one waited for him in the middle of the road. Indeed, he drew very near, and finally Hugh gave a sudden cough.

At that the other quickly looked up, as though startled. When he saw who it was he immediately commenced to grin after his usual custom. Somehow Hugh no longer saw anything to condemn in that broad smile that covered the face of the ex-hobo; just then, in the light of the new revelation, it seemed most kindly and benign; for circumstances alter cases, and a great deal depends upon one's view-point as to whether an expression can be classed as merry or sarcastic.

Brother Lu did not seem to be bothered a great deal on making the discovery he did, though he must surely have jumped to the conclusion that the boy had been spying upon his late movements. He continued to advance. Hugh could detect the light of humor in those blue orbs that had always mystified him, even when he believed the other to be the worst kind of an impostor, or human leech, capable of living upon the scanty earnings of his sister Matilda.

"Hello, there, Hugh Morgan! so you concluded to turn back, did you?" the man started to say, as though inviting the other to open his batteries at once, and accuse him to his face.

"Why, yes," said Hugh, trying to control his trembling voice, "I saw somebody jump into the bushes as if he didn't want me to glimpse him, and of course my curiosity was aroused; so I just dismounted and came back to the other bend. Then, when I recognized you, I determined to follow a bit. You see, Mr. Corbley, I mean to settle certain matters that have been worrying both my chum and myself a heap lately—settle them once and for all."

"Which I suppose now you've done for a fact, Hugh?" remarked the other, chuckling.

"I believe I have," the boy said, firmly.

"You've got me sized up, all right, I imagine, lad," continued Brother Lu.

"I've come to the conclusion, sir, that you are a fraud of the first water, if that's what you want to know," Hugh told him, boldly.

Strange to say, the ex-tramp, instead of taking umbrage at such language, bent over almost double, and laughed so hard Hugh almost feared he was about to have one of his violent fits of coughing; but he did not.

CHAPTER XVII

THE WONDERFUL NEWS

"I reckon sure my cake is dough now, since you've tumbled to my game, Hugh," the late tramp was saying, presently; "and there's nothing left for me to do but take you into camp, and give you the whole story from beginning to end."

"I'd be glad to have you do that, Mr. Corbley," Hugh hastened to tell him.

"Then let's walk back a bit. I believe we can find a nice convenient log close to the road, where we'll take things easy while I spin my little yarn. To tell you the truth, Hugh Morgan, I've taken a great liking to you and that chum, Thad. I've been sizing the pair of you up ever since I first ran across you; and say, it's given me a heap of joy to see how solicitous you both were about my hanging out at Sister Matilda's ranch, and eating her hard-earned bread. You boys have got the right kind of stuff in you, that's certain. Why, there were times when I was almost afraid that impulsive chum of yours would be wanting to jump on me, and try by main force to chase me off the ground."

"We did make one try that way, as of course you know, sir," ventured Hugh.

"Meaning that article in the *Weekly Courier* about the terrible marshal from Texas, Hastings by name," laughed the other. "I've had lots of fun over that racket, son, I give you my word I have. Of course there's a sheriff down there capable of doing all those stunts your friend on the paper wrote up; but his name chances to be Rawlings and not Hastings. I must have got things a bit mixed when I told you about how he took bad men into camp, and all that. But here's the log, and we can take things easy while I confess how I'm the most tremendous impostor going."

Hugh seemed eager to hear about it, nor was he apparently at all afraid. In fact he was looking at the reformed tramp as though he felt a positive affection for him now, in the light of the new revelation.

"First of all, Chum Hugh," said the man, after they had settled themselves comfortably, "I want you to know that the stories I told you about my travels in foreign lands were every one of them Gospel truth. I have been all around the whole globe, and seen some queer things in my day. But let that pass, for as

we are apt to see considerable of each other after this, there'll be a plenty of time for me to continue that narrative of adventure.

"In the course of my travels I've really picked up several fortunes, and then lost them again almost as quickly. It didn't much matter, because I was one of those happy-go-lucky chaps who believe the world owes them a living, and which they can get any time they more than half try.

"So the years went on, and all at once I awoke to find that I was getting old and gray. When a man passes sixty, lad, his thoughts begin to travel far back into the days of his childhood. So more and more I got to thinking of those who were everything to me. I knew that all of them had checked in but a sister, and her I hadn't seen for twenty years and more; though I believed she was still living.

"It was down in Texas a few months ago that I had a little sick spell, and while I lay there convalescing strange fancies came into my head. I made up my mind the time had come for me to quit this foolish roaming all about the world. I couldn't expect to live a great many years more, and why not settle down to being decent and respectable, as well as do some good with my money before I cashed in?

