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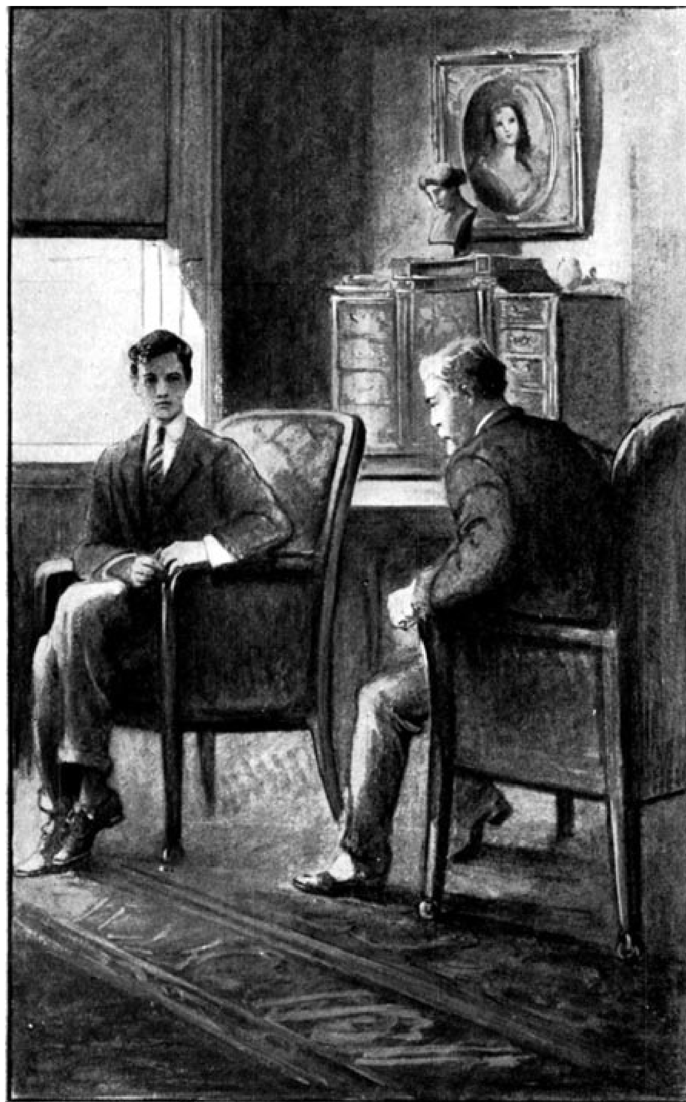

It was hard! It was a sore trial to give up his dream of years!—*Page 20*.

“As Gold in the Furnace”

A COLLEGE STORY

(Sequel to “SHADOWS LIFTED”)

By Rev. JOHN E. COPUS, S.J.

Author of “Harry Russell,” “The Son of Siro,” etc.

NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO

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“AS GOLD IN THE FURNACE”

CHAPTER I

Roy Surprises His Friends

“I TELL you what it is, gentlemen, once for all. I can not go in for baseball next spring, nor even for the few games we have still to play this fall.”

Roy Henning was talking to a group of college boys of the upper classes in St. Cuthbert's yard. It was late September and still very warm. The little gathering of friends found the shade of a large elm tree in one corner of the yard very grateful. A hearty burst of laughter followed Roy's announcement. No one for an instant entertained the idea that Henning was in earnest and meant what he said. Was he not passionately fond of the game? Had he not, before vacation, been the very best player on the college diamond?

“Oh! of course not! of course not!” exclaimed Jack Beecham, Roy's truest friend and constant companion. “Of course not! You're no good anyway! You couldn't be center-rush on the eleven if you tried! You don't know a thing about baseball either! Oh! no! And another team wouldn't do a thing to us if you left the pitcher's box! Oh! no, not at all!”

“Look here, Jack,” said Henning, “I'm in earnest. I am not going to engage in sports at all this year.”

“Not for the money, I know that. It has always cost you a good penny. But let me assure you, you dear old goose, that you can't come any sort of game like that on us—not on me, at least. Let me tell you, Roy boy, that you are most decidedly and most strictly in it, and in it every time.”

“Look here, Jack, will you listen to reason——" began Roy Henning.

“With pleasure, when I find evidence that you are in possession of that valuable commodity.”

“But——”began Roy again.

“That's all right, old fellow. We know your modesty, and all that. We're also under the impression that you have recently developed a remarkable penchant—that's the word, isn't it, boys—for practical jokes. But this time be so condescending as to remember that joke-day—April 1, you know—is a long way off. See?”

“Yes, I see,” replied Henning, “but you fellows will not, nor will you listen to reason. So it is useless for me to talk.”

“That's precisely what we wish to do,” said Jack—laughing Jack Beecham—who struck an attitude and continued, “but you persist in talking anything but reason. What an incontestably preposterous thing for you to say that you are not going to play ball. Is a fish going to swim?"

“Nonsense or not, boys, I have good reason for saying what I have said. It's a fact. I am not going to play.”

Roy Henning's clean-cut, handsome face was flushed at the moment with vexation. His eyes showed his annoyance, and his brows contracted in displeasure. It was vexatious enough for him to make—to be compelled to make—such an announcement to his friends, but his chagrin was rendered four-fold by having his companions receive his statement with incredulity. Not the least

part of his annoyance came from the fact that his own particular friend should affect to believe that he was perpetrating a practical joke, especially as he was very much in earnest and the announcement had cost him much effort to make.

When Roy Henning first came to St. Cuthbert's, he was a narrow-chested, weakly boy of very quiet manners and of a retiring disposition, as the readers of the chronicles of St. Cuthbert boys may remember.

Month after month, however, saw him growing stronger and taller and more robust, until now, in his last year at college, he was one of the biggest boys in the yard, with the strength of a giant, and, as some who knew declared, the grip of a blacksmith. The opportunities of acquiring brawn and muscle he had not neglected, resulting in a proficiency in running, jumping, swimming, and boating, and in all the manly and invigorating exercises of school life.

He was well aware how much the success of next summer's baseball season really depended on him. He knew, also, what the boys expected of him. They all regarded it as a foregone conclusion that he would again be the captain and the principal pitcher on next season's team.

No one but himself knew what annoyance it had been to him to make the statement which his hearers had refused to accept otherwise than as the merest joking. Yet he intended to give up sports for this school year. Why? The reason for so doing, and all the consequences that such a course of action brought in its train, will constitute the following narrative.

Roy's eyes, quick to sparkle in fun, quick to soften in sympathy, yet quicker to glitter with indignation at any exhibition of smallness or meanness, just now had a look in them other than was their wont. Their owner was annoyed because the boys standing around him seemed determined not to take him seriously, and this annoyance could be seen. For a moment he felt a strong throb of anger, such as quickens the pulse, and the hasty word was on the tip of his tongue, but he checked himself in time. Why should he not be believed when he had made a plain statement and had reiterated it? Yet there was a smile as of incredulity on nearly all the faces grouped around him.

The truth of the matter was that Jack Beecham and his companions were hoping against hope. They clearly saw Henning's annoyance, and several of them had more than a suspicion that, after all, he meant exactly what he had said. Beecham's badinage was only a cover for his uneasiness.

A silence fell on the group, during which, to their nimble imaginations, visions of future victories on the diamond grew dim, for every boy there had the most unlimited confidence in the proven prowess of Henning to lead them to victory.

“But, Roy,” said Tom Shealey, a short, thick-set, sturdy, whole-souled boy, who had a habit of calling a spade a spade: “Give us your reason. You are not sick?”

“No, not sick, certainly,” said Henning, smiling at such an idea.

“What's your reason, then?—supposing you have a reason and are not joking.”

“I'm not joking, Tom,” said Henning, “but I can not give you my reason.”

“Guess he has none,” said Andrew Garrett, a youth who affected a blue sweater instead of a coat and vest and whose face was not a healthy-looking one. “Guess he has no reason. He's merely posing.”

The remark vexed Henning all the more that it came from his own cousin, to whom in a difficult situation he might have looked naturally for some form of support.

“Stop that, Garrett,” said Tom Shealey, hotly. “Do you wish to insult your own cousin? I'd rather believe him than you—there! If Roy says he has reasons for acting as he is doing and does not want to give them to us, I believe he has them anyway. I guess you don't know your own cousin as well as we do.”

“Well, why doesn't he give his reasons for not playing?” asked Garrett, sulkily.

“Because,” answered Henning, with no little natural dignity, “I do not feel at liberty to do so. If I did I would give them readily. Believe me, boys, it is not by my own choice that I resign my position on the baseball and football teams.”

“We believe you, Roy,” said Shealey. “Although we regret your action, we believe you have good reasons; don't we, Beecham?”

Jack Beecham nodded affirmatively. “Yes,” he replied, after a moment's silence, “I joked at first only because I thought Roy was joking. Sorry he wasn't. Garrett, you had better believe what your cousin says. He is not accustomed to lie into or out of a thing.”

This remark was received by Garrett in silence. With a look unpleasant enough to be considered a leer on his face he walked away, but Shealey's innuendo, as we shall see later, had more significance for the one to whom it was directed than the rest of the group realized. Were it not on account of the relationship with Roy, the boys in general would have ignored Garrett.

Winters and Hunter and Stapleton and Clavering were gone from St. Cuthbert's, having graduated the previous year. Henning and Ambrose Bracebridge, Rob Jones and Tom Shealey were taking their places, and among these Henning was most popular.

In a few minutes Henning walked away, and his friends began freely to discuss his decision, vaguely guessing at the motive which prompted it, and entirely unsuccessful in arriving at any solution of the difficulty.

“Of course,” said Jack Beecham to Shealey, as they strolled about the yard somewhat disconsolately, "Henning must have some good reason for backing out, but I am more sorry than I can say that he has done so. I am afraid things are going to be mighty unpleasant for him in consequence.”

“I, too, am afraid they will be.”

“Well, I'm going to stick to him, come what may.”

“Same here,” replied Shealey. “It won't be hard to do that, because he is the soul of honor and a royal good fellow. You might as soon expect anything wrong with him as—as to see——”

“You at the head of your class in next examination,” interrupted Jack.

“Thanks! Or to see you heading the philosophers.”

“Thanks, too.”

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CHAPTER II

The Motive

BEFORE proceeding to narrate the complications which beset Roy Henning's path during his last year at St. Cuthbert's, and the many curious cross-purposes of which he may be said to have been the victim, we shall endeavor to give some idea of the motive which actuated him in retiring from the arena of college sports.

It must be remembered that Roy Henning, in the previous year, was a fast friend of Claude Winters, Hunter, Selby, Clavering, and Stapleton. The companionship of these boys had helped as much to form his character as had the careful work of the professors. Under his friends' influence he had gradually lost much of his bashfulness. By the time that Winters and his other friends had graduated, he could conduct himself with an amount of ease and composure. He no longer blushed and squirmed immoderately, like a small boy, when addressed by a stranger or by one in authority. He could now speak to a Father or even the President without wishing to fall through the floor. Roy was much improved, yet the influence which his companions of the previous year had exercised over him had taken a somewhat peculiar turn.

As far as he knew, not one of his last year's friends, now graduated and gone, had any aspirations to study for the sacred ministry of the priesthood. Their joyous piety, nevertheless, and their cheerful goodness had been the means, entirely unknown to themselves, of making Henning entertain a profound veneration for the ecclesiastical state.

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From often contemplating how eminently suited, both in talents and in virtue, were many of his companions for this state, Roy had passed from admiring them to the thought of the feasibility of embracing that state himself. The more he thought of this, and the more frequently he examined himself, the more enamored of the lofty idea he became; so that at the expiration of the previous year's term he had fully made up his mind to enter the priesthood should he secure the sanction of his spiritual director.

Before he left college for vacation he had a long interview with the white-haired, holy old chaplain, from which he received great encouragement, but was told to keep his intention a secret from all save his parents. He took the admonition literally and obeyed it exactly, so that he left St. Cuthbert's in the previous June without his most intimate acquaintances so much as dreaming that he entertained such exalted ambitions and aspirations to a dignity than which there is none greater on earth.

It was not remarkable that his companions should never imagine such things of him. Was he not the recognized leader of all sports and games? Who had a merrier shout? No one's laugh rang more musically across the playground. How should boys—mere boys, after all—imagine that graver thoughts and sublimer ambitions were coexistent with merry pranks, resounding cheers, or harmless escapades. Well, boys, college boys even, are gifted with only a limited prescience, and none suspected the great plan of life which was now continually in Roy's mind.

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He did not broach the subject to his father until the vacation months were drawing to a close, and it was time to think about returning to St. Cuthbert's. The Hennings spent the summer months in the lake region. One beautiful calm, warm evening in August, Mr. Henning was sitting on the broad veranda of his cottage, watching in quiet content the silver pathway which the full moon made across the water, and marveling how the light made the sails of the yachts appear now black, now silver as the vessels tacked about. Roy, who for several days had been watching his opportunity to have a private talk with his father, saw that it had now come. He took a seat near his father.

“Where are Mama and the children, Roy?”

“They are down on the beach, Father, throwing sticks into the lake for Fido to swim after. The dog is almost crazy with the delight of the game.”

“Why are you not down there too? You seem to be moping lately, my boy. Is anything the matter? Are you quite well?”

“Quite, thanks. I am not moping, but the fact is, Father, I have something I wish to talk to you about, and as the rest won't be back for some time, perhaps this is a good opportunity to tell you what I have to say.”

“Dear me! what a lot of mystery! Say on, son. I am all attention. Let me see: how old are you? Nineteen next month, eh? You'll be graduated next year at St. Cuthbert's, will you not?”

“I hope so,” replied the boy modestly.

“That's right. Well, I suppose you want to talk about the choice of a profession. It is quite time you made a choice, you know.”

“That is precisely what I wish to speak about.”

“Ah! Well, go on. I am willing to listen to your ideas, reserving, of course, the right of veto, Is it to be the law, or medicine, or the army? Perhaps 'tis the navy? I have influence enough to get you into Annapolis, if you wish to follow the sea.”

“It is none of these you have mentioned, sir,” said Roy, nervously, and the next moment he blurted out awkwardly, “I want to enter the priesthood!”

“The priesthood,” said Henning senior, with an intonation that expressed various emotions. "H—um,” And he remained a long time silent.

The light from the sitting-room fell on Mr. Henning's face. Roy watched the florid features of his father. His closely-cropped white hair and side-whiskers worn in the style once designated “mutton-chop,” the short-trimmed mustache, and clean-shaven, well-rounded chin, all showed distinctly in the strong light of the reading lamp, which sent a flood of light out across the veranda. Roy thought that his father's face was unusually flushed. It appeared almost purple in the artificial light, and the son became anxious, momentarily fearing that the suddenly communicated intelligence might have caused a rush of blood to the head. The family physician not long before had told Mrs. Henning that her husband was quite liable to an attack of apoplexy.

Roy could not guess what was passing within the mind of his father, who remained silent a long time. Nothing was heard except the nervous tapping of Mr. Henning's eyeglasses on the arm of the rocker.

The boy knew that his father was irascible, and he was more or less prepared for a storm. He waited for what he thought several minutes—in reality less than forty seconds—for his father to speak. No sound was heard save the nervous tap-tap-tapping on the arm of the chair. Roy twirled his cap and shifted his weight from one foot to another.

Then, as it often does, the unexpected occurred. Mr. Henning arose from his chair, and without noticing his son, or saying a word, retired into the house, leaving the surprised boy on the porch.

The young man was perplexed at this turn of affairs. Had his father flatly refused he could have pleaded and coaxed. Had he stormed, the boy knew enough of his parent to be aware that the end he desired would most probably be attained—when the storm blew over.

Roy left the porch in a dazed sort of way. He had never seen his father act so peculiarly. Wanting to be alone to think over the affair, he sauntered off to a secluded part of the large lawn.