"That idea kept gripping me until I finally made up my mind to sell all my big holdings in the new oil wells. This I did, and banked the cash in New York—I won't tell you what it was, lad, but six figures would be needed to cover it, and maybe seven, if all goes well with my last sale.

"But somehow an old distrust of human nature began to get a hold on me. I found myself wondering whether Matilda, if she should still be living, would welcome her long-missing brother for himself alone, or because he was close on a millionaire.

"That bothered me a heap, Hugh. Finally a bright idea came to me, and I determined to fix myself up like the worst old tramp going, and pretend to be sick, as well as out of funds. The game appealed to my liking for new adventures, and—well, you know how it succeeded. You boys became connected with the affair from the start, and I'm glad of it, for I like you both.

"All through these weeks I've grimly held out, though ready to call the game more than a few times when it seemed that poor Matilda was having a bigger load on her shoulders than she could carry. But I fixed up several little schemes to ease the strain, when I decided to hold back the grand disclosure till her birthday. For one thing, I hid a ten-dollar bill in her Bible, and she never could remember putting the bill there, although she tried her best. Another time I wrote a letter in a disguised hand that was signed by a fictitious name, and which said that in a long-ago deal I had got the better of her, which my conscience wouldn't allow; so to ease my mind I was enclosing a twenty-dollar bill to her to cover interest.

"Say, that certainly did make her lie awake and wonder, because, of course, she couldn't remember anything of the sort; nor could Andrew. I used to listen to them talking it over again and again, and I am sure got heaps of enjoyment out of it; but I told them it was perfectly proper for them to use the money, and they did. I ate part of it up myself, Hugh.

"Now, I'm getting down to hard facts, boy. I want to let you into the great secret, and your chum ditto. Could you come over to our house, say about ten this morning, and fetch that sharp-eyed Thad along with you? There'll be something about to happen then. We've already fixed it to go on a little picnic excursion and take our simple lunch along with us, just to celebrate Matilda's birthday, you see. And I'll ask you to go along, which you must agree to do, if you want to have the finest surprise of your life. How about it, Hugh?"

"There's nothing that I can see to prevent us, Mr. Corbley," the boy assured him, eagerly, "and to tell the truth wild horses couldn't hold me back, after what I've already learned. I must see the end of your queer game, sir. But I'm glad that it isn't likely to interfere with our working in the baseball match, which starts at three this afternoon on the home grounds."

"Oh! I assure you we'll be all through long before then, and luncheon eaten in the bargain; though it isn't going to be the simple bill of fare that Matilda'll be putting in the basket we're going to carry with us. Well, Hugh, I'm going to keep you in just a little fever of suspense until then. When you and Thad show up, try to act toward me as you've been doing right along. Don't call me Mr. Corbley, remember, for that might excite suspicions. Even poor simple but good-hearted Andrew, whose best clothes I'm wearing right now with brazen assurance, doesn't dream that I've got more than a few dollars in the wide world. He even begged me not to squander those, saying that we could have a holiday without extra expense; but say, I told him to shut up, that if I chose to spend two dollars on my only sister it was nobody's business. I really think Andrew has come to like me first-rate, though I'm a little afraid he misses his garments and has to curtail his customary smokes on my account."

He laughed at the conceit until he shook all over, and Hugh, now alive to the immensity of the great surprise that awaited the gentle couple, found himself obliged to join in the merriment.

Shortly afterwards Hugh started off to finish his errand. He rode with speed now because of his eagerness to get back home and look up Thad, upon whom he meant to let loose a bombshell that must fairly stagger him.

It was not yet nine o'clock, and ten was the appointed hour when they were expected to join the picnic party. Hugh believed he had never in all his life felt one-half so joyous. If a fortune had come his way he could not have appreciated it as much as he did the knowledge that Matilda and Andrew were going to reap the reward of their long life of tender-heartedness in their relations with their fellows. It was simply grand, and Hugh felt that his mother must know all about it as soon as the affair had developed to the grand finale and Matilda's eyes were opened to the fact that she had all this while been entertaining an angel unawares.

Thad was at home and up to his eyes in rewinding a fishing-rod that needed attention. When Hugh burst in upon him with such a glow in his face and a light in his eyes, Thad knew that something bordering on the wonderful must have occurred.

Singular to say, his first remark was pretty near a bull's-eye, showing that he must have been thinking about the ex-hobo as he wound the waxed red silk around the guides of his fishing-rod.

"What's happened, Hugh? Oh! have you found a way we can get rid of that sticker of a Brother Lu? Something seems to whisper to me you've struck a scheme. Pitch right in and tell me all about it, Hugh."

"There has a way come up, sure enough," said Hugh, beaming on his chum, as well might the bearer of such glorious news. "After today that tramp will never eat another mouthful of food at the expense of his poor sister and brother-in-law!"

"Then he's going to skip out, is he?" burst from the delighted Thad. "Bully for that! However did it happen, Hugh; and what sort of a hand in it did you have?"

"I don't claim the least credit for it," he was firmly told; "and for that matter Mr.—I mean Brother Lu, isn't going to shake the dust of Scranton off his feet, yet awhile at least. Something else has happened to bring about the change. Here, I just can't hold the wonderful news in any longer, Thad. Listen!"

Accordingly Hugh started to pour out the story. He had Thad sitting there and almost ceasing to breathe, so deeply interested was he in everything. When Hugh got to where he discovered the ex-tramp talking with the chauffeur of the big touring car, and seemingly with authority, Thad jumped up and began to dance around excitedly.

"Oh, joy unconfined! I'm just beginning to glimpse how it's going to turn out, that's what I am, Hugh!" he exclaimed, trembling all over with the violence of his emotions. "Wouldn't that be the limit, though, if this old hobo proved to be the good fairy coming in disguise to prove the worth of the ones he meant to assist? Go on and tell me the rest, like a good fellow, Hugh. Is he very rich; where did he make all his money; was that his fine big car, and his chauffeur; was he just testing Matilda and Andrew to prove how they were true gold? It's the greatest thing that ever happened for Matilda, for Andrew; ditto for you and me, because we've had a hand in it all, haven't we, Hugh?"

The rest of the amazing story was soon told. Thad shook hands with his chum again and again. He fairly bubbled over with enthusiasm.

"I'm so glad, so glad, for Matilda's sake!" he kept saying. "I warrant you now that fine brother of hers has got some wonderfully big thing up his sleeve; and so we're invited to go along and see the fairy story through, are we, Hugh? How long do we have to wait before making a start for the Hosmer cottage? I wonder if Matilda'll care if we keep company with them on their picnic? First thing she'll do will be to run back and add some more to the basket, because she knows how boys can eat like a house afire. I don't see how I can stand it waiting nearly a whole hour; but then there are a hundred other questions I'm burning to ask you."

Time passed while they sat there in Thad's room and talked. Hugh was compelled to relate every little incident over again, and amidst all sorts of comments on the part of the other. Finally Hugh said it was now a quarter to ten, and that they might as well be starting out, which they proceeded to do most eagerly indeed.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHEN THE WIZARD WAVED HIS WAND

"Don't forget for a minute," cautioned Hugh, as they started on their way toward the humble cottage home of Matilda and her husband, "that Brother Lu asked us to act quite natural when we came along."

"I'm on," responded Thad, though it was only with the greatest difficulty that he seemed able to repress the glow in his eyes that told of secret joy. "He means by that, you are to ask Matilda whether she's ready for another batch of sewing stuff that both of our mothers have ready, which I happen to know is the case. And then I suppose Brother Lu will ask us to join them on their little holiday outing, since he's made himself master of ceremonies for today. Say, will a hungry fish snap at an angleworm when it's dangled just in front of its nose? Well, we'll thank Brother Lu for being so kind, and as we have nothing else to do we'll accept with celerity, eh, Hugh? Is that the programme?"

So talking and laughing, they walked on. Soon they arrived at the cottage, where they found the three inmates just getting ready to start forth. Matilda had a covered basket already packed. She welcomed the two lads with a happy smile. Birthdays came and went in her life just as they did with other people, only as a rule there was scant reason to celebrate them, save as they marked the fact that Matilda was "getting old."

But somehow the presence of cheery Brother Lu seemed to have started something. Possibly, although Matilda could not dream of what was coming, some intuition caused her to feel that this day was to be different from any other in her past. A sense of something good impending may have thrilled her poor pulses, though if asked why she found any particular reason for smiling, and throwing off her yoke of worry for a brief spell, she could have given no intelligent answer.

Brother Lu bustled up. He seemed very important, indeed.

"Glad to see you, boys," he said, holding out his hand, which Thad actually seized eagerly; although just a few hours before he had been telling himself how delighted he would be to form one of a party of determined fellows who might visit the Hosmer cottage at midnight, and warn the ex-hobo to clear out of the neighborhood on penalty of having something decidedly unpleasant happen to him if he refused. But then that was before Thad had heard the wonderful story which Hugh unleashed, and fired at him as he sat there gaping and listening and slyly pinching his thigh so as to learn whether he were awake, or asleep and dreaming.

"Looks like you folks might be going on a picnic somewhere?" remarked Hugh, taking his cue from something Brother Lu had said to him before.