“Hi, Roy, is that you? Where have you been? I have been searching for you everywhere. Put on your dancing pumps and come over to our villa. We are going to have a carpet dance. All the tables and chairs have been put out on the lawn, and we are going to have a jolly time. Come on.”

The speaker over the hedge was Andrew Garrett, Roy's cousin, whose father had rented the adjoining villa for the summer. Garrett was on the road, seated in a stylish dogcart. He held a pair of white ribbons over a mettlesome horse whose silverplated harness ornaments shone brightly in the moonlight.

“You must make my excuses——”began Roy.

“Eh! what? Oh! come! that won't do. My sisters have netted a lot of girls, many of whom are already there, and the cry is 'still they come.' We haven't enough partners for them. I am not slow at this kind of affair, but, you know, a fellow can't make himself ubiquitous. Run and put on your dancing-shoes, and if you spoil them in the dew coming home, I'll buy you another pair to-morrow.”

“The puppy,” thought Roy, and the ugly word was on the tip of his tongue, but he checked himself in time, and said:

"I am sorry indeed to disappoint you, but I have more important things to think about to-night. I really can not come. You must make my excuse to auntie and your sisters."

"Oh! hang it all, man; we haven't enough dancers,"

"I am sorry, but to-night——"

"Sorry!——" We regret to say that Garrett used an expression not at all becoming to the lips of a Catholic young man.

"You won't come, then?"

"I can not, to-night."

"You won't, you mean,"

"I did not say that."

"But you mean it. Well, I can go up the road and get the Meloche boys, and the Poultneys, and others. Mark my words, Roy; I'll get even with you for this. You'll be sorry for it yet. It's a mean trick. Get up, Nance."

And he gave the mare a vicious cut, which sent her rearing and racing up the dusty country road, giving the ill-tempered boy all he could do to prevent the spirited animal from running away with him.

A week later, Roy Henning was surprised to learn that Andrew Garrett was to be a student at St. Cuthbert's the coming term. His first effort at "getting even"with his cousin was attempted as we have seen in the preceding chapter, when Henning made the unwelcome announcement of his retirement from college sports.

CHAPTER III

The Conditions

THE following morning, Mr. Henning called Roy to him soon after breakfast. When the two had taken seats under a shady beech on the lawn, Roy saw that his father appeared moody, and as if suffering from a great disappointment.

"What is this I hear about your refusing to go to your Aunt Garrett's last night?"

"I did not refuse to go and see Aunt Helen, sir. Andrew wanted me to go and dance. I did not care to dance. Nor could I have gone and retained my self-respect."

"Dear me! dear me! Are not your Aunt Helen's children and their friends good enough associates for you?"

"Quite good enough. But, sir, you mistake my meaning. I had two reasons for refusing. I do not care for dancing, and do not care to be made a mere convenience of, nor do I wish to be patronized by my cousin Garrett. My other reason was that I was anxious and worried, having received no word from you since I told you of my earnest desire to study for the priesthood."

"Ah! Yes, to be sure. You may think my abrupt leaving you last night was a strange proceeding. It was. I am sorry I vexed you. I want to be kind."

"Thank you, Father; I am sure you do."

Mr. Henning was not a demonstratively affectionate man, and it must be charged to heredity that his own child possessed decidedly similar characteristics, especially in all absence of demonstrativeness. Roy loved his father deeply, but no terms of endearment or outward show of affection, so far as the boy could remember, had ever passed between them. If Roy had only known he could have crept very close to his father's heart this morning. If Roy could have known just then, he would have seen his father's heart sore and sensitive, trying to discipline itself into renouncing its life-long ambition—that of his son's advancement. He had so earnestly wished the boy to adopt his own profession. Was he not already getting along in years? Would not a partner in his law practice become ere long an imperative necessity?

He had too clear and too well-trained a mind not to see the futility of attempting to thwart the boy's inclinations. He was too sincere a Catholic of principle and too well instructed in the obligations of his faith to wish effectually to prevent or destroy a vocation, and yet—oh, it was hard! It was a sore trial to give up his dream of years!

"Thank you, Father; I am sure you wish to be kind."

Roy, seeing that his father had remained silent an unusually long time, repeated his remark. The elder man's lips twitched. The muscles of his cheeks moved with the strong emotions he was experiencing.

"Oh, Roy, Roy! Think what it all means for me! My shattered hopes for you! I know that as a

Catholic I dare not thwart you in following so high a vocation, nor would I have it on my conscience to do so. But all my shattered hopes of you! I have wealth and position, but they are not everything. I have looked forward to you as my prop and stay and my honor in my declining years. Must you—must you leave us? Are you sure of this call? Is it not a mere passing fancy, such as many good and pure boys have? Are you sure that your duty does not point to your family rather than to the seminary? Are you sure, my lad?”

The old gentleman's words were almost passionate. Young Henning was unwontedly affected. He had never been placed in so peculiar a position. His father evidently regarded him now, spoke to him, even appealed to him, as to a man, with a man's responsibilities. For a moment he was thrilled with exquisite pleasure in being so treated, but he did not waver in his purpose. He knew that he would probably add to his father's regrets, yet he was conscious that he could not hold out the faintest hope that the parental wish, which appeared to run contrary to what he now conceived to be his plain duty, would be gratified.

“My dear father,” he said, “I am sorry to cause you pain, but I believe I have this vocation and I must, in conscience, follow it.”

There was a long pause.

“Well—what must be, must be, I suppose, but, my child, have you well considered the step? Are you willing to live on a meager pittance, as most priests do? Are you willing to lead a life of penurious denial and of study? Can you face the ordeal of the confessional for hours at a time, listening to tales of misery, wretchedness, and degradation? Can you be strong with the strong, and not too strong with the weak? Can you bear all this? Are you sure of yourself?”

Now Roy Henning, during the previous year at St. Cuthbert's had thought over the question of his vocation time and time again, examining himself rigorously as to his fitness, and, as far as his experience allowed, reviewing the life of the ordinary parish priest. He saw clearly that no one embraced the priestly life from a purely natural motive. Such as did, he argued, must become failures, and unfit for their state. He had, as every one who has a true vocation, a higher motive than a merely natural one. With him the supernatural was paramount, and in its light all prosaic, squalid, unheroic circumstances sank into insignificance. He, therefore, answered:

“Yes, sir, I have thought it all over. I firmly believe I have a vocation, and after I graduate, I think it will be my duty to enter a seminary with a view to probing and testing it.”

“I will not thwart you, my boy; I dare not. But do you think yourself worthy of so high a calling?”

“I do not, indeed, Father; but my confessor encourages me to go on.”

Mr. Henning sighed on discovering that the opinion of the boy's confessor was averse to his wishes—sighed as if giving up his last hope of being able to change his son's views. He then altered his manner suddenly, as if ashamed of having displayed emotion before any member of his family. He was again the sharp, shrewd man of affairs.

“Very well, sir,” he said, with a crispness in his voice which hitherto had been absent; “you take your degree the coming year. After that you have my permission to enter a seminary. I will be responsible for your expenses until your ordination. As you desire, however, to enter a hard and self-denying life I consider it my duty to test you myself to some extent during the coming school year.”

In the midst of the delight at his father's capitulation, Roy looked up in surprise. He wondered what was coming next.

“You must apply yourself wholly and solely to your studies. I shall allow you only twenty-five dollars for your private expenses, and I desire and insist that for the last year of your college life you relinquish all sports of whatsoever kind.”

“Father,” cried the poor boy in dismay; and oh, the heart-sinking that was expressed in that one word!

“I mean precisely what I say,” persisted Mr. Henning, almost relentlessly; “a priest's life is one of constant self-sacrifice and denial. You can not begin to practise those virtues too soon.”

“But, Father, I am captain of the ball nine, and the football eleven, at college,” And there was a world of appeal in the boy's voice.

“I am sorry, under the circumstances, to hear it. Abstinence from baseball and football and boating and all sorts of contests is the condition under which I sanction your plans, which, pardon me if I say it, I can not but consider chimerical. The test I have selected will prove how right or wrong I am in my opinion. You will take only enough exercise to keep a sound mind in a sound body.”

Whether Roy Henning's father was acting judiciously or otherwise, we will not undertake to say. We merely give the facts. Mr. Henning was desirous to see how his son would act under circumstances which he readily admitted would be particularly trying.

It is probable that many boys will be inclined to think that Roy Henning was not in such a very sad plight after all, and perhaps would be willing to exchange places with him if their

pocketbooks were exchanged too. It is true that many a boy goes to college with far less spending money than that which was to be Roy's share for his graduating year. It must be understood, in order to make Roy's position clear, that the boy was generous to a fault, and never having stinted his expenditures at college, or been stinted in the supply, he was looked to for pecuniary assistance by all sorts of college associations whose financial condition, as most collegians are aware, is perennially in a state of collapse. He was one of the most popular boys, because his purse was always open. [Pg 24]

His father had, indeed, arranged a severe test for him. He little realized what the trials of a rich boy's poverty were. Little did he imagine to what hours of guiltless ignominy he was unwittingly condemning his son. We must do the lawyer the justice to say that had he imagined but one-tenth of the trials which were to come upon his son by his restrictive action, he would have been the last man to have imposed the conditions.

Roy Henning accepted them unreservedly, and the conversation at the beginning of the first chapter shows us how fully and completely he intended to obey his father's injunctions. [Pg 25]

CHAPTER IV

Roy and Garrett

HENNING was not overwhelmingly delighted when he learned that Andrew Garrett was to accompany him to St. Cuthbert's. He knew his cousin's disposition fairly well and did not expect to derive much pleasure from his presence at college, although he was aware that the relationship would occasion more or less close intimacy.

Never were two boys more dissimilar in character. Henning had been molded at St. Cuthbert's for five or six years. He had imbibed that spirit which is found among the students of every well-conducted Catholic college—that peculiar something which is so difficult to define, but which is so palpable in its effects, elevating and rendering the Catholic student the comparatively superior being he is. Those who have intelligently watched this college phenomenon admit that the tone, or spirit, or influence, or whatever it may be, is like nothing else on earth, so that if nothing else were accomplished, this result gives abundant reason for the existence of our Catholic colleges. If one were asked to define the exact process, to point out the various means employed, in transforming a crude youth into the manly, generous, self-possessed young man of high ideals and noble purpose, it would be found a most difficult thing to do.

Roy Henning was a fair example of what Catholic training does for a well-disposed youth. He was not perfect, as we shall probably see later on in our story; yet he had qualities that endeared him to all who knew him. Hating any appearance of meanness, he was ever the champion of the weak or the oppressed, as many a boy who was not the “under-dog” found to his cost. His cheerful, manly piety made religion attractive. There was nothing squeamish or mawkish about him. Everybody who knew him would laugh at the idea that Henning and effeminacy had the remotest connection. If the truth were told of him at this time he was, owing to his splendid health and sound physique, verging on the opposite of effeminacy. [Pg 26]

Under the tutelage of such boys as Hunter, Claude Winters, Clavering, and others, he had developed into a really fine athlete. The “muscles of his brawny arms were”literally “strong as iron bands,” and that one was certainly to be pitied who, if under Roy's displeasure, came in close contact with him.

Andrew Garrett was his cousin's antithesis. He was about the same inches as Roy, who measured five feet ten inches in his stocking feet, but beyond this all resemblance ceased. Andrew was not an athlete. He was of spare build, but did not look healthy. His chest was narrow, his arms and legs spindling and flabby. He had no muscle, because he took little exercise, and was, consequently, frequently bilious, which often resulted in his saying or doing much meaner and pettier things than he intended. It would be difficult to find two more dissimilar characters than these two cousins.

In justice to Andrew Garrett it must be stated that when he came with his cousin to St. Cuthbert's he had not the slightest knowledge of the conditions under which Roy was laboring. Owing to what he had previously known of the state of Roy's purse both at home and during vacation time, he had not the slightest suspicion that now his cousin's paternal allowance had been inconveniently curtailed. Whether he would have acted differently had he known all the circumstances is a matter of conjecture. Garrett was a factor in much of the annoyance Roy Henning suffered during the year. [Pg 27]

For several days after the arrival of Andrew Garrett, Mr. Shalford, the prefect, watched him closely. Being a cousin of Henning, the prefect thought it was natural that he would associate with the Henning-Bracebridge-Shealey-Beecham set, and be one of those to whom no particular attention need be given. He was not a little surprised to discover that these boys had very little to do with him. There was no overt act on their part by which Garrett could be said to have been snubbed or “dropped,” but the prefect saw that there seemed to be a tacit understanding among these boys to let Garrett severely alone. No one had any particular liking for him, and it is quite

probable that had he not been Henning's cousin, he would have experienced several times a very unpleasant quarter of an hour.

Roy Henning was now one of the leaders among the forthcoming graduates. His influence was now as great as Hunter's or Winter's had been in the previous year, and his relationship with Garrett saved that boy much annoyance, which, by his want of tact and a lack of companionableness, he would have brought upon himself.

“You do not seem to get along with the other boys, Garrett,” said Mr. Shalford kindly, one day not long after the conversation recorded in our first chapter.

“I guess I can manage without them,” was the ungracious reply.

“I don't think you can, my boy,” said Mr. Shalford.

“Well, I do. I think I can manage my own affairs.”

The prefect did not know whether this speech was intended as a rebuff to his advances, but he took a charitable view of it, and ascribed it to awkwardness, rather than to intentional boorishness. He said:

“Let me tell you, Andrew, that you can do no such thing.”

“Yes, I can.”

“Look here, my young man. You are forgetting yourself. I do not know what sort of training you received at home, but while you are here, you must speak to your superiors with more respect. Prefects and professors and the other officers of the college are accustomed to be treated here with at least a certain amount of deference.”

The boy winced under the allusion to his home training. He prided himself upon being a gentleman, and, indeed, his home life was all that was delightful. As if he had read his thoughts, the prefect said:

“Do you know the meaning of gentleman—a gentle man? It is not necessarily an inherited quality of birth. It is rather a question of manners, is it not?”

Garrett hung his head. He knew that he had been rude and uncouth.

“Forgive me, sir. I did not mean to be ungentlemanly. But I do not like these boys here. They don't seem to treat me squarely.”

“Why? What is wrong?”asked the prefect, now satisfied.

“Oh! I don't exactly know. They all seem inclined to let me alone. Nobody seems to want to have anything to say to me.”

“Perhaps that statement is not altogether exact. Have you not annoyed or vexed several of them one way or another? Think now of what you may have done. If you want to get along with St. Cuthbert's boys, you will have to act honorably and above board in everything. Do not for a moment imagine that I am accusing you of anything underhand or mean. I am far from doing so. But boys are quick to discern character—frequently quicker than men. It is a species of intuition with them, and they are rarely deceived. You have been here a month. Do you know of any nicknames among the boys?”

“Yes, sir; several of them. There is Shanks, and Owly, and Pinchey, or Pinchbeck, and a lot more of them.”

“Just so. Now, do you not see that each of these boys to whom a nickname sticks has just the characteristic or foible the name indicates?”

“Yes, sir, that is true.”

“I am glad you recognize it. You have not as yet developed or shown any particular trait which would give the boys an opportunity of attaching any particular name to you. I should advise you to watch carefully, for, believe me, if they do give you a name, it will not be a pleasant one, and probably it will be one that will sting. At all events it will be one that will show to you your foibles pretty clearly. Watch yourself, therefore, and prevent it if you can.”

With this warning the prefect left the boy and went to ring the great bell as first warning for supper. Garrett remained in a “brown study” for some time. Had he taken the prefect's advice he might have saved himself many hours of subsequent regret and remorse.

CHAPTER V

A Pitching Cage

JACK BEECHAM and Tom Shealey were standing at a window in their classroom one dark afternoon in the late fall. They had their heads together, for both were reading from the same

letter, which the former had just received. They were evidently much interested in its contents, for neither noticed the entrance of Rob Jones, nor were they conscious of his presence until he, boylike, gave them both simultaneously a thump on the back.

“You must be mightily interested, you two, not to hear me come in,” said Jones.

“We felt your presence, Rob, quick enough,” said Beecham.

“It was quite striking,” added Shealey.

“What's the news? It must be of tremendous importance to cause such absorption.”

“It is important,” said Shealey. “Jack has just received a nice letter from those nice fellows of Blandyke College. They write elegantly—perfect gentlemen.”

“What have they to say?”inquired Jones.

“It isn't a challenge for next spring, or anything of that sort,” said Jack, “but a sort of recapitulation of this year's games we played together, and a chat over the prospects of next year. Listen to this: 'We met with few defeats this summer, and I am instructed by the nine to say that if we were to be defeated—and we were once or twice, as you remember—we preferred to have been defeated by no one but the St. Cuthbert's team, not only because you, gentlemen, were considered worthy of our steel, but also because every player on your team was a gentleman whom it was a pleasure and an honor to meet.'” [Pg 31]

“Now isn't that nice,” exclaimed Beecham. “But let us see what more he has to say. They are capital fellows, these Blandykes,” and Jack read on: “'We intend to meet you early next summer, if we can arrange some games with you. We have great pleasure in telling you that we intend to wipe out all defeats of this season. With this in view, we have, already, men daily in the pitching cage, and our captain intends to keep his men in training all the winter months.'”

“They must feel pretty sure of victory to tell us all their plans,” remarked Beecham. “Pshaw! isn't it a pity that Henning has gone back on us! I wonder what we shall do without him,”

“I don't know. I can't imagine,” remarked Jones.. "Whatever we do, we must not be behind the Blandykes. We, too, must get a cage and practice pitching and catching. We can't afford to dim the glory of last summer's record. You remember we won two out of the three games we played with the Blandykes. Next spring we must capture the three.”

“But we have no cage, and they are expensive things,” observed Beecham.

“Pass round the hat,” remarked Shealey promptly; "of course Roy will help us as usual. He is always generous with his money; just the fellow who deserves to have plenty of it.”

“Yes, that's true,” said Jones, “and I suppose his cousin, young Garrett, has plenty of cash to spare too, but I doubt whether he will be as generous as Roy has always been. Thanksgiving day will be here in ten days, and we ought to have the pitching cage ready when the football season closes.” [Pg 32]

“What will Mr. Shalford say about it?” asked Beecham.

“Oh! he will leave it all to us, that's sure; but we may expect his one proviso which he is very strong on, and that is, as you know, that we do not go into debt.”

“Very good,” said Jack. “Then we had better begin at once. Here comes Garrett. I'll try him first.”

Beecham explained the project to Garrett, and then asked him whether he would help them out. His first words rang with a false note.

“Has my cousin given anything?”he asked.

“Not yet. We have not seen him yet. You are the first that has been asked.”

“Very well. Put me down for five dollars.”

“Thanks; much obliged,” said Beecham, without a particle of enthusiasm.

Strange to say, young Garrett did not feel satisfied. He had at once conceived this an opportunity to make himself popular by a liberal donation. The gift, for a college student, was liberal enough; but there was something in the merely civil “Thanks,” from Beecham, which told him he had not succeeded, at this time, in his purpose. He thought he detected in the tone a covert sneer. But of this he was not sure. He made another mistake.

“Let me know,” he said, “what my cousin subscribes, and if he gives more than I have given, I will increase mine.”

A second civil—but colder— “Thanks,” greeted this speech, and Garrett walked away in no very pleasant frame of mind. “Why is Roy so popular and I a nonentity?” he asked himself, but it was to be a long time before he would learn the answer to his own question. [Pg 33]

Beecham and Shealey started at once on a subscription tour. They caught Henning in the study-hall.

“Hello, Roy! We have come to bleed you, old man. We are going to put up a pitcher's cage in one end of the long playroom for winter practice. How much shall we put you down for?”

Roy Henning blushed slightly and a look resembling pain came over his face. His father's test was beginning to operate. Roy, owing to his restricted capital, had made a resolution to spend only two dollars and a half each month. He made a rapid calculation of the present month's necessary boyish expenses, and he knew that he would have very little to offer them. Before he could speak, however, Beecham remarked:

“Say, Roy boy, we know you won't play next spring; but we want you to be treasurer and secretary of the club.”

“Yes, you are the man for the job,” said Shealey, "none better. Won't you take it? You can do ten times more with the boys than either Jack or myself.”

“I don't know——” hesitated Henning, for several reasons.

“Oh, yes, you do, Roy,”urged Jack. “You are a capital beggar, you know, and with your own big donation at the head of the list you will be irresistible.”

“Call him a good solicitor,” laughed Shealey, “it's more euphonious.”

“I think I can act as treasurer and secretary for you, if the boys are willing. It is the least I can do if I don't play.”

“Of course it is. Thanks. That's good of you," said Beecham, and Shealey nodded approvingly.

“Now, Roy, how much shall I put you down for before I hand over to you the subscription list? Twenty is too much, I suppose,” said Shealey.

Roy looked out of the window in a perplexed sort of way. He had always been a liberal contributor. What would his friends think of him now? The paternal test was certainly a hard one in more ways than one.

“I am afraid I shall disappoint you,” he said.

“In what?”asked Beecham. “In book-agent assurance? Never fear. I am willing to certify that beneath all your laughing good humor, you are possessed of an unlimited amount of—of—well—to put it without circumlocution—an unlimited amount of cheek. No one can withstand your winning smile and drawing manner. But what is your own gift? Let us head the list with that. I must tell you that your cousin Garrett has promised to equal your subscription, so make it large, if you please. He has already given——”

“How much?”asked Henning uneasily.

“Five dollars.”

“Oh,” said Henning, with something very like a sob in his throat.

“Better make it twenty-five, Roy; you can spare it, and it's practically giving an extra twenty which comes out of the pocket of that beg—Oh! I beg your pardon. I am constantly forgetting that he is your cousin. I wish he wasn't.”

Beecham spoke the last sentence in blunt, boyish fashion. Roy understood him, but just now he was not inclined either to defend his cousin, or discuss his friend's desires.

“I am afraid I shall disappoint you this time, boys,” said Roy.

“You never have yet,” remarked Shealey.

“But I shall this time, I am sure.”

“Well, let's see the amount of the disappointment," said Beecham laughingly.

Jack Beecham, of late, could not, as he himself expressed it, “make out” his friend Roy. Several times since the beginning of September he had surprises from Henning. He was beginning to regard him as an uncertain or even an unknown quantity. Was his friend becoming miserly? This idea made Jack Beecham laugh. Roy misanthropical! The clever, bright, jolly Roy doing aught but loving all mankind was absurd to think of, but yet—There certainly had come over his bright, genial friend a change which was puzzling. What could——

But his thoughts, as he stood expectantly, with his pencil and notebook in hand, were interrupted by what Roy said next:

“You may put me down for two dollars and fifty cents.” Shealey only partly suppressed a giggle, supposing that Roy, as usual, was hoaxing. Roy saw the laugh and was deeply hurt.

“Phew,” began Jack Beecham, and he was about to make a very straightforward remark when he caught a side view of poor Roy's face, which was suffused with the blushes of mortification. There was a look of positive pain there.

Good, sensible Jack at once saw there was something wrong somewhere. Hastily changing his pencil from right hand to left, he took Roy's hand and pressed it warmly, sympathetically. The action told more than words could do. Beecham gave a quick glance toward the door for Shealey,

which that individual understood and immediately departed. [Pg 36]

When they were alone Jack said:

“You are in trouble, Roy. Is there—is there any financial difficulty at home?”

“None whatever, Jack; but I can't explain.”

There was another silent pressure of the hand.

“Nor will I ask you to do so. But there is something wrong somewhere. Oh, Roy! If I could do—if I could share—look here, Roy,” he at last blurted out, boy-fashion, “look here. I intend to give twenty dollars—let me put ten of it under your name—do let me.”

“No, no, Jack," said Roy, after a few moments of silence which his emotion compelled him to observe; "no, you must not do that. I can't explain, but come what may I want you not to misunderstand me. Whatever you may hear or see I want you not to lose faith in me," and Roy Henning held out his hands to his friend, while there was a hungry, eagerly hungry, look in his eyes.

There was, of course, no absolute reason why Roy Henning could not have given his entire confidence to his friend. His father had made no such restriction in the test he had imposed. It was Roy's own peculiar temperament which prevented him from confiding in any one; in consequence his trials were in reality much more severe than even his father could have foreseen.

“Have faith in you! Believe in you! Well, I should guess. I don't understand it all—your refusing to play, and this—this small donation, and everything; but, believe in you! Roy, I would as soon cease to believe in myself.”

Roy's eyes were hot, and his lips were dry.

“Thanks, old man. I knew you would. I can't explain—yet. But as long as you have confidence in me I'll go through it all right. God bless you, Jack.” [Pg 37]

Young Beecham was more mystified than ever at this exhibition of emotion, but he felt at the moment something like the knight of old who sought quarrels to vindicate the fair name of the lady of his heart. To make the simile more in accordance with our own more prosaic times, Jack Beecham became Henning's champion, and went around for several days with a metaphorical chip on his shoulder, daring any one to come and knock it off. Of course, the chip represented Roy Henning's actions and intentions.

After this interview, Roy looked a long time out of the study-hall window. [Pg 38]

CHAPTER VI

Advice

WHETHER Roy Henning's small donation to the boys' collection for the purchase of the pitching cage for the winter practice was the cause, or whether there was some other occult reason, the subscriptions came in very slowly. Many boys, seeing that Roy, usually the largest contributor to all such schemes, had given so small an amount, measured their own donations by his. The project, consequently, dragged along very slowly. The treasurer-secretary more than once called those interested together, and proposed that they should give up the plan.

To this neither Shealey, nor Beecham, nor Bracebridge would listen. They were boys who, having once taken a project in hand, were determined to carry it through to success. Bracebridge encouraged Henning to continue his work of soliciting, but the latter found that he was working against some impalpable obstacle to success, the nature of which he could not divine.

The boys were as free and as genial with him as ever. Every one appeared to like him as usual, yet withal there was an intangible something in the atmosphere, as it were, which appeared to militate against his success. Roy often tried to discover the cause. Was this silent but unmistakable change toward him, which had lately come over most of the boys, of his own causing? After much introspection he could discover no reason for blaming himself. [Pg 39]

His retirement from the field of college sports had been more than a nine-days' wonder. All his friends, not understanding or guessing his motive, expostulated with him, and time and again urged him to reconsider his decision. He had remained firm.

His more immediate friends had long ago ceased to make the matter a subject of conversation in his presence, giving him credit for acting from right intentions, although what these were, now near Christmas, was as much a mystery to them as they were on the September day on which he had announced his withdrawal.

Others were not so considerate. With a savagery often found among thoughtless but not necessarily ill-intentioned boys, they frequently discussed his "going back on his team,” as they

expressed it, in Roy's presence, with an almost brutal unreserve.

“If I could play ball as you do, Henning,” said a coarse-grained youth named Stockley, one day, “I would call myself a dog in the manger.”

“And why, please?”asked Henning, who was by this time getting used to such talk from those whose opinion he did not value.

“The old reason. A bird that can sing and won't sing, ought to be made to sing. The honor of the college is at stake.”

“Your motto has no application in this case," replied Henning. “If I do any injustice to any one by not playing ball, then I ought to be the bird who should be made to sing. But I think you will have some difficulty in proving that I am acting against justice. As to the honor of the college being at stake, in that you know as well as I do, if you have any sense at all, that you are talking sheer nonsense.”

“I don't know whether I am,” sneered Stockley. "I am not the only one who thinks there is a nigger in the woodpile in this affair. Your cousin was saying only this morning that he could tell the boys something why you will not play ball that would make things mighty ugly for you.” [Pg 40]

“Now look here, Stockley,” said Henning warmly, "you go and mind your own business and leave me and Garrett alone or—or it will be decidedly unpleasant for you.”

Stockley, coarse as he was, was observant. He saw Henning's fist close tightly, and he observed the muscles of his arm swell up for a minute. He discreetly moved some paces away.

“When I want your advice upon my conduct," continued Henning, “I will ask it. Till then, mind your own affairs, and keep your tongue from wagging too freely about mine.”

The young fellow walked away, muttering some unintelligible words between his teeth. Roy saw no more of him for several days.

Henning entered the Philosophy classroom with a flushed face and an unpleasant frown.

“What's up, Roy?” asked Ambrose Bracebridge, seeing that his friend had been suffering some annoyance.

“Nothing, Brosie; only I have had to talk pretty freely to one fellow who attempted the mentor business over me.”

“Nothing serious, I hope?”

“Oh, no. I merely told him to mind his own business; that's all.”

“Do you care to walk?”asked Bracebridge, who saw Henning was very much annoyed.

“Yes, come along,” replied Henning.

They walked some time in the face of a cutting wind, such as brings tears to the eyes. While facing it conversation was impossible. Presently they came to the base of a wooded hill which afforded them some shelter. Here they could talk at ease. [Pg 41]

“How much money have you collected, Roy, for the cage?”asked Ambrose as soon as both had finished rubbing their chilled cheeks to bring back the circulation.

“I have collected sixty-four dollars in cash, but about eighty-seven has been subscribed. Why do you ask?”

“Please do not think me impertinently curious if I ask you where you keep it.”

“Certainly not. It is in the drawer of the table in the dressing-room of the gymnasium. That room just off the playroom. You know, Ambrose, that is the place of meeting of all committees of the various college associations. It's safe there; don't you think so?”

“Yes—perhaps,” answered Bracebridge, with evident hesitation. “I would rather you keep it there than in your desk, or in your trunk.”

“Why? You appear uneasy. What's the matter?”

“It may be foolish of me, but, Roy, I can not help thinking there is some ugly work being concocted. No doubt you think I am fanciful, but I have accidentally overheard here a word and there a word which I do not like.”

“From whom?”

“I can not tell you from whom, because it is all too vague, and if I mentioned any name I may be doing an innocent boy a grave injustice. There is a good deal of talk against you. Many silly fellows have taken it as a personal affront that you refuse to play ball.”

“Pshaw! I——”

“Wait, old fellow: of course that is all nonsense. It is no one's business except your own, and their talking is not worth your consideration. Nevertheless there are a few restless spirits here this year, and it is my opinion they are only waiting their chance to make trouble for you.” [Pg 42]

“What would you advise me to do, Brosie?”

“Why not put all the money you have collected into the hands of the college treasurer? He will take care of it for you. It will be safer in the office vault than in the committee room.”

“I think it would be the better plan, but really I do not think there is any necessity for it. There is no one here who would attempt a robbery.”

“Maybe there is not; but as I said, it is better to be on the safe side.”

“All right. Much obliged. I guess I'll take your advice. Jack Beecham, only yesterday, hinted something similar to what you have just said about the ugly spirit against me. I wonder why it should have arisen, Ambrose, if it really does exist outside of your imagination. I have done nothing small or mean to any one. The head and front of my offending seems to be that I have withdrawn from next year's ball team. I happen to be a good player. Personally I regret having to take the course, but circumstances have occurred, which, in a way, compel this action. I can not divulge my reasons for so doing, even to my nearest friends—not even to Jack or you, Ambrose.”

“Nor do we wish to know them,” replied Ambrose, "it is quite sufficient for us to know that you do not wish to give them. Both Beecham and Shealey, and of course, myself, have every confidence in you, and you may rely on our staunch support in anything that may happen. By the way, how does the prefect, Mr. Shalford, regard you?”