"Just what we expect to do, lads," hastily replied the other, with a wink, when he believed neither of the Hosmers was looking at him. "You see, this happens to be Tilly's birthday. She hasn't had a real one for ever so long, and Andrew and me, why, we've fixed it that she should take a holiday from her drudgery and we'd all go off for a little lark. Now, perhaps you two would like to keep us company. How about that, boys? You've been pretty kind to my sister, and we all feel that you're our good friends. What do you say about tagging along? In my walks about this section of country, I've chanced to make a few acquaintances. One of these is managing a kind of pretty place about two miles away from here; and he suggested that I fetch my sister and brother-in-law across country today. He reckoned that they'd kind of enjoy looking over the nest his employer has bought and fitted up, though he ain't really taken possession yet. Tilly, tell Hugh and Thad they'll be welcome to a snack with us at noon. This is a day we all want to remember, you know. Let tomorrow and dull care look out for themselves. That's the tramp's motto."

Matilda readily complied, and she meant it from the bottom of her heart too, for she was becoming very fond of both boys. Doubtless when she carried the basket back into the house to add to its contents, she must have swept the pantry clean. But as Brother Lu said, why bother about the future when they meant to have a whole day free from carking care. Tomorrow would be time enough to take up the heavy burdens of life again.

And so they started forth, chatting, and so far as appearances went, quite happy. Thad was in a fever of suppressed excitement. He felt certain that that splendid car would come into the little drama somehow or other; and for once he guessed aright.

"There's a car on the side of the road that has stopped to let the driver do a little repairing, I guess," remarked Brother Lu, quite innocently. "And say, I know that man right well. We've talked several

times when I was roving around seeing what the country surrounding Scranton looked like. He even calls me Lu and I know him as Jerry. He's a pretty decent sort of fellow in the bargain. Why, he even said that sometime when he didn't have the boss along with him, he'd like to give all of us a little joy ride. Tilly here told me only yesterday she never had been out in a car except once in a little broken-down flivver; and then she had to walk back home, nearly three miles. I wonder if Jerry wouldn't pick us up and take us over to the Hoover place right now. I've a good mind to ask him. Would you like it, Tilly?"

Would she? Matilda's sparkling eyes proclaimed that it would give her infinite delight; and so Brother Lu, with the assurance that every ex-tramp possesses in abundance, stepped up to the man who was putting his tools away in the chest where they belonged.

Jerry made an involuntary gesture with his right hand. He had been about to touch his cap respectfully, but caught himself just in time.

"Hello, Jerry!" sang out the breezy one, giving the chauffeur a hearty slap on the shoulder that must have somewhat astonished him; "you told me you'd be right glad to give my folks a little joy ride if the chance ever came along. We're heading right now for the Hoover place, and would be obliged to you to give us a lift, because we'll have to walk all the way back; and brother-in-law Andrew here isn't a well man. How about it, Jerry, old top?"

Jerry grinned as though enjoying the joke.

"Sure I can—Lu," he managed to say, though it evidently came a bit hard for him to be so familiar with his rich employer's first name. "Just bundle in, and we'll take a round-about way there. I can give you half an hour, easy enough, and the old man need never know the difference in the gas supply."

They all got in, "old man" and all, for the car had supplementary seats to be used in emergencies, being built for seven passengers. Thad and Hugh were trying hard to keep from exhibiting broad grins on their faces; though, for that matter, neither of those simple, guileless souls would have suspected the least thing had the boys laughed outright in their happiness.

They had a splendid ride, and must have covered many miles while that wonderful half-hour was being used up. Matilda looked supremely happy. Now and then Hugh saw her glance rest admiringly on Brother Lu. She must have begun to believe that after all the coming of this poor sick brother of hers, who had appeared so forlorn, and with such a dreadful and alarming cough, was gradually emerging from his chrysalis stage, and becoming a full-fledged magician.

Greatly to the amusement of the boys, Brother Lu would every little while ask Matilda how she liked such a car, and seemed to chuckle softly to himself when she rolled up her eyes in an expressive fashion, and declared that it surely must be getting pretty close to Paradise to be able to go about the beautiful country in such a palatial conveyance; poor Matilda had evidently been accustomed to considering it an event when she managed by great good luck to get an invitation to take a ride in an ordinary country buggy or farm wagon.

Then finally they passed in through the gate of the Hoover estate. This estate had a reputation in Scranton as being the prettiest little country place around. It had belonged to a wealthy gentleman who had lately died in New York City. There were rumors that it had changed hands, though no one seemed to have heard the name of the new owner. Thad and Hugh could easily understand now why this secrecy had been maintained. They caught many a sly wink from the wizard, who sat back there with his sister and her husband, whenever they looked around.