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“I do not know exactly,” said Henning, cautiously. “You see, he is a great enthusiast for sport and games among us boys. I know I have vexed him by my decision. More than once he asked me to retract it. When I refused to do so, and told him I could give him no reason, he seemed, or at least I fancied he seemed, to be cool toward me.”

“Don't misjudge him, Roy,” said the other, warmly. “It was only yesterday that he advocated your cause to half a dozen pessimistic baseball malcontents. He's all right. Before he had done with these fellows, they held very different views concerning you. Still, he has not influenced all in your favor, for, as you know, not all will take a common-sense view of things, nor listen to reason.”

Henning nodded assent.

“The fact is,” Ambrose continued, “the yard seems to be dividing or divided into two camps. One is pro-Henning, the other contra. Therefore, and I know you will take what I say in the right spirit, I want you to watch yourself and be quite careful in what you say and do.”

“Do you think I shall be attacked?”

Ambrose glanced over the big form of his friend, and laughed loudly.

“Not much. There is no one such a fool as to invite corporal punishment. But there are a dozen means of annoying and vexing without resorting to the lowest means—physical force.”

“I am really very grateful, Ambrose, for the interest you take in me. Be sure that, come what may, you shall never be ashamed of having done so. It seems to me that, without the slightest fault of my own, I am placed in a most awkward position. Come what may, I'll try to do nothing I should afterward regret.”

[Pg 44]

“That's right. I know you will be careful.”

The two shook hands with the warmth of confident friendship, as they began to retrace their way to the college.

On their way home they were joined by Garrett, who still affected the sky-blue sweater, although he now wore it under his coat. In the presence of Garrett the two friends dropped the subject of their confidences, and the conversation became general.

[Pg 45]

CHAPTER VII

The Little Sisters

TIME crept slowly, as it is apt to do with boys at school. To the St. Cuthbert boys it seemed as if the year had leaden wings, but at length the week before Christmas arrived. All were now in expectation of coming events. If anticipation is half the joy, then most of the boys were taking their Christmas pleasures in advance.

Already the Christmas feeling was in the atmosphere. In various out-of-the-way places were stored bunches of holly and cedar and laurel. At all times of the day when boys where free from lessons, some one or other would be carrying strange wooden devices from place to place. Now one would be seen carrying to some out-of-the-way shed or unused classroom, wooden stars or double triangles. Another would partially and often unsuccessfully secrete a knot of clothesline. There never was such a demand for fine wire or binding twine.

All of which meant the mediate preparation for decorating the chapel, study-hall, refectory, and

even to some extent, the gymnasium. It was a pretty fiction among the boys that all the preparations had to be done in secret. It was fiction only, for the real fact was that, in both divisions, everybody was interested and everybody knew exactly what everybody else was doing.

None entered into the work of remotely preparing for Christmas more heartily than Roy Henning and his friends, Bracebridge, Shealey, and Beecham. There is a certain skill required in decorating. To some this proficiency never comes. It is perhaps an innate quality. It had never come to Roy Henning: He was no decorator. He could neither make a wreath of evergreens, nor cover a device with green stuff creditably. [Pg 46]

Owing to this defect of at least a certain kind of artistic temperament, Henning was the subject of a good amount of banter from his friends. He took all their teasing good-naturedly, and admitted his utter inability to make or cover designs.

“I have been thinking—ouch,” said Henning. The last word was spontaneous. It came from sudden pain, caused by the sharp point of a holly leaf penetrating his finger, which member he immediately applied to his mouth.

“By my halidom,” remarked Shealey, “'tis strange,”

“Don't do it again,” laughed Bracebridge, “but learn from experience what an awful and immediate retribution follows upon such a crime. Hast lost much blood in this encounter?”

“I think each of you fellows has a screw loose," retorted Roy, still sucking his wounded finger. “I am sure Shealey is *non compos mentis*.”

“Sane enough to keep holly thorns out of our fingers,” retorted Shealey.

“But, fellows, I really have an idea,” said Henning.

“Halt! Attention! Stand at ease! Dismiss company!" shouted Beecham with mock gravity, and then with a military salute, he said:

“Now, colonel, I am all attention. What is it?”

“It's this, boys. It wants but five days to Christmas. Between now and the great day all our Christmas boxes will have arrived.” [Pg 47]

“There's nothing very new in that idea,” answered Jack Beecham. “History, just at this time of the year, has the pleasantest way in the world of repeating itself.”

“You'll be accused of having brains, Jack,” said Henning, “if you keep on that way. If it is not too great a waste of gray matter, or too violent a cerebration for you, just try to listen to me for a moment.”

Jack Beecham fell against the wall, and fanned himself with his handkerchief.

“Poor fellow! Isn't it too bad! and so near the holidays, too,” he said. “Does any one know when the first symptoms appeared?”Jack turned to Shealey and Bracebridge. “Hadn't we better call an ambulance at once?”

“You'll need one if you don't stop your nonsense and listen to me,” said Roy, and he doubled up his great fist. His friends knew Roy's blows, although given only in jest, and having no desire for sore bones for Christmas, they were immediately all attention. Henning laughingly relaxed his muscles and allowed his hands to fall to his sides.

“I thought I could bring you fellows to reason," he remarked.

“We are all attention. Say on, say on,” they shouted.

“My idea is this, then. When we get our Christmas boxes, we shall each have much more than we need. Now you know the Little Sisters of the Poor maintain a large number of men and women in their institution. Without any settled income, don't you think it must often be a difficult matter for them to secure enough for the old people to eat and drink?”

“Never thought anything about it. Guess it's true, though; but how does that affect us?” [Pg 48]

“Just this way,” said Roy. “Let us ask every boy to give something out of his abundance to provide a feast for the old people.”

“Capital idea,” shouted Bracebridge. “I do not believe there is a boy who would refuse.”

“I agree with you,” said Jack.

“But the difficulty is,” remarked Ambrose, “that we can not feast old folk on cake and nuts and candy. I suppose this is about all that comes in those boxes.”

“You mistake,” remarked Roy. “I am sure you will find all sorts of cooked meats—turkeys, chickens, geese, and an unlimited supply of canned meats and delicacies.”

Bracebridge was surprised, but then he had not much experience in college Christmas boxes. He was inclined to be slightly incredulous. This was Ambrose's second year at St. Cuthbert's. As he had spent the previous Christmas at home, owing to the fact that he lived but a few miles from the college, he had not yet seen the college sights of Christmas time.

Had he seen the hundreds of Christmas boxes arrive a few days before the great feast; had he learned that one of the smaller study-halls had to be converted into a temporary boxroom for the holidays; had he seen the contents of an average Christmas-box from home, he would have been possessed by no doubt as to the possibility of the boys, presuming they were willing, to supply the inmates of the home for the aged poor with as bounteous a dinner as heart could desire.

The proposal appealed to the fancy of our friends. They went at once to the President to obtain the necessary permission.

“I give you leave willingly,” said the head of the college, “and I am pleased to see my boys cultivating a spirit of charity and considerateness for others. It will bring down God's blessing on you all.” [Pg 49]

“Father, it wasn't our idea at all,” said Jack. “It originated with——”

“We have another permission to ask, Father," interrupted Roy Henning.

“What next?”said the President, smiling.

“We would like to be allowed to go and serve the dinner to the old people some day during the Christmas week.”

“Dear me! What would three hundred and fifty boys do there?”

“I don't mean everybody, Father.”

“Whom, then?”

“Just enough to serve all their tables.”

“How many inmates are there in the Home?" asked the Father.

“About two hundred, I believe,” replied Beecham.

“Very well, Henning; you may select two dozen boys to go with you.”

“Thank you, Father. When may the feast take place?”

“Christmas day falls on Monday this year. Suppose you arrange matters for Wednesday. But Wednesday night there is to be the Seniors' play, isn't there?”

“Yes, Father,” said Bracebridge, “but I do not think that will interfere. We can have the last rehearsal in the morning, if necessary, or we can be back by three o'clock in the afternoon.”

“Very good,” said the genial President; “arrange everything with your prefect; but remember the matter drops unless the response is generous among the students. It would not do to send half a feast.”

“There won't be any danger of that, Father,” said Jack Beecham confidently. [Pg 50]

“Very well. God bless you for your charitable intentions,” and they were dismissed.

Beecham was correct. The students, almost to a man, became enthusiastic over the proposed feast. Abundance of provisions from the boys' boxes was donated. Every boy, instinct with the spirit of the season, gave something and gave it willingly. Some were offended because they were not allowed to give as much as their generosity prompted. One or two who were inadvertently neglected were very much vexed over not being asked to give their share. Many wondered why the beautiful idea had not occurred to them before. Others were so certain in advance of the success of the banquet that they then and there proposed to make it an annual occurrence.

The little black wagon of the Sisters—and who does not know those wagons! a familiar sight in nearly every city in the Union—made several trips to the college on the Wednesday of Christmas week. Hitherto the boys had paid little attention to this vehicle as it daily drove modestly to the door of the kitchen. On this day it came triumphantly into the boys' yard, amid the lusty cheers of the generous-hearted lads. Even old “Mike,” the driver, noted everywhere in town for his delicious brogue, was an object of special interest.

Owing to the excitement of the occasion—the boys afterward declared this most solemnly—the driver performed the remarkable feat of making the old gray mare, which had seen almost as many years as her driver, canter, actually, positively *canter*, up to the classroom door where the provisions were stored. In the after-discussion of this startling event authentic documents were called for, and as they were not forthcoming the cantering incident remains an historic doubt until this day. This old gray mare was known—— [Pg 51]

The boys would not let the two nuns load the wagon. There were too many strong arms and willing hands for that. At last all the boxes were on the wagon, and old “Mike” mounted his chariot once more. This was a slow operation, for the old man's joints were stiff and he was no longer active. When one of the boys put the lines into his knotted rheumatic fingers, he broke through his usual taciturnity and said:

“You are good boys: good boys. God bless yees all.”

“Three cheers for Mike,” shouted a lively youngster in the crowd. The signal was taken up, and it is safe to say that the old man never received such an ovation before in all his life.

As the leather curtain fell the cheering boys caught a last glimpse of the faces of two smiling Sisters, jubilant over the fact that they were carrying home an unwonted treasure for their old people. When the wagon had driven clear of the mob of good-natured boys, Jack Beecham ran alongside, and lifting the flap said to the Sisters:

“Twenty of us are coming by eleven o'clock to-morrow. So you are to do no work. We are going to set the tables and serve the old people. Please tell the Mother-Superior that she and the Sisters are to stand by and give the orders, and we will do the rest.”

And the feast itself! What a revelation the inside of the convent was to these gay, careless, happy boys. The sight of so much pain and suffering and dependence and resignation was to them a revelation indeed.

To Ambrose Bracebridge, who eagerly accepted the invitation to don an apron and turn waiter for the occasion, the scene was one of absorbing interest. It will be remembered by those who have read the second book of the series of three which deal with the fortunes of the St. Cuthbert's students, that at this time Ambrose was a convert to Catholicism of about six months' standing, and consequently had seen little or nothing of the workings of the vast fields of practical charity within the Catholic Church. The immense Catholic charities of almost every imaginable kind which dot the land are so familiar to ordinary Catholics that they scarcely cause comment or notice. To Ambrose Bracebridge all was new and wonderful. As a waiter on the old people he did not prove a success. He did not do much serving, but spent most of his time watching the old people feasting, and the good Sisters looking after their comfort.

“A penny for your thoughts,” said the chaplain of the institution as he came up to Ambrose.

“I was thinking, Father,” said Ambrose, amid the rattle of knives and forks, “what a wonderful charity this is.”

“Yes? What impresses you most deeply?”

“The retiring modesty of the Sisters, I think, and the wonderful way they have of managing these old people.”

“Anything else?”

“Yes, I am impressed with the docility and evident gratitude these old people show toward the Sisters. How is the institution supported, Father?”

“By the charity of all classes. Have you not often seen the Sisters' modest wagon on the streets? It seems to me that this one charity has touched the tender spot in the heart of the American people. Did you ever know a merchant, or a hotel manager, Catholic or non-Catholic, to refuse the Sisters?”

“Never,” replied the boy.

“Yet, after all, this is Catholic charity working in only one direction. Did you ever realize what the Catholic Church is doing for the State in this country? It seems to me that the State would be simply overwhelmed if all the Catholic orphanages, asylums, hospitals, academies, protectories, deaf-mute institutes, and, above all, the vast system of parochial schools, which make, literally, a network of Catholic charity over the land—if, I say, all these were closed and the State had to do the work.”

“Some, of pessimistic view,” continued the chaplain, who was evidently quite optimistic in his own views, “are always grumbling over the fact that many non-Catholic institutions of learning are so richly endowed, and that Catholics of the country are doing nothing for education. I believe there never was a greater mistake. It is true that, as yet, there are few large Catholic endowments. They will come in time. The money paid by Catholics in the interest of Catholic education—and, mind you, at the same time they are paying their pro rata share of taxes for the support of all secular institutions, including the public schools—the money paid by Catholics, I say, throughout the country, makes a magnificent showing when compared to the few highly endowed secular universities.”

“Is not this a rather optimistic view, Father?" asked Bracebridge.

“I do not think so,” was the reply. “Ponder over it, and you will see that what I say is correct.”

“Here, you lazy rascal—oh! excuse me, Father—here, Ambrose, you lazy rascal, get some of that cranberry sauce from that table. You would not earn your salt as a waiter, Brosie,” and Roy Henning, red-faced and excitedly busy, laughingly pushed Ambrose in the direction of the sideboard.

Thus the talk with the chaplain was abruptly broken off. Nevertheless, Bracebridge had received much food for thought for future days. He pondered to good effect, and the result was that his graduation speech at the end of that year was on “Catholicity, a State Aid,” which was subsequently the cause of much comment.

One event occurred during the old folks' dinner which was of great interest to some of our friends. Roy Henning, during the latter part of the feast, when the demand for the services of the voluntary waiters was not so urgent, frequently passed a few words with the chaplain who had acted as a sort of honorary general superintendent of the banquet.

On one of these occasions Jack Beecham happened to be passing with a plate of fruit for the table in one direction, and Bracebridge was carrying something in the opposite. Both were near enough to inadvertently hear portions of what appeared to the priest to be a very interesting revelation. Both boys heard the end of a sentence:

"Seminary! You?"

"Yes, Father, please God."

"When?"

"Next year."

"For this diocese?"

"No, my own."

"Ah! I am sorry."

Bracebridge and Beecham exchanged glances as they passed each other. What a revelation was here for both in regard to Henning's conduct. Did not this explain a thousand things?

As soon as the services of the two amateur waiters could be dispensed with, they came together in one corner of the room, and while wiping their fingers on the aprons the thoughtful Sisters had provided for them, they eagerly discussed their accidental discovery, but in a rather curious fashion.

"Please, Brosie, give me a good kick," said Jack.

"Why?" asked his companion.

"Just to think, numskulls that we are, that we never thought just this about dear old Roy."

"I do not see how we could. Roy never gave us the slightest hint."

"No, but if we were not such ninnies—Oh! I say, Ambrose, do you think it is true?"

"No doubt of it. 'Seminary—next year—his own diocese' tells the tale most conclusively for me."

"I'm so glad! If any one of us fellows is worthy of being a priest, it surely is Roy."

"Amen. But why has he kept it such a secret? Now all his actions are clear to me, although I confess I think some of them are mistaken or ill-advised."

"I won't admit that until I know more," remarked loyal Jack.

"That's right, too. But knowing what we now know, we can make things much pleasanter for Roy than they have been so far this year."

"Yes; if only for that I am glad we were involuntary eavesdroppers."