"Let's get out here," announced Brother Lu, with an air of importance that must have further awed both Matilda and Andrew. "There's my friend Billings, coming over to see who we are. I told him I wanted to show you all around this elegant place, and he agreed to pilot us about. Now, to look at him, managing this property, you'd never think that Malcolm Billings was once down and out, and the worst-looking tramp that ever took to the road; but it's true. I remember him well. We first met riding on the rods of a freight car out on the Santa Fe road. You see, some rich fellow took a fancy to Malcolm, and gave him a chance to make good; and I reckon he's a-doing that same, all right."

He greeted the other familiarly as "Mal," and having been drilled in his part, the manager of the place called him "Wandering Lu," as though he could not dissociate the other from the roving life of the past. The boys, keenly watching, could see that he quickly turned his eyes on Matilda and Andrew when introduced by Brother Lu; and also that there was a light in their depths that told how he appreciated this little surprise which the other was playing.

So they started to see first of all the grounds, which consisted of many acres, all in a high state of cultivation, and with flower gardens, vegetable ditto, and all manner of fine fruits, such as a rich man

loves to grow on his own country place. There were even Jersey cows, and fowls of various breeds, as well as a flock of pigeons that gave Matilda more delight than anything else; for secretly it had always been a pet wish of hers to some day have a flock of doves fluttering around her head, just as she had seen the tame ones of St. Mark's in Venice do—in pictures, of course, because Matilda had never been abroad—as yet.

Had either of them been in the least suspicious they might have wondered just why Jerry, for instance, had taken the big car over to the garage and started to clean it as though it really belonged there. The boys saw this, but not Matilda or Andrew, who were in a seventh heaven of rapture, and not walking on earth.

Then they went to the house, where a matronly woman met them. Brother Lu, more than ever like a magician of the first water, seemed to be friendly with the housekeeper also, for he introduced his sister and the others to Mrs. Husted. She took her cue from Mr. Billings, who was also present, and tried to act as though she were condescending to agree to show these strangers through the beautiful house; but it was an exceedingly hard task for her, because she knew that with the wave of the wizard's wand this lady would henceforth become her mistress.

Thad, lingering behind, could hardly contain himself. He would again and again manage to give Hugh a knock with his elbow, and gurgle something half under his breath, only to have the other shake a finger at him, and add a look of reproof.

They went through the house from top to bottom.

"Now, if you don't mind, Mrs. Husted, I'd like my folks to see the dining-room, for it's the best part of the whole establishment, according to the notion of men like Malcolm and me, who have known what it is to go hungry many a time during our adventurous lives."

The obliging housekeeper complied with a degree of alacrity that must have still further astonished Matilda. When they entered the room, to discover a table set for just five persons and fairly groaning beneath the weight of all manner of good things, Thad drew a long breath; for now he knew that the grand announcement could not be much longer delayed. And he also knew that poor Matilda's simple luncheon, resting in the covered basket under the tree outside, would in all likelihood remain untouched.

"Why, what do you think of that?" remarked Brother Lu, appearing to be very much surprised. "Here are places for just five, the number we count. Wouldn't it be a great joke now if we had the nerve to sit down, and partake of this little spread. Mrs. Husted, this is my sister's birthday, the only one she's really had, I guess, for more than twenty years. Perhaps you wouldn't mind if we celebrated the event and tried to do justice to this luncheon. Matilda, let me give you this seat of honor at the head of the table. Andrew, old scout, you are to sit opposite your wife Boys, find places, and I'll take this seat."

Matilda and Andrew allowed themselves to be almost pushed into their respective chairs. They were dumb, and seemed almost in a dream. Matilda could not take her wondering eyes off this astonishing brother of hers, who now must have looked very like the fairy prince to her. She was an automaton in his hands, and he could have done anything with her. But, of course, presently she would awaken, and find it all one of those amazing dreams that so often come to tantalize the very poor.

Now Brother Lu was standing there. He bent forward and looked affectionately at his sister. His eyes were sparkling still, but from quite another cause, Hugh saw; though his own orbs were also dimmed, and he had to wink very rapidly in order to keep the tears from flowing down his cheeks.

"Well, Matilda, how do you like your new home?" said Brother Lu; "for henceforth you and your husband are to live here to the end of your days. It has been bought, and placed in your name. Yes, I'm going to own up, sister mine, that Brother Lu had been playing a cruel joke, but with a good object. I'm not a poor, forlorn hobo, as I led you to believe, neither am I dying by inches. I hope to live some years yet, to see the two I love drink heartily from the cup of happiness. All this is but a drop in the bucket to what is coming. You shall make up for some of the lean years you've spent so bravely, buoying up each other's courage. Yes, and that tender heart of yours, Tilly, shall be given plenty of opportunities to bring good cheer to those who are almost down and out. And boys, I'm right glad that you're here with us to see the mask removed, and Brother Lu stand out in his true colors. Matilda has stood the test, and proved to me that her heart is of pure gold. She deserves everything that is coming to her. Now, I know you boys haven't lost your appetites, if the rest of us are too happy to think much of eating; so let's get busy, and do justice to this little spread, given in honor of Tilly's birthday!"

Which they accordingly did, and it would hardly be proper in any one to tell how much Thad ate, and how both of them felt that they were seeing one of the most enjoyable occasions in their entire lives.

And later on the boys were taken home in the big car, to rest up a bit, so as to be in trim for the game with Belleville that afternoon.

CHAPTER XIX

SCRANTON HIGH EVENS MATTERS UP

The match with Belleville proved a walkover for Scranton, much to the delight of all the local rooters, and the utter humiliation of the boys from the neighboring town. Tyree was at his very best, which meant that few among the Belleville batsmen could touch his slants and drops and speedy balls.

They fought gamely to the very last, as all sturdy players of the National game should, hoping for a turn in the tide; but in the end found themselves snowed under by a score of eleven to two. Those runs were actually gifts, for in the end Tyree slowed up, and almost "lobbed" a few over the plate, as though wishing to take a little of the sting of defeat away; though that is never a safe practice for any pitcher to do. Still, eleven to nothing would have been rubbing it into the Belleville fellows pretty roughly.

On the following Saturday Allandale had a last whirl at Belleville. This time the boys of the third town took a brace, and for a time put up quite a creditable game. Big Patterson, however, was too much for them, and after the seventh inning they lost all hope of winning. But the score was six to four, which might be considered a little hopeful.

So Belleville, having lost all the games thus far played in which she took part, was consequently eliminated as a contending factor in the race for the pennant of the Three Town High School League.

This left it between Scranton and Allandale. The latter team had a big advantage to start with, since they were already one game to the good. But Scranton still had faith in Tyree, and if things broke half-way decently in the next game they fully expected to make their adversaries "take their dust," as Thad expressed it.

During this time, of course, the wonderful happenings at the Hosmer cottage had become town talk. Everybody was greedily drinking in such details of the story as they could manage to gather up.

Acting under the directions of Brother Lu, now known to every one as the rich owner of the Hoover place, Mr. Luther Corbley, Hugh and Thad did not hesitate to relate everything they knew, which, in fact, covered the story from beginning to end. It thrilled all Scranton, and would be related many times over as weeks and months passed by. There had never been anything to compare with it in the annals of all Scranton, or any other town in the county, for that matter.

Matilda and Andrew had gone to live in their new home, and the boys were told that they might always "find the latch-string out," as the genial genie of the whole undertaking assured both Hugh and Thad. He seemed to have taken a decided liking for the chums, and could not see enough of them. Many an evening did they spend over at the new home. Thad never seemed to weary of listening to the marvelous stories told by the great wanderer; nor did he any longer have the least doubt regarding their accuracy. Indeed, after seeing what marvels Brother Lu was able to bring to pass in the dull lives of Matilda and her husband, Thad would have been ready to take anything he said as Gospel truth.

Then came the Saturday when Allandale had to be met for the second time. Hugh and his fellow players had worked hard through the week, under the fostering care of Coach Leonard, to put themselves in fine fettle for the hard game they anticipated lay ahead of them.

Never was a boy more pampered and looked after than Alan Tyree during those last few days before the trial of skill and strategy took place between himself and Big Ed Patterson. They were forever hearing vague reports to the effect that the Allandale pitcher was excelling his own record, and that his speed had reached a point where it was attracting the attention of scouts sent abroad through the land by some of the big teams in the National and American Leagues; so that in all probability Patterson would be offered a contract calling for a stupendous salary before the fall came along.

Hugh only laughed whenever these yarns reached him.

"Let Patterson keep on improving," he would say lightly, "and no backstop can hold him for a minute any more than he could grapple with cannon balls. We've got some pitcher, also. Tyree is better than

ever before in his life. While he may not have all the speed to burn that Patterson has, there are a few tricks in his bag that he means to uncork on Allandale. I'm sorry for those fellows when they run against Alan in his present shape. Tell them so when you see them, please."

It would seem from all this talk that the battle was to be one of pitchers, for the most part. And when finally the time came for Scranton to journey over to the rival town, there to take up cudgels with Allandale High, quite a numerous host of the local people went along, bent on learning just how much truth there might be in the stories that had drifted across regarding the invincibility of Big Ed Patterson.

As on previous occasions, there was a tremendous outpouring of interested spectators. If anything, it was a record crowd, and far excelled in point of numbers and enthusiasm any gathering that had cheered the Allandale team on in their two contests against Belleville.