CHAPTER VIII

Something Happens

THE charitable boys returned from the Little Sisters early in the afternoon, aglow with the warmth of their own good deeds, in time to take a rest and an early supper, and put themselves in good condition for the play that evening. It was the Seniors' night, and they were to present "Richelieu" for the first time at St. Cuthbert's in years. The last performance of that great play, ten years ago, had been a brilliant success. The present generation of student actors were nervously anxious to equal, and, if such a thing were possible, to excel the reputation of the bygone players.

To make the situation more critical, several of the old boys who had taken part in the play at its former presentation had been invited to witness its reproduction. Six or seven, stirred by the memories of old times, had accepted the invitation. They were the welcome guests of the college for Christmas week. It can, then, be well understood that this play was to be the great event of the holidays.

The afternoon passed quickly and already the college theater was lighted. Already the boys had more or less noisily scrambled to secure the best positions. Suddenly the footlights shot up, sending a thrill of expectancy through the audience. Amid a rather unmeaning applause, for as yet it was certainly unearned, the orchestra took their places.

Before the curtain, much expectancy; behind it a much larger amount of suppressed excitement. Some of the actors were busy scanning over their lines for the last time, and with regretful haste, sorry now that they had not taken more to heart the advice of the trainer and committed them to memory better. Others were thronging around the busy make-up man, getting into his way, and—as always happens—upsetting the spirit-gum used to fasten on artificial

mustaches and beards.

Roy Henning, in the scarlet robe and white fur tippet of *Richelieu*, nervously tugged at a blue silk ribbon which was around his neck, and patiently waited his turn for his make-up.

Shealey was *De Mauprat* and looked well in a black velvet suit. Ambrose Bracebridge had a decidedly comical appearance in a Capuchin's brown habit and cord, with fleshlings and sandals, as the monk, *Joseph*. Ernest Winters, who this year had been promoted to the large yard, was to impersonate *Richelieu's* page, *François*, and certainly his brother Claude would have been proud of him could he have seen at this moment how fine he looked in his handsome doublet and trunks.

The play had been slightly modified to allow of its presentation by college students. The *Julie de Mortemar* had been for this occasion metamorphosed in *Julius de Mortemar*, and was consequently nephew instead of niece of the great cardinal. The adaptation of the lines had been cleverly done, so the transposition of this character did not greatly injure the play.

Behind the curtain the actors could hear faintly the squeakings and tunings of the orchestra violins. Presently the first overture began, and the actors knew their time had come. The manager, with a commendable horror of delays and stage waits, and knowing that anything of that kind would ruin the very best production, had everything arranged for the opening scene when the music ceased.

The manager's little bell rings once, twice, and up rises the curtain on the drinking scene in *Marion de Lorme's* house. The great play of the year had begun. Is it not strange that so many really good plays open with a drinking or carousing scene? At best, there is nothing elevating in them, and it takes the finest kind of professionalism to make them even tolerable. The St. Cuthbert's college boys were not professionals. The consequence was that the first scene went but slowly.

It was not until Henning, magnificently costumed as *Richelieu*, entered, in the second scene, that any of the players appeared at their ease. The round of applause which greeted his entrance with *Joseph* seemed to steady the actors and give them confidence.

There now occurred a strange thing during this scene, which led to much talk and fruitless speculation for many subsequent days. Henning made a good entrance. He began his lines in a rich baritone:

Richelieu—"And so you think this new conspiracy
The craftiest trap yet laid for the old fox?—
Fox!—Well, I like the nickname! What did Plutarch
Say of the Greek Lysander?”

Joseph—"I forget.”

Richelieu—"That where the lion's skin fell short he eked it
Out with the fox's. A great statesman, Joseph,
That same Lysander.”

Just as Henning had finished the rendering of the sentence, “That where the lion's skin fell short he eked it out with the fox's,” there was heard from the far right-hand corner of the hall a loud, distinct sound—one word. Clear and resonant, every one in the hall and the actors on the stage heard it distinctly. As nearly as letters will represent the sound it was “UGH,” The intonation of the one syllable was such as to convey without doubt to the hearers that the perpetrator regarded the words of the cardinal as practically applicable to the actor himself.

Many heads were momentarily turned in the direction whence the sound had come. Henning himself gave a rapid glance to the corner of the hall. As he did so, he saw his cousin Garrett drop his head and look fixedly at the floor.

Boys at a Christmas play do not usually fix their gaze on the floor. Henning felt that, for some reason or other, his cousin had made the interruption. For what purpose? Roy could not imagine. That it was Garrett there was no shadow of a doubt, for the actor plainly recognized the blue sweater his cousin wore constantly. Perhaps after all this time, thought Roy, his cousin was now trying to “get even” with him, as he had promised, for refusing to accompany Garrett to that carpet dance during the summer. Roy loyally put this thought out of his mind, but in doing this he was more mystified than ever, as it left him without a motive which could explain the curious action.

Fortunately for the success of the play the intended interruption, and probably intended insult, did not sufficiently distract Henning to the extent of spoiling the scene. There was a pause but for a moment. "A great statesman, Joseph, that same Lysander," he repeated, and thus recovering himself, the play went on without further interruption to a most successful finish.

The next day the attempted spoiling of the scene was the general subject of conversation. Many boys were uncertain who made the attempt. Henning did not refer to the matter when Garrett approached him. He accepted the many congratulations without evidence of either pleasure or displeasure, merely politely bowing. He appeared indifferent to praise or blame from his cousin. When, however, among his own special coterie of friends he was by no means passive.

After breakfast the Philosophers met in their own classroom, which, as we have before stated, was a sort of clubroom for them. Everybody crowded around Roy. Some shook his hand vigorously, others patted him patronizingly on the shoulders, assuring him that he was “the stuff” without deigning to explain their use of that word; others, in their enthusiasm, thumped him on the back, and Ernest Winters, who because he had taken part in the play, had been allowed to come up to the classroom, presented him, amid the profoundest salaams, with a bouquet of paper flowers surrounded by cabbage leaves which he had purloined from the kitchen.

“Ye done rale good, an' this is fer yees,” said the young rascal.

“He did that,” said Jack Beecham, and turning to Roy he continued: “If I knew who it was who tried to rattle you, I would——”

“What?”asked Roy.

“I would—would punch his head,” replied Jack, and manner, look, and gesture showed how pugilistic were his inclinations at that moment.

“Who was it, Roy?”he continued, “I wasn't on the stage just at that time, you know.”

“I do not know,” replied Henning slowly.

“Mental reservation,” said Bracebridge laughing.

“I do not know,” repeated Roy, and his friends could get no more out of him.

“By the way,” said George McLeod, “are you going to finish taking the subscriptions for the pitcher's cage to-day, Roy?”

[Pg 61]

“Yes,” answered Roy. “The boys seem to have plenty of money now, and we want only about twenty-six dollars more.”

“That's splendid,” said George, “we must have that cage ready by the time classes begin again after the Christmas holidays.”

“That reminds me,” said Henning, aside to Ambrose Bracebridge, “that I forgot to take that money out of the table-drawer and place it with the treasurer. I intended to do it every day for several days past, but every time I put more money in I forget all about it.”

A shade of vexation passed over Bracebridge's bright features. He said:

“I am sorry you forgot. It would be much safer with the treasurer of the college. But I suppose it's all right, anyway.”

“I have seven dollars in my pocket now belonging to the fund. Let us go over to the playroom, boys, and I will unlock the drawer and take the money to the treasurer for safe-keeping.”

The group of boys left the classroom and went diagonally across the yard to the playroom, which was situated under a large study-hall, and was a half-basement room.

There were about two dozen boys in the playroom when our friends entered it. As Roy passed up the long room, first one and then another complimented the *Richelieu* of the previous evening on his fine acting. Roy's cheeks flushed with pleasure. There was some of that semiconscious gentleness of perfect success about him. He was experiencing some of the pleasantest moments he had ever spent at St. Cuthbert's.

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Jack Beecham took the key from Roy and unlocked the door of the sports-committee room. The group that had recently left the classroom entered, those in the playroom paying little attention to them. Boys were accustomed to see various groups enter the small room for the purpose of discussing various sporting events and conditions of the college games.

“How much have you collected, Roy?”asked Tom Shealey.

“About seventy-two dollars—seventy-nine with this in my pocket. Wait; we'll see in a minute.”

He felt in his pocket for a small bunch of keys, but could not find them.

“There! I have left my keys in my desk. Wait a moment, boys, and I'll be back,” and he started for the classroom.

“What a dastardly thing that attempt last night was,” said one of the company.

“I guess Roy knows who it was well enough," remarked Tom Shealey, “but cousin or no cousin, if he did such a thing to me, I would have to get a very satisfactory explanation, or by the nine gods he would pay dearly for it.”

“But Henning is too generous to take any further notice of it,” said a boy named White, “but I wonder whether Mr. Shalford will move in the matter at all.”

“Haven't the least idea,” said Shealey. “I do not see what he could do exactly. It seems to me it were better to let the matter drop, and I am sure that is Roy's wish too. Treat it with the silent contempt it deserves.”

Which speech shows that Shealey was not always consistent.

Ambrose agreed with him, although at the time he was furiously angry. As *Joseph* in the play he was close to Richelieu, and beneath the disguising grease-paint on Henning's face he saw the hot flushes of passion rise, for a moment. Ambrose thought that Roy was going to address the interrupter, but he saw him check himself in time to save a scene that would indeed have been memorable. [Pg 63]

"Go on, Roy," Ambrose had whispered. "A great statesman, Joseph, that same Lysander."

Henning took the cue from Ambrose, and although trembling with suppressed indignation his friend knew the play was saved.

"Where on earth is that Roy all this time?"asked Beecham.

Just at that moment that young man reappeared, red, and out of breath.

"Oh! I say, fellows, forgive me for keeping you waiting so long, but Mr. Shalford caught me in the yard, and—and, really, he was very complimentary."

"Is he going to find out who attempted the interruption last night?"asked young McLeod.

"Not if I can help it, George," replied Roy. [Pg 64]

CHAPTER IX

Who?

"HAVE you your keys, Roy?" asked Bracebridge.

"Yes, here they are."

Henning moved to the end of the table where the drawer was, and picked out the key which was to unlock the table drawer.

By this time all were engaged in a general discussion as to the kind of pitcher's cage which should be procured.

"I can not make up my mind," said Roy, as he inserted the key into the lock, "whether to recommend the committee to get a wire backstop, or a canvas one."He had now opened the drawer and was feeling mechanically for his subscription book.

"I think a canvas one will be better because it will not be so hard on the balls, and be less noisy, too. Why! where is my book—Ah! here it is."

He drew out from the drawer the book containing the list of donors. In the back of the book Henning had made a rough sketch of what he supposed was wanted as a pitcher's cage. He showed it to the boys.

"Who's the artist?"asked Jack.

"Your humble servant," replied Roy.

"H'm! Perspective all out. It looks two miles long. I guess the grease-paint man of last night could do better than that."

"That's what you say, Jack," answered Roy good-naturedly; "I would like to see you do as well, anyway." [Pg 65]

Jack Beecham was not in earnest. Henning had caught him winking to the others while decrying his work.

"Well," continued Roy, as he put his hand again into the drawer, "I would not ask Mr. John Beauchamps—to draw—for me—a—a barn door—Great heavens! Where's that money! I can't feel it anywhere in the drawer,"

All this time Henning's forearm was in the drawer and his fingers were nervously searching for the bag.

"Give yourself more room. Open the drawer wider, you goose," said Beecham.

Henning pushed back his chair so suddenly that it fell. He pulled out the drawer to its full length. Then taking out the contents of the drawer he put them excitedly on the table. There was a large leather blotter, with pouches, a pad of athletic club letterheads, a lot of spoiled half sheets of foolscap, about a quire of clean paper, and a few small miscellaneous articles.

"Did you have the money in a purse?"asked Bracebridge, who could not keep his anxiety out of his voice.

"No; it was in one if those yellow bank canvas bags."

"Look again through the pile of papers and be sure it is not there."

They all searched. The money was gone.

Those who saw Henning at that moment pitied him from the bottom of their hearts. For a few seconds he stood as one dazed. When he realized the force of the catastrophe which had happened to him he turned ghastly pale. His lips became livid. Around them were distinct white lines.

For a moment the six boys stood in perfect silence. Ambrose Bracebridge seemed afraid to look at his friend. [Pg 66]

Henning stood as one dazed, not at present seeming to realize all of the untoward thing that had happened to him. It seemed to him as if he were under water and could not breathe. He panted for breath. A moment or two later a reaction set in and the blood rushed to his head, making his sight waver and his temples throb, and reddening his face to crimson. He felt as if he were falling forward, yet he remained motionless.

“Fetch Mr. Shalford, Ernest, but tell him nothing. Say we want him at once,” whispered Bracebridge to young Winters. The boy slipped out noiselessly and it is doubtful if any one except the last speaker noticed or knew of his departure. In half a minute Mr. Shalford came in. As he pushed the door open he saw the standing group, and began to laugh.

“High tragics, eh? Are you all posing for a tableau? Where's the camera? What! What on earth is the matter with you boys? Speak some of you; what has happened?”

They certainly did look a lot of frightened boys. Suddenly Roy regained the power of speech. With a full realization of his own predicament he threw up his hands in a despairing attitude.

“Oh, oh, oh! I shall be branded as a thief,”

Then he dropped on his knees and buried his face in his arms on the table.

“That's quite dramat——”again began Mr. Shalford, but suddenly checked himself. He now saw there was something woefully wrong.

A moment before Roy Henning had a strong inclination to burst out laughing at his ridiculous position, but his self-control was too great to permit him to give way to the nervous hilarity of misfortune. Just as Mr. Shalford entered the room the thought flashed across his mind of the consequences at home for him. What would his stern father say! Then a momentary thought of his mother's grief—and he gave way. [Pg 67]

Who can blame him? Roy was as yet only a boy, after all. At present he lacked the stability and poise of later years. Fifteen or twenty years later he would have borne the crash of a financial misfortune with a certain kind of equanimity. But he was young yet, living in boy-world, with all a boy's thoughts and feelings. And he wept. Do not blame him. It is more than probable that under the same circumstances you and I, and a hundred others, if we ever had a spark of boy nature, or boy feeling about us, would have done the same, and not thought it derogatory either.

Mr. Shalford, putting his hand on Roy's shoulder in a kindly way, said:

“What is wrong, Roy? What has happened? Your friends do not want to see you in this way.”

The poor boy raised his head from his arm.

“It's gone. The money's gone. My character is ruined,”

“That is not so, my boy. Be sensible. No one in his senses will ever accuse you. How much was taken?”

“All, sir, except seven dollars in my pocket.”

“But how much?”

“Seventy-two dollars.”

“Dear me! dear me! Seventy-two dollars! Why did you keep so large a sum in a place like this, Roy?”

“If I had a particle of common-sense I would have taken Bracebridge's advice long ago. He recommended putting it away safely two weeks ago, but I forgot to do it. What a fool I was—fool! fool,” [Pg 68]

“Don't say that, my boy. Come, cheer up. There is not a shadow of moral wrong for you in the whole affair. It's a misfortune for you, truly. You can bear that bravely. We may catch the thief yet.”

“Yes; but, sir, I shall be suspected. Many fellows will point the finger at me. Oh!—oh! I think I had better go home and give up all my plans.”

Give up all his plans! In the bitterness of his heart he thought that all was ruined, that the secret hopes of a vocation were now irretrievably lost, character gone, opportunities wasted. Well, Roy Henning was not the first and will not be the last of those who, when sudden misfortune comes, grow exceedingly pessimistic and want to give up. This was the first great grief of Roy's life. All the petty annoyances he had suffered from Garrett and his undesirable

clique sank into insignificance in the face of this overwhelming calamity. Oh, why had he not followed Bracebridge's advice, and, days ago, put the money out of his own keeping!