There was a reason for this, of course, since the latter team had proven to be so woefully weak that they had not thus far managed to win a single game, and were out of the race for the pennant. On the other hand, Scranton, while beaten in the first combat with the locals, had fought gamely, though terribly handicapped by the absence of their regular star pitcher. Besides, they had really beaten Belleville both times as badly as had Allandale.

Everybody therefore was anticipating considerable real sport with the two pitchers on the mound pitted against each other, and the regular teams covering the various positions on the diamond.

It was a cloudy day, and looked as though it might rain. Hugh noted this fact and understood just what Coach Leonard meant when he told them it would be just as well to start right in, and do some scoring. If the game should be called after a number of innings had been played, whoever was ahead would be adjudged the victor. A threatening day is not a time to put too much faith in a ninth-inning Garrison finish, because the game may never go beyond five or six turns, if the flood-gates above chance to open, and the field be deluged so as to make a continuance of play out of the question.

Well, that was just what did happen, as it turned out, and Scranton boys found occasion to thank Coach Leonard for his advice, since it really gave them the decision.

Patterson certainly had amazing speed when he started, and for three innings it was next to impossible to touch him; for that matter Tyree was also twirling with considerable effect, though several hits had been made, and an error allowed one run to be tallied.

Then in the fourth something happened. Allandale was still striving with might and main to stretch that lone tally into several. They seemed to have a batting rally, and singular to say it was the end of the string usually considered the weakest that came to the fore.

Whipple, the right fielder, knocked a terrific fly, but it was taken after a great run by Juggins. Brown followed suit, but also died through clever work on the part of "K.K." out in center. It was supposed that Big Ed Patterson as the next man up would be an easy third, because he had struck out both times at the bat.

He surprised everyone, himself included, possibly, by sending out a crack that by bard base running allowed him to reach second. Then Keeler, the Allandale backstop, not to be outdone in the matter, also met one of Tyree's mystifying balls on the tip of his bat; and Patterson, who had not had time to even think of asking to get some one to run for him, had to keep galloping along in mad haste, the coach near third sending him home, which he reached after a slide.

Farmer, however, struck out immediately afterwards, so that one tally only resulted from the batting rally. But the mischief had been already done. Big Ed was wheezing badly when he took his place in the box, a fact the vigilant eye of Hugh instantly noted.

"This is going to be our one chance to do something, boys," he told his mates as they came in to start the fifth frame. "Big Ed is tired after that running. Work him for a pass, Owen; you know how to do it, all right."

Owen apparently did, for shortly afterwards he was perched safely on the initial sack, with Hugh himself at bat, and filled with a grim determination to send the runner along, as well as plant himself on the bag.

He picked out a good one, and cracked it out for a double, Owen managing to land on third. All Scranton arose and roared to "K.K." to send them both home, which he obligingly did with the nicest possible little hit that could have been made, he himself reaching second on the throw-in.

Julius Hobson was now up, but he struck out, greatly to his chagrin. With the score tied, and the sky looking so threatening, Hugh was more than ever anxious that one more hit should bring in the run that might eventually win the game.

Patterson realized his weakness, and tried in various ways to delay the game. He had to tie his shoe once, and then managed to toss the ball again and again to try and nip "K.K." at second. In doing so he actually let the runner make third, as O'Malley on second allowed the ball to slip out of his hands, and the agile "K.K." slid along in safety, making a great slide to the sack.

Then Tyree got in the tap that scored the runner, although he himself was caught at first. Thad sent a dandy hit out past short, but was left when "Just" Smith struck out.

In their half the Allandale players again tried to delay the game until the umpire threatened to call it off, and proclaim Scranton the winner nine to nothing. Then they went to work, but without avail, for the inning found Scranton just one run to the good.

Play was continued, even though a fine drizzle started, that caused hundreds of the spectators to take warning and depart.

At the beginning of the seventh inning, with the score the same, the rain came down in torrents and play was discontinued. Later, finding that there was no hope of the game being resumed, the umpire declared it in the favor of Scranton, and those fellows went home happy though soaked to the skin.

CHAPTER XX

A GLORIOUS FINISH--CONCLUSION

The fact that Allandale and Scranton were tied, and that there must be played a deciding game, brought out a clause in the League contract providing for just such a possibility. It would be manifestly unfair to play this game on either grounds, even when tossing a penny for choice; because luck should not enter into such a championship any more than was absolutely necessary. So this last game was to take place on the Belleville grounds, which were adequately supplied with grandstand and bleachers, and really better adapted for holding a record crowd than either of the other fields.