“Yes,” he said again, “I think I had better leave——”

“No, no, no, no, Roy,” came the chorus from his friends.

“If you do so, now, Roy,” said Mr. Shalford, who motioned silence to the others, “you make the mistake of your life. You give your enemies—I mean those ill-disposed toward you, if there are any—a free field, and unlimited opportunities to vilify you. You can not, you must not go.”

“But I must.”

“No, no, you must not, Roy.”

“But I must, sir. Oh, I can't stand it,”

“Well, if you must, think over your friends' sorrow at such a course.” [Pg 69]

“Sir?”asked the bewildered boy, not at all understanding.

“I say, think of our sorrow, your friend's sorrow at such a step. And, Roy, think of your mother's sorrow! A son with a blighted name! Don't you see that by running away now you make a tacit confession of some guilt? No, you must not go,”

Long ago Mr. Shalford had surmised what were Henning's intentions and aspirations for a future career. He saw this affair would be an occasion of trying the very soul of the boy before him, and that it would either make or break him. He thought, and correctly, that he knew the character of the youth now in such deep trouble, and he was anxious that he should make no false step. He looked Roy straight in the eye, and said seriously:

“Definitely, you must not go,” and then, as calmly as he had spoken before, he made use of a somewhat enigmatic expression: “Eagles live on mountain heights where storms are strongest.”

A quick glance from Henning told the prefect that the boy understood him, and the saying also told the boy that the prefect had divined his intention accurately. Mr. Shalford had thought the words and the glance would be understood by himself and Henning only. In this he was mistaken. Two boys, who had overheard Roy's words to the chaplain at the Little Sisters, understood perfectly.

“Very well, sir. I stay,” said Roy.

“That is right; that is sensible,” said Mr. Shalford, but in a moment Henning burst out, with an agony in his voice that was piteous:

“Oh, the shame of being suspected! What shall I do! What shall I do,”

“Let me think what is best to do,” said Mr. Shalford, who walked up and down the room once or twice. He realized that it was a critical moment in Henning's life, and he wanted to gain a little time. He decided that it was wisest to get Henning away from the scene of his misfortune at least for a few hours. [Pg 70]

“What you will do now is this, all of you. You—Henning, Bracebridge, Beecham, and Shealey, will go out at once for a long tramp, buy your dinners somewhere, and do not come home till dark. Have you plenty of money?”

“Yes, sir; yes, sir, lots of it,” answered the delighted three who were not in trouble.

“I don't think——”began the despondent Henning.

“That's right; just now do not think,” said the energetic prefect. “It will do no good. Walk and talk instead. Come home tired out, all of you.”

Three out of the group were enthusiastic over the plan. But there were two other very long faces just then. George McLeod and Ernest Winters were not included in the generous proposal.

“I say, Mr. Shalford, may not the kids come, too?”asked Tom Shealey.

“The kids! Whom do you mean?”and the prefect turned and saw two very disconsolate faces. He thought for a moment.

“Let—me—see. Records clear, Ernest? George?”

“Yes, sir,” answered the two, their hopes rising.

“How were your notes in the Christmas competitions?”

“Pretty good, sir, eighty-two,” answered Ernest.

“Fine, sir, mine were eighty-nine,” answered McLeod for himself.

In the meantime Mr. Shalford had caught Henning's eye. By a slight raising of his eyelids he wordlessly inquired if the company of these smaller boys would be acceptable. Roy answered by an almost imperceptible affirmative movement of the head. [Pg 71]

“Very well, then,” the prefect said, “I suppose you both may go, too, but it's only another

weakness on my part, letting small boys out all day. You big boys must take care of them."

"Whoop," shouted Ernest vociferously, and even the disconsolate Henning smiled at Ernest's resemblance in voice and manner to Claude, his brother, especially under stress of any pleasurable excitement.

"Of course I will set about investigating this money matter at once," resumed Mr. Shalford, "and you six here had better keep the whole matter a secret, at least for a time."

This injunction was useless. The prefect, this time, had reckoned without his host. At his own exclamation of surprise at the discovery of the theft, several boys who were in the large playroom, crowded around the door, unobserved by the prefect, whose back was toward them. Already the fact was known in the yard to some extent. Already had little excited groups begun to discuss the startling event.

CHAPTER X

A Day's Adventure

MR. SHALFORD at once told the President of the theft, and what he had arranged for Henning. The head of the college agreed with the prefect in thinking that a day's outing for Roy would be the best distraction he could get. A change of scenery and of faces would be beneficial, and prevent the unfortunate boy's mind from dwelling too morbidly on his misfortune while the event was still fresh.

"Why, why, why! What's this? Boys out of bounds? Where are you going? Dear me, dear me,"

The President, with a merry twinkle in his eyes, shook his gray locks, and a long finger, at the six boys whom he purposely met on the snow-covered lawn in front of the college.

"Where are you going?"he asked again.

"We hardly know yet, Father," said Jack Beecham. "We have only a few minutes ago obtained permission from Mr. Shalford for a day off."

"A day off! and what do you expect to do with it?"

"Take a good tramp, buy our dinners at a farmhouse, and have a good time, Father."

"H—hm! Have a good time, eh? Well, that's right. You can all be trusted. Hope you will enjoy yourselves. Wait. Where are your skates? If I were you I would take them with me. In your journeying you may come across a frozen pond, and then you would regret being without them."

"That's a good idea, Father. We will go back and get them," said Jack.

"Do, and meet me here before you start."

The boys turned back into the yard, and the President went to his office. A few minutes later he met the boys. He was carrying a good sized parcel.

"Were you not some of the charitable boys who, out of their abundance, provided the old folks with a feast yesterday?"

Not one of those engaged in that enterprise answered, but Ernest Winters said:

"Yes, Father, these four big fellows were some of them and I think they are all a set of mean fellows."

The four, and the President, too, looked surprised.

"Why do you think that, my child?"he asked.

"Because they didn't give any of us smaller boys a chance to give anything toward the feast."

The four big "mean" fellows burst into a laugh.

"Never mind, Ernie, this time," said Jack Beecham, "we had too much anyway. You shall have a chance for the next spread."

The President smiled at Ernest's vehemence, and at the nature of his charge.

"On your way," he said to Henning, "I want you to call at the Little Sisters and give them this package. I learned last night that although your dinner there was a great success yesterday, still there are many poor creatures, both men and women, who are in the infirmaries and could not attend. Here are a couple of boxes of cigars for these old men, and two boxes of candy for the old women."

The boys were delighted to be given such a mission. A bright smile of welcome spread over the features of the Sister who answered the door, when she saw these college boys again.

"Come into the parlor, young gentlemen, and I will call Mother."

The Superioress soon came. She was profuse in her thanks for what the students had done that week for her charges.

"May God bless you all," she said. "Our old people, since yesterday's dinner, have done nothing but talk about the kindness of the young gentlemen in remembering them. Many extravagantly funny, and some really comical things were said in your praise," and the nun's eyes twinkled and a smile stole around the corners of her mouth at the remembrance of many a quaint bit of Irish humor from the old men.

"Oh, tell us some of the things, Mother," said the impetuous young Winters.

"I am unable to reproduce any of it. I should only spoil it if I were to attempt it. You must come and hear them yourselves some day."

Henning then told her their mission.

"Please convey my thanks to the President. All of you must visit the infirmaries and distribute the gifts."

Whether this is what the President intended—we are inclined to think it is—that visit was the very best thing that could have happened to Henning in his present frame of mind. There is nothing like witnessing the sorrow and misery of others to make us think less of our own. For the first time in his life Henning was face to face and in close touch with pain and suffering and disease and all the calamities of impoverished old age. What was a misfortune like his to that of being doubled and rendered helpless by rheumatism? Here one was totally blind, but marvelously patient. There another whose distorted hands rendered her powerless to help herself. Another had to be lifted and tended and fed as a little child in the helplessness of old age and years of sickness. Yet all, under the fostering charity of the nuns, were clean, docile, grateful, and as cheerful as their condition would permit. Yes, the visit was very beneficial to Henning.

It is true that Roy's greatest distress was, after all, in the anticipation of what was to come. He knew there were many who were by no means kindly disposed toward him. Would these set afloat rumors and reports? Would they attempt to blacken his character? He greatly feared they would.

The chagrin caused by having lost the money entrusted to him through want of a little prudential forethought, or through mere forgetfulness of what he had the intention of doing, was bad enough. The imputations and the innuendos he dreaded far more. He realized that life could be made very bitter for him. But after all, what was all he might have to suffer, even granting the gloomiest view of the future to be the actual one, in comparison to the chronic and hopeless pains of these poor people in the Sisters' infirmaries?

He left the convent in a much more cheerful frame of mind than he had experienced since the discovery of the theft. His companions gladly saw the change. They did their utmost during the long tramp over the hills, by quip and prank and song and jest, to make the time pass pleasantly.

It was a splendid day for a winter's walk. It is true there was no sun, but neither was there a breath of cold air stirring. There was an even gray sky, a motionless atmosphere, and just sufficient snow to accentuate the beauties of a winter landscape, but not enough to envelop everything in an indiscriminating white pall. It was an ideal winter day in which to be outdoors.

The fresh snow that had fallen during the night and early morning remained on the trees, loading down every branch and twig. The well-known bridle-path through the woods, along which the boys passed merrily, had a double carpet, the upper one of snow, and beneath that a spreading of dry autumn leaves.

The great charm of a windless snow-covered forest is the absolute silence that prevails. Nothing was heard by the travelers save the distant occasional bark of a shepherd-dog, or a far-off train whistle, sounding like a dismal appeal for help, and subconsciously regarded by the hearers as an irreverent intrusion upon the silence of the solitude. Once in a while from an overweighted bough the soft snow would fall, but with a muffled sound as if fearful of breaking nature's sabbath calm.

As the boys traveled merrily on, here and there they saw the "vestigia" of birds or rabbits, and once they discovered what they supposed to be deer tracks in the snow. Descending to a pretty hollow they saw a scene which delighted them immensely. In the bottom of the hollow, which in the summer time was a beautiful glade in the forest, there was standing out alone with a clear space around it, a magnificent snow-laden spruce tree. Each graceful downward curve of the limbs sustained its load of pure white snow. The symmetry of the forest king was unmarred, but appeared glorified by its covering of whiteness.

The six were enraptured. They gazed long at the beautiful sight and would have delayed much longer had not Jack Beecham, who had assumed a temporary leadership of the excursion, warned them of the unwisdom of staying too long in one place.

A little farther along they saw an ideal winter scene. A large, comfortable farmhouse, with all the sheds and barns of a well-kept farm, lay at their feet under a mantle of white. From the broad chimney arose a straight column of blue smoke, telling of warmth within. In the barnyard were several head of comfortable looking sheep and fat cattle were contentedly ruminating in the

shelter of a huge straw stack. One of the inmates of this cosy looking farmhouse had, probably unconsciously, added the last touch to complete the artistic effect of this scene of gray and white. In the door yard on a clothesline were three or four brilliantly red woolen shirts which heightened by contrast the more somber colors of the scene.

“That's our Mecca if the fates be propitious,” said Tom Shealey, as the boys were viewing the scene here described from an elevated point at least a mile away.

“It is a comfortable looking house and doubtless has a well-stocked larder. I wonder if the Dowsibel of the Kitchen could be induced to turn a spit for us.”

“'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished,” observed Beecham, “for already I believe I could eat a couple of sheep and a Michaelmas goose.”

The boys had already walked a good seven miles. All were beginning to feel tired and to realize the necessity of a good meal.

“Suppose we can not be entertained there?”suggested Ernest Winters.

“Then we shall have to tramp on till we find a place where we can be—perhaps ten miles more," said Roy Henning teasingly.

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“O—oh,” groaned Ernest. Roy laughed.

“Well, do not despair, little one. Nine miles from here I know of a wayside hostelry where we may perhaps get some year old crackers and eggs, with an apology for coffee, and have the privilege of paying Delmonico prices.”

“Oh, oh! Nine miles—oh! Sixteen miles and crackers! Oh,” groaned Winters again. All burst out laughing at the comical look of despair Ernest's face had assumed.

“Look here, Ernie,” said Roy again,“if it comes to the worst we can eat our shoes and our skate straps, and our gloves for dessert.”

During their chatter they had continued their walk down the hillside toward the comfortable-looking farm. When about half way down the road they saw a jolly looking, red-faced man—in the clear atmosphere they could easily distinguish his red face—come out of the farmhouse, take his stand on the stoop or veranda, shade his eyes with his hand, and look a long time at the approaching boys.

“We shall know our fate in a few minutes,” said Jack Beecham in a tragic whisper to Ernest. “If we are not welcome he will set his savage dogs on us as soon as we get near enough, and then we shall be hungry orphans out in the cold world, sure enough.”

But no such catastrophe occurred. After gazing a few minutes the man went into the house and closed the door. The boys opened the yard gate with trepidation, fearful of the onslaught of some vicious watchdog, and more afraid than they would have been owing to the rascal Jack's ominous forecast of the possibilities. To their great relief no canine enemy appeared.

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All they saw pleased them. There was an air of prosperous, generous plenty everywhere. The hay-mows were bursting with sweet-smelling hay. The wheat barn was congested with unthreshed grain. The cows, pigs, and sheep were fat, and evidently well cared for. Repose was everywhere. In such a place as this, thought Roy, life must be well worth the living.

“Cave canem,” whispered Bracebridge, as he espied the watchdog lying on the porch of the house. This old Roman warning, “Beware of the dog” was, on this occasion, unnecessary, for when the animal saw the visitors he merely wagged his tail and did not take the trouble to stir. He seemed too fat and too contented with life to care about molesting a mere parcel of college boys, and his instinct told him they did not belong to the genus tramp.

As they reached the porch of the house the good-natured looking man who had watched them coming down the hillside opened the door. The boys noticed that he had put on his coat to welcome them. While making his observations he had been in his shirt-sleeves.

“Welcome, young gentlemen. Come right in by the fire,” was his hearty greeting. “Mother, Mother! Here are some young gentlemen from Cuthberton,” he called to some one in the large living-room.

A kind, motherly woman appeared in the doorway. She was clad in a warm homemade linsey dress, with a white handkerchief over her shoulders, and white muslin cuffs to match. A black lace coif surmounted her snow-white hair. The boys saw a very smiling, kindly face in the doorway greeting them.

“Welcome, welcome, my dears. You are welcome. But, please, scrape the snow off your shoes before you come in. I am very particular about that, am I not, Roland?”and she glanced affectionately at the big man beside her.

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“Yes, yes, indeed she is,” he remarked humorously. "Would you believe it, gentlemen, she leads me an awful life about my dirty boots—awful—awful,”

“Roland,” said the elderly lady, “how you do talk,”

The husband gave a sly, comical wink to the boys, who immediately understood the nature of

the amicable bantering which they soon found was going on constantly between these two.

“Take off your overcoats, my dears, and come up to the fire. You must be cold. There's no wind, but it's near zero. And did ye walk all the way, from St. Cuthbert's College? You must all be tired.”

She saw at once they were college boys.

“Did ye now! Well now! well! well! My! but that's a long way to walk. Roland, go ye and get another hickory back log, and start a good blaze. Now sit ye there and warm yourselves. I'll be back in a minute or two,” and the kindly woman put down her knitting and bustled out of the room.

“This is fine,” said Tom Shealey. “We are in luck for sure.”

“I wonder where she has gone,” ventured Ernest Winters, in a whisper.

“Gone? Um! um! don't you know, youngster?" said Jack Beecham, with a shrug, and a stage whisper. He was a terrible tease. “Better keep your eyes on your skates and overcoat, Ernest. Of course she has gone to gather all the hired men on the farm who will soon be here to drive us off the premises. The ogre of this castle won't stand for any such invasion as ours. You can see it in her eye.” [Pg 81]

But Ernest was not to be caught a second time.

“You can't fool me this time, mister. I think—but hush! here she comes.”

She came. With her came two of her maids bearing with them eatables—sweet homemade bread, apparently created to make a hungry schoolboy's mouth water, delicious pats of golden butter, red cheese, and an enormous pitcher of new milk—what a lunch for hungry boys!

“I am very glad you came,” again remarked the dear old lady. “To-day I give the farmhands and the dairy maids a sort of Christmas-week feast. It is a holiday in this house to-day. We don't have dinner to-day until after two o'clock, and as that is late and you must be hungry with your long walk already—- my! it's nigh onto eight miles to the big school, isn't it—you had just better take a snack before dinner-time. Come, sit up to the table, my dears; that is if you are warmed enough.”

The young fellows did not need a second invitation. Hunger is a good sauce. Growing boys are always hungry and the sweet, wholesome farmhouse fare was extremely enticing. Such butter! No oleomargarine there. Were it not, as mentioned before, that boys have a perpetual appetite, I am afraid that the amount of bread, cheese, butter, and milk disposed of would have seriously interfered with the enjoyment of the forthcoming dinner. At all events it wanted considerably over two hours to dinner-time. [Pg 82]

CHAPTER XI

An Afternoon's Fun

IF the writer of these veracious chronicles knows anything about boys—and he has been accused of having that knowledge—he is sure that his boy readers, and his girl readers, too, for that matter, will expect an account of that famous farmhouse dinner. Well, we can not delay the story by merely describing what people eat; yet it was a gorgeous feast for our friends. The enjoyment was greatly enhanced by the complete unexpectedness of it all. Not the least part of this enjoyment was the hearty, extraordinary welcome given to a troop of boys who had never been to the house before and were entire strangers to the good people who entertained them so royally.

A few minutes after two o'clock the farmer took from a shelf in the common living-room a large seashell and went to the porch and sounded it lustily, much to the astonishment of George McLeod, who had never seen a shell put to such a use before.

“How did you do it?”he asked.

“Just blew into it. Try it yourself,” said the farmer. McLeod tried and tried again, but could not produce a sound.

“What is it for?”he inquired.

“To call the hands to dinner. We have no bells or whistles out here in the country, so we use a horn, or a big shell, which is the next best thing, and I believe it sounds farther. On a still day I have heard this shell five miles away.” [Pg 83]

“Come, boys; wash for dinner,” called the motherly housekeeper. They were not allowed in the kitchen while the maids were dishing the dinner. They were taken to a side porch and there shown a rain-barrel and several tin pans and soap. A large round towel hung on a nail close by. The boys enjoyed this primitive method of performing their ablutions.

The dinner was a surprise even to those boys who were not unused to occasional big dinners at

home. George McLeod said that never in his life had he seen so large a turkey, but it was found none too large after it had passed the guests and traveled to the end of the table. And the stuffed ham! And the mince pies, and tarts, and rosy apples and nuts, and that old-fashioned plum pudding! Well, we must stop: it is not fair.

There were two wings in the rear of the house which the boys had not noticed when descending the hill in front of the dwelling. To one of these all the maids of the large household retired after dinner, and the farmhands went to the other, where they spent the rest of the afternoon in smoking and enjoyment until it was time to feed and water the stock, milk the cows, and do the other necessary daily farm chores.

Roy Henning and his companions, after the dinner, were invited to sit around the blazing yule log. The old lady sat in the center of the group in an old-fashioned armchair whose back reached some twelve inches above her head, and which had large, broad, comfortable arms. It was well padded and comfortable, and was covered with a serviceable chintz of a soft green color. She sat in the midst of her guests, before the blazing logs, a very picture of content and matronly dignity. Her husband sat next to her, and their guests were arranged on either side.

With fine tact she drew out each boy and made him appear at his best. Although, owing to the generous welcome given them, all reserve and bashfulness had vanished long before the dinner, yet the coziness of a winter afternoon indoors made them chatty and even confidential. They told her of the play the night before and of its success. They found interested listeners in host and hostess.

“I should so like to have been there,” said the old lady. “I am so fond of good dramatic productions. Providing the tone is correct there is no more elevating form of amusement than the drama.”

“Hold on there, mother,” said the husband, “grand opera is finer. In that we get all that dramatic presentation gives, with the addition of excellent music.”

“You know, my dears,” said Mrs. Thorncroft, for that was the old lady's name, “my husband is an enthusiast in matters musical.”

“So is Ernie Winters,” said his friend George McLeod.

“Is that so?” said Mr. Thorncroft, enthusiastically. "Is that so? Well, well! Now I wonder, mother, whether these young gentlemen could not sing some songs for us. Wouldn't that be fine, eh?”

“Jack Beecham can sing, ma'am,” said George again.

“Oh! you keep quiet, youngster,” said Jack.

“I won't. He sings first rate, sir.”

“Capital! Anybody else?”

“Yes,” said Beecham, “George McLeod there, who is so fond of getting other people into difficulty, can sing, too.”

McLeod shook his fist at Jack. But it was well known that he had a good voice.

Then, to the infinite delight of the musical farmer, songs and glees and madrigals and rounds were sung. It was an impromptu concert, but of no mean order, for the lads were well trained and had a good stock of songs. They wished, properly, to make a return in some way for the kindly treatment they had received and were still receiving. “Holy Night" was given, and “Good King Wenceslaus,” and “God Rest You, Merry Gentlemen," “Angels We Have Seen and Heard,” and many others. Then followed the college songs, and the concert was closed with the old favorite of St. Cuthbert's, the “O Sanctissima.”

When the singing had ceased there was a momentary silence, during which the six boys exchanged signals and glances. Suddenly there were two very startled people in the company around the ingle nook. The old lady half arose from her chair in consternation and amazement. Her husband stared in wonder when he heard such a vociferous and unexpected sound. Had the boys gone crazy? Certainly the old people, kind and hospitable as they were, for at least one minute thought so. Such an unearthly noise! It resembled nothing so much as a wild Indian warcry.

After all it was only the college yell.

In the school days of Mr. and Mrs. Thorncroft no such thing had ever been dreamed of. Living now in seclusion out in the country amid plenty and a certain rustic refinement, this elderly couple had never heard that modern accomplishment of a college man—the yell. It may be exhilarating to the college man; its use may be within the modern bounds of propriety, and it may, among the coteries of the more advanced, be considered the correct thing; but it is certain that the old lady, who had been educated in a French convent in her youth, hearing the yell for the first time did not think so. Her unformulated idea, judging from her looks, was that it was an indication of atavism—a going back, in one particular—to man's former state of savagery.

The boys were amused at her surprise. She then saw that it was something done for her entertainment. They evidently thought it was something very fine. These lads lacked, just now,

what one may call perspective. They lacked the proper appreciation of the correctness, or fitness, of things. They knew the college yell was the most enthusing thing on earth to them when used on the campus in a grand rush to victory, but they did not think, or realize, that the same yell given in a small room might be startling and even offensive to an elderly lady.

"You must excuse me now, boys, for a little while,said the farmer. "I must go and look after my men. I will be back soon. Mother"—he always called his wife by that name—"are all the walnuts gone?"

"No. Dear me! I never thought about them. I will get some."

She returned with a large dish of walnut and hickory nuts. In lieu of the usual table nut-crackers she brought a flat stone and two hammers. While the boys were busy cracking and eating nuts she said:

"You do not know, my children, what an unexpected pleasure your visit has been to me. Would you like to know the reason? Very well, I will tell you,she seated herself comfortably again in her green chintz-covered chair.

"I love boys because somewhere in the world there are wandering two of my own dear children. Both left home when they were about the age of you four big boys, and I love to remember them as such even now. They were fine lads, with rosy healthy cheeks, and they were good. You lads with your bright eyes and clear skins, and good pure faces make me see my own two darlings once again. Do I long to see them? Ah, yes. Oh, how much, how much!—once again before I die. But I am not grieving about them. No. Every night I commend them to the keeping of our blessed Mother, and I feel that wherever they may be a mother's prayers for them must be heard. I am sure that Our Lady is taking care of them." [Pg 87]

"Why did they leave home?"asked Henning sympathetically.

"Ah! the wanderlust. The desire to see the world. But you boys must come and see me again and I will tell you the story. There is no time now, as I see my husband coming from the cattle-shed."

"Mother," said the cheery voice of Roland Thorncroft a moment later, as he opened the door, "would not these young gentlemen like a good skate on the meadow pond? It has been swept by the wind, and is capital ice."

Jack Beecham looked at his watch. It was already four o'clock.

"We are thankful," he said, "but I am afraid we must do without that pleasure. It is quite time we started for home."

Husband looked at wife. She nodded, and then he nodded. Something was settled between them.

"Don't you like skating, boys? I thought you did, seeing each had a pair of skates along."

"Very much, sir," said Tom Shealey, "but we must be starting now." [Pg 88]

"Come along, then. Bring your skates. There is no wind and it is not nearly as cold as it was this morning. You will not want your top-coats."

The boys looked puzzled. The host saw the look of mystification on their faces. He burst into a merry laugh.

"You simple children," he said, as soon as he could. "Do you think that after being our guests all day, and singing for us as you have done, we are going to let you walk home! No, no. You just get your skates and come along with me. I'll show you the finest piece of ice in the country. You can skate there for an hour or an hour and a half. By that time coffee will be ready, eh, mammy? And a bobsleigh. We are going to have just the finest, most musical sleighride this evening you ever saw, or heard. You had better come along, mother, too."

"Really, I have half a mind to."

"Do, do, do, Mrs. Thorncroft; do, do," chorused the boys.

"I will see by the time you return for supper."

When the time came for starting, however, she decided to stay at home. She had prepared a lunch for the journey, for there was no time now for a formal supper. After each boy had taken a bowl of steaming coffee, she bade them adieu. Such handshakings! Such good-byes! The jolly lads subdued their merriment momentarily when she kissed each one a farewell on the brow. It was a beautiful moment in each one's life and was never forgotten by any of them.

They had a glorious ride in the moonlight and the frost. And so it happened that six merry boys came joyously into the college yard at about seven o'clock, happy, tired, excited, and chattering like magpies about the unexpected good time they had enjoyed. [Pg 89]

"I am glad the plan worked," said Mr. Shalford to himself. The boys never learned that the dinner at Thorncroft's was a prearranged affair. As soon as he had decided to send Henning and his companions out for a day's change, the prefect had told one of the farmhands to get a fast horse and arrange with the Thorncrofts for the boys' entertainment. He had suggested to Tom

Shealey and Jack Beecham the best route to take without arousing their suspicions, and everything had happened just as he had planned. Some men are positively ingenious in their charity. [Pg 90]

CHAPTER XII

Reports

PERHAPS it was not the wisest course to have pursued, after all, on the part of the prefect, to have allowed all the boys who were present at the discovery of the theft to be absent for the whole day. Twelve hours was ample time for a number of rumors to be born, grow strong, and become, in the minds of some, established facts. There were, unfortunately, all too many willing to believe, not maliciously but thoughtlessly, the wildest and most absurd report. A few were anxious to find something more than a mere misfortune in that which had befallen the treasurer. These did not hesitate to sit in judgment on their fellows, to discuss and impute intentions which with knowledge any less than omniscient they could not possibly possess.

Almost as soon as the discovery had been made, the news spread like wildfire through the yard. Excited boys gathered in groups and discussed the situation. It was certainly the biggest sensation St. Cuthbert's had witnessed in many a day—more exciting than the Deming affair. The rumors were legion and as contradictory as numerous.

“Hi! Jones; have you heard the news?”asked Smithers, about half an hour after the discovery.

“No. What?”asked Rob.

“Haven't heard of the robbery?”

“No. What robbery? No one has stolen our costumes, have they?” [Pg 91]

Rob Jones was full of the play of the night before, and just at this moment he considered the costumes, if not the most valuable, at least the most attractive things for a thief to make away with.

“Costumes! Not much! It's cash. Hard-earned cash; at least cash subscribed by other people. The delectable and very pious Henning has managed to lose seventy-two dollars which the boys had already subscribed for the cage.”

“Managed to lose! I don't understand. Speak plainer.”

“I mean, then, that Roy has lost that money and the report is that he was robbed of it.”

“You miserable cur,” said Rob Jones.

In a flash he saw Smithers' motive. There had evidently been a robbery. No matter how, or when, or where, without knowledge of any of the details whatever, Rob Jones was as sure as he was sure of his own existence that Roy, big, generous, noble-hearted Roy, was guiltless of the least shadow of complicity. As soon as he realized that Smithers, in the mere telling of the event, was so coloring the facts by innuendo and sneer that Roy's name would probably suffer, Jones became furiously angry.

“You miserable cur,” he repeated, and made a spring for the other's throat. Luckily the high collar he wore saved Smithers to some extent, or he might carry to this day some ugly marks. Jones fairly shook him, as a mastiff would shake a whelp.

“You cur! Is this the way you would blacken one's reputation! I tell you Roy is innocent, and you shall apologize to him for your dastardly insinuations. Come with me, come with me, I say,” and he began to drag the now frightened boy across the yard to where he thought Henning was. Smithers, trembling, began to say something, but it was unintelligible, which is very likely to be the case when another has a strong hold on the speaker's throat. [Pg 92]

“Hold on there, Jones. You can't find Henning. He's gone out. I saw him and several others leave about half an hour ago,” said John Stockley. A crowd had now gathered about the two.

“A fight! a fight,” was the word that ran around the yard.

Rob Jones relaxed his hold, but did not release the boy. Holding his fist close to his captive's face he said:

“Now take it back, or I'll thrash you till you can't see.”

“Wha—what did I say?”asked Smithers.

“You know very well what you said. You said that the delectable and pious Henning had managed to lose seventy-two dollars of the boys' money. That's a lie. Take it back, or I'll——”

“It isn't a lie,” whimpered the choking Smithers. "Didn't he have charge of the money? And hasn't it been stolen?”

“But did he, as you say, manage to have it stolen? That is, is he implicated in the theft, as you imply, or is he not? Speak out, man, if you have a spark of honor in you. Speak out, or I'll thrash you if I have to leave here to-morrow.”

Generous Rob! There were few boys at the college at this time who knew that this same Rob Jones once played the rôle which Smithers was so unsuccessfully attempting. He had repented of that long ago, but never had there come a time, for which he had often wished, when he could safeguard another's reputation, as a species of reparation for the damaging of Howard Hunter's in the long ago.

Irrespective of the idea that actuated him, Jones was quite convinced, even without knowing the simplest details, that Roy Henning must be free from all moral blame. Roy Henning was a boy whom Jones honored and loved. All these circumstances must be considered when we pass judgment on the vehement burst of passion which put young Smithers in danger of strangulation. He muttered some kind of apology to the absent Roy, and Jones with a positive grunt of disgust flung the frightened boy as far as he could send him. He stumbled along for several paces before regaining a steady footing. Mumbling something inaudibly, he slunk away, but more than one of the students saw an ugly, ominous look on his face as he went.

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“I hear all sorts of reports,” said Stockley; “tell us the true story, somebody.”

There was no lack of talkers, and almost as many theories. Few versions of the affair agreed in substantials. In the course of the morning all sorts of foolish rumors were flying around. One was, that Roy Henning had been caught in the act of pocketing the money and had been instantly expelled. In confirmation of this, the question was asked: “Where is he? No one has seen him since the discovery!" Another busy rumor had it that six boys were implicated and had been summarily dismissed.

“Did not the President see six boys off the premises this morning?”was advanced as a reason for this wild guess. Robert Jones, the absent boy's champion, happened to hear this last stupid remark.