It turned out to be a very fine day, for which every one felt thankful, after the bitter experience over at Allandale, when so many summer hats and dresses were ruined by the sudden coming of the storm, and the long ride home.

Belleville, while in mourning because of the unexpected weakness developed by her school team, proved to be a loyal sport town, for she opened her arms to the visitors, and many a flag decorated other buildings besides the high school, to prove to Scranton and Allandale folks that no bitterness was felt, since every game had been fairly lost to superior playing.

That deciding game proved to be a fierce one, so far as the desperate playing on both sides went, though there was no animosity displayed on either team. All the noise made by the visiting contingents was done in a good-natured spirit of friendly rivalry. And the Belleville rooters acted impartially, cheering first one side and then the other, as good plays happened to come along.

Big Ed Patterson may have been as good as ever, but Hugh and his mates seemed to have solved his speedy shoots that came hissing over the plate like cannon balls. At least they did not strike out as often as during that other game. "Familiarity sometimes breeds contempt" with regard to a baseball phenomenon in the way of a pitcher, as well as in other walks of life; and when Hugh found Patterson for a drive in the sixth frame "K.K." took courage and did likewise. Then came Julius Hobson, never having forgiven himself for striking out when the score was tied, and all Scranton had begged him to "tap one out past second, Julius; you know how to work it, old boy; you're a dandy, Julius; now win your game right here!"

Julius had his revenge, for what did the boy do but knock a "hummer" clear out in far center, that it seemed the madly running Farmer would never get his hands on; and by the time the ball again entered the diamond three tallies had resulted, Julius having fairly flown the rounds, to throw himself down panting, and as happy as they ever make a baseball player.

Three to one it stood now, and those figures looked pretty big to both sides, for the pitchers were doing gilt-edged work and heavy scoring seemed utterly out of the question. Allandale was game to the backbone, and they started a rally of their own when next at the bat. Tyree, however, nipped the same in the bud by getting himself out of two nasty holes when it looked as though the other team must surely push men over the plate.

So the game went on, and Tyree gave no sign of falling down, standing the strain wonderfully well. Hugh felt the joyous thrill of coming victory. Many of the wildly cheering Scranton rooters boasted that they could already see Allandale handing over the pennant they had so easily won the previous summer, and which must float from the flag-pole in front of the Scranton high school another season.

The finish was highly exciting. Allandale managed actually to tie the score in their half of the ninth, but Scranton still had an inning in which to do something.

Thad Stevens led the batting list in the ninth; and some other heavy artillery followed close on his heels. Thad got first on a neat little hit. "Just" Smith advanced him a base with a sacrifice bunt. Then Horatio Juggins, who was seldom ever known to fail when it was up to him to do something, met one of those speedy shoots of Patterson on the end of his bat, and perched on second, while the winning tally came in.

That closed the game, since Allandale had already had their turn at bat in the ninth. Juggins was the hero of the occasion, and that glorious hit of his would long place him on a pedestal in the estimation of the Scranton High scholars. Indeed, all sorts of dates would be reckoned back to "that time bully old Jug nearly knocked the cover off the ball, and handed us the championship on a silver plate."

Scranton boys were more than satisfied with the success that had attended the baseball rivalry. They would be entitled to fly the pennant of victory for the next season, beginning with the fall session of school. Every student's heart must thrill more or less with honest pride as he looked back to the wonderful way in which, under such a leader as Hugh Morgan, the Scranton High spirit of outdoor sports, which had fallen to a lamentably low figure of late, had been boosted on high, so as to place the locals above every other town worth mentioning in the county.

As yet, Hugh was sorry to learn, there did not seem to be much chance of a series of football games being arranged, because somehow that sport had never taken a firm hold upon the boys of the three towns. But encouraging signs gave promise that by another year some thing might be done along such lines.

However, there was to be no lack of interesting events occurring in and around Scranton, as the fall came on. For some years now there had been a regular tournament of athletic sports, mostly along the line of running races, of which the boys of Scranton appeared to be especially fond.

Mr. Saunders, in his capacity of teacher in the high school under Dr. Carmack, the principal, and also county supervisor, had opportunities to encourage this growing spirit among the pupils, which he did every chance he found. He featured the splendid training resulting from consistent work upon the cinder-path, and by degrees quite a lively interest was created in the idea of having a regular Marathon running race for all high-school boys, no matter where located.

That this idea finally seized hold upon the good people of Scranton to such an extent that a splendid prize was offered for the successful competitor, may be guessed from the title of the succeeding story in this Series, which it is to be hoped every one reading this book will wish to secure immediately—*"The Chums of Scranton High on the Cinder-Path; or, The Mystery of the Haunted Quarry."*

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE CHUMS OF SCRANTON HIGH OUT FOR THE PENNANT ***

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