“You set of babbling geese! You lot of old women! Here you go and jabber away people's reputations as easily as—Oh! you make me sick! Look here, you fellows, those six boys, and Henning among them, are out for a day's holiday. I say the President would rather send home six dozen dull-heads such as you fellows, than these six. They have been given a privilege that you ninnies would never get if you were here fifty years. Mark my words! To-morrow morning I shall call upon some of you brainless gossips—some of you silly babblers—to repeat before them what you have the impudence to say behind their backs.”

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In this manner Rob Jones did much to keep down the public excitement, and to reduce all stupid talk to a minimum. Mr. Shalford, also, had put something of a quietus on many senseless and ugly remarks which some malicious or thoughtless boys had set afloat. While admitting that the loss of the money was to be deplored, he did all in his power to exonerate Henning.

“Although the loss is severe,” he said, “yet after all no one individually suffers much. It is true that, probably, we shall not be able this winter to purchase the much-wished-for cage. Well, we have never had one yet, and we can wait a little longer. The whole affair might have worn a much worse aspect than it does. Suppose it had been one of our own boys that had been guilty! I shudder to think of such a thing! Now do not spread idle and useless conjectures as facts. We shall endeavor strenuously to discover the thief, and until he is discovered it were better to make no rash surmises. Especially must we refrain from accusing any one of the crime until we have positive proof of his guilt, and until he is discovered it were better and safer to make no surmises. Some very stupid rumors have already reached me. Pray do not lose all credit for common-sense. Let every boy act with moderation and justice. No one has a right to constitute himself a judge of his fellows. If any well-grounded suspicious circumstance comes to light, I am the one to be consulted and no other.”

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With such sensible remarks, and Rob Jones' generous defense of his absent friend, much of the excitement had died down before the return of the six excursionists.

When they arrived, wrapped in buffalo robes and hoarse from singing on the way, all the boys had assembled in the college theater to hear a burnt-cork minstrel entertainment and to listen to the orchestra. Supper was prepared for them in the infirmary, and they were told that they might occupy beds there "for one night only”if they wished to avail themselves of that privilege.

Thus it happened that Roy Henning and his friends met none of the boys that night. They had no opportunity of judging the public pulse until the next morning. Tired as Henning was from the exercise and the strain and excitement of the day, he could not sleep. After tossing from one side to the other for an hour he got up, and, throwing a blanket around him, sat at the window and began to do the worst possible thing under the circumstances. He began to think and brood.

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CHAPTER XIII

What Henning Remembered

THERE was much in Roy Henning's disposition to make him a creature of temperament. Had he not been so strong and muscular one would sometimes be inclined to imagine that he was possessed of the peculiarly feminine accomplishment, yclept “nerves.” For the least reason, and sometimes apparently for none, he was all exhilaration and enthusiasm. On such occasions everything was the brightest of bright rose-color, and the failure of a project in hand was not even to be dreamed of.

Should anything go ever momentarily wrong in a pet scheme, he became the veriest pessimist. All would go wrong; all the world was conspiring against him. If it rained at such times, even nature herself was in league against him.

While he was to a large extent a creature of temperament, it must not be supposed that he had not a high appreciation of manly qualities. None, perhaps, at St. Cuthbert's, certainly none of his day, had loftier ideals. With these and with his splendid physique he represented as fair a type of Catholic early manhood as could be found.

Henning had one peculiar trait, and to this may be traced much of the trial and vexation to which he had already been subjected, and much of which was to fall to him for the remainder of his time at St. Cuthbert's. He remained too much self-centered. This was frequently an occasion of trouble to him. An instance: it will be remembered that he was told by his director not to tell any one save his parents of his intention of entering the ecclesiastical state. He took this advice as absolute, and on it molded his conduct, with what inconvenience to himself we have already seen.

It is not to be wondered at, then, that he kept his thoughts and his fears and troubles arising from the loss of the money to himself. All that day, except that first burst of grief, he made no outward manifestation of what he was feeling or suffering. Of course he was thus depriving himself of the sympathy and help which his friends were only too ready to offer. Actuated by the highest of supernatural motives, he nevertheless deprived himself in his difficulties of the guidance and assistance of a faithful friend. Roy had yet to learn that troubles told into sympathizing ears are more than half healed. Small wonder then, with this habit of reserve, if the circumstances in which he found himself on this holiday night of Christmas week paved the way for a very gloomy meditation.

He recalled his early school-days. Why had he been so unlike other boys at school and at college? They were always full of self-assertiveness and self-reliance; he had always been timid and retiring. Perhaps it was the reflection of that timidity he had always felt in the presence of his father. Had his college life been a happy one? Unfortunately, for the most part, no. Not until last year—one year out of seven—when he had the company and full sympathy of such noble characters as Howard Hunter, Claude Winters, Harry Selby, Frank Stapleton, and others. With such characters as those he could not help being happy. But all these had gone; passed out of his life. Oh, if some of them were here now to help and show him what to do!

Those dear boys! And oh, that visit to Rosecroft, and that nearly fatal accident when he so narrowly escaped being struck by the chute boat! There was this consolation, that if the clouds thickened around him he would get Ambrose Bracebridge to take him over to Rosecroft Manor. There was Mrs. Bracebridge there, who would understand him and who could always help and direct and encourage him.

Thinking of her, Roy became more cheerful. I have said that he was a creature of temperament. Here it served him in good turn. He began to take a brighter view of the trials he knew awaited him on the morrow. Was he not entirely innocent? Who would dare to impugn his character? He would face all bravely, explain how he discovered the theft, and blame himself publicly for his imprudence in keeping so much money locked in a common table drawer. Then who would dare to say a word against his integrity! All would pass over soon. He would write a full account to his father, who would doubtless make good the loss.

“By the way,” he suddenly thought, half aloud, "am I responsible? Must I make restitution of the lost money?”This was a puzzling question which he could not decide. He determined to consult his spiritual director the first thing in the morning. But wouldn't he like to catch the thief!

This last thought led him to a mental survey of all persons who might possibly be guilty. To his credit, he spurned the idea that any one of the college boys could be the culprit. No St. Cuthbert boy could do such a thing, and if by chance it should happen to be a student, were they not all Catholic boys? Would not the first confession the thief made result in a full restitution of the ill-gotten goods? He had little hope that any such thing would occur, but he had not the slightest idea that any college student would prove to be the delinquent.

He endeavored to imagine a way the theft could have been accomplished. It must have been committed between seven o'clock on Wednesday night and six on Thursday morning, when the boys rose. It could not have been done later than a minute or two after six, because it was the custom of a number of boys who were in training to use the playroom as a kind of indoor running-track immediately upon rising and before they took their shower bath.

He remembered that the door of the committee-room had been locked by himself in the evening just before the play began. It is true that the only window of this room was not fastened, but there were iron bars on the outside. He remembered now that one of these bars—they were half above ground and half in a window well which was covered by an iron grating, that one of these

bars was loose, for he now recalled the fact that yesterday he had seen a boy move one of them with his foot as he stood on the grating. Could the thief have gone through the window?

Henning suddenly clutched his chair in the greatest excitement. There had flashed into his memory an incident which he had witnessed the night before, but which until this very moment had not come to his memory.

He remembered now that after the play last night he stood at the Philosophy classroom window, and across the yard he had seen a boy crouching down at these very bars. He had paid little attention at the time, as his mind was full of the *Richelieu* he had just played. The electric light in the yard was so located that it put the boy, the window, and one third of the sidewalk in deep shade. The other part of the sidewalk was very bright. He now remembered that when he first saw the boy he was in a crouching position. He had not paid much attention, and other things occupying his mind, he soon forgot all about it. What was that other thought? Ah! now he remembered. It was that wretched attempt to spoil the second scene of the play. He now recalled that for some time he forgot all about the boy at the grating but when he did think of him again he remembered seeing the boy as if he were just rising from his knees, which, as he stood, he brushed with his hand. At the time the boy received very little attention from Roy, who now remembered having vaguely wondered why any one was out in the yard when all, except the players, were in the chapel at evening prayers. Chapel bell had sounded immediately after the play, so the actors could not divest themselves of paint and disguises in time to attend.

Who could that boy have been? Last night Henning was not interested enough to find out. To-night he would give a great deal to know. He remembered now that the person, whoever he was, wore a black soft felt hat, which was pulled down well over his eyes and hid a great portion of his face. A soft felt hat would not identify any one. There were dozens of them in the yard. Oh, if he could only remember how the boy was dressed!

“Great heavens,” he ejaculated aloud in sudden, intense excitement.

He arose and clutched the blanket around him and folded his hands across his breast. His face was very white. He trembled. He began to pace the floor, muttering as one demented, or at least as one under the strongest stress of excitement. Great beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead. At one time he thought he was going to faint. He had made a discovery, and the discovery sickened him.

The boy he saw at the window grating had worn a blue sweater!

“No, no, no, no,” said Roy to himself many times. "I can't—I won't believe it. I must be mistaken. It can not be he! No, no! Yet no one else has a sweater of that color,”

By this time he had left his room and was excitedly pacing up and down the lengthy corridor. Luckily he was barefooted, or he would have disturbed everybody. The more he thought over his discovery the more he became convinced of the identity of the burglar. His conviction and wretchedness grew in proportion.

“It can not be! It can not be! Impossible! Impossible!" he muttered, as he strode up and down. "Andrew is mean in many things, but not a common felon! It can not, can not be true,” and he was hoping against hope for his family's sake.

Henning was never so excited in his life. For a long time he walked up and down on the cocoa-matting. His blanket trailing behind him, often caught the leaden binding of one of the strips of matting. This would be raised about a foot and fall with a bang; his excitement prevented him from noticing the noise he was making.

Not so the old infirmarian, whose room was at the end of the corridor. Peering out, he at first thought he saw a ghost. But ghosts do not trip on cocoa-matting. He followed the disturber of his repose. Henning, still under pressure of strong excitement, walked the whole length of the corridor. He turned suddenly to encounter the angry infirmarian.

“Oh, it's Henning! What are you doing at this unearthly hour of the night, disturbing my sleep?" said the old man in an unusually sharp tone for him, for he was generally mild and kindly. The official at first thought it was an ordinary case of somnambulism, but he soon found Henning to be very wide-awake.

“I've found it—the secret. I've got it,” exclaimed Roy in excitement.

“I guess you have—bad,” said the old man with grim humor. “Well, if you boys will fill yourselves up with rich plum-pudding and cake in the daytime, you must expect to suffer at night. There now, get back into bed, and don't disturb the whole house with your nonsense.”

“Oh, if I were only sure, I would settle the whole thing to-morrow,” muttered Roy. It is doubtful if, in his excited condition, he had seen the infirmarian at all.

“I'll settle you in the morning if you don't get back to bed at once. Get now.”

But Roy did not move. He had lapsed into a thoughtful mood. He stood, with his chin on his hand, motionless.

“Do you hear me, boy? It's time to stop this Indian ghost-dance business. There's no sense in breaking an old man's rest. Get to bed.”

The infirmarian was fully persuaded that the whole affair was only a practical joke, such as even sick boys, or those, at least, who sometimes get passed into the infirmary on the plea of sickness, are not always above playing. Seeing that Henning did not move or pay any attention to his words, the infirmarian took hold of his shoulders and gave him a vigorous shaking. This operation had the effect of bringing the distracted boy down to the knowledge of mundane things at once. [Pg 103]

“Eh! oh, ah,” he said in a bewildered, sheepish way. “I've made—a horrible—discovery,”

“You'll make another very unpleasant one in the morning if you don't get into bed at once. Don't cause any more disturbance.”

Without another word Henning went back to his room, and softly closed the door. He did not get into bed, but continued his ruminations.

“Andrew! Andrew,” he moaned, “I did not think it would come to this,”

He dropped his head on the window-sill and thought for a long, long time. It was in some degree a contest between self-interest and family pride. It was a long struggle, and the result of these cogitations he announced to himself as he threw the blanket from his shoulders across the bed. They were comprised in two short sentences:

“I must keep silence! I *will* keep silence,”

The decision may have been fanciful, or it may have been heroic. We shall see later. It led him into complications, the nature of which he little dreamed. [Pg 104]

CHAPTER XIV

Facing the Boys

WHEN Roy Henning entered the college chapel at half-past six to attend Mass, his movements from the time he appeared at the door until he had taken his seat were watched by many scores of pairs of curious eyes. To even the small boys, who came near the big fellows only in the chapel, Roy was an object of deep interest, for by some means the reports and rumors of the big yard had seeped through to the small division, and the most wonderfully distorted stories had been circulated. Henning had been attacked, fought desperately, conquered and bound, three men single-handed. He had been captured and carried away by burglars (wasn't he absent all day?) to their cave, and gained his liberty by the most daring feats of skill and bravery! Young imaginations are active, and young tongues more so.

The Philosophers—Henning's class—occupied the front benches in the chapel. When Bracebridge and Henning came in they had as yet met no boys since the public knowledge of the discovery of the robbery. Roy was in some peculiar way quite conscious that his advance along the aisle was causing quite a commotion, although its manifestation was decorous on the part of the boys, owing to the place in which they were gathered, and to their reverence for its divine Guest.

Rob Jones occupied the outer seat of the bench. As the two friends were passing him he turned his knees aside for them to do so and took Roy's hand and gave it a warm squeeze. The pressure was gratefully returned. Roy took heart. Much strengthened by this show of sympathy, he determined to meet all inquiries after breakfast and give all the information he possessed to any one who should ask. [Pg 105]

His regret over the loss was as poignant as when it was first discovered, but in some way he now felt that he could face all the boys and answer all their questions. He could not have done this the day before. Perhaps Jones' unspoken sympathy had given him courage.

As he expected, a large group gathered around him after breakfast.

“How did it all happen?”asked John Stockley, anxious to learn the particulars down to the minutest detail.

Henning gave them all the information he possessed. When the discussion had died down a little, he said: “As far as I can see, the thief must have entered through the window.”

“From the yard side, or the garden side?”

“There is but one window, if you remember, in the committee-room, and that is on the yard side. All the windows on the garden side are in the playroom outside the committee-room.”

“That's true, come to think of it,” said Stockley; "but could not the thief have gone in by the playroom by way of the partition door?”

“I do not think so,” answered Roy, “because, you know the door has a Yale lock, and I am the only one who has a key to it, except Mr. Shalford.”

“It is not likely that he robbed the drawer,” said Stockley with a laugh. “We are all very sorry

for you and you have our sympathy.”

Stockley looked around, and the others in the group nodded in affirmation.

“Thanks. You are very kind. You can not regret this occurrence more than I do, especially since I failed to take Bracebridge's advice to put the money in a safer place.”

“It's lucky that a fellow like you lost that money, and not a poor beggar like me,” remarked Smithers, who was standing on the outer edge of the gathering. Henning looked sharply at the speaker:

“Why?”he asked.

“Simply because a fellow like you who always has plenty of money will find no difficulty in replacing that which is gone. Such a thing would be impossible for impecunious me,” and the speaker turned his empty trousers' pockets inside out, and spun around on his heel. A few laughed, but the majority were silent, not liking the clownish exhibition of bad taste.

Henning was, naturally under the circumstances, in a nervous condition. He at once suspected that this Smithers was merely the spokesman of many others, and that he was expressing their sentiments as to what his line of action should be. Whether he acted judiciously or not in this immature stage of developments, we leave to subsequent events to determine. He replied, and rather warmly, too:

“I don't know so much about that, Smithers. It may turn out to be the misfortune of all, at least of all who contributed. I really do not remember whether you gave anything or not. I shall certainly not make up the loss unless the President fully convinces me that I am under obligation to do so. I am going to see him now. Even should he decide against me I do not know whether I shall be able to replace the money.”

A faint murmur of surprise and dissatisfaction, Henning was convinced, ran through the increasing group, as he, in company with Bracebridge, moved away toward the President's office.

The two walked slowly away from the crowd of boys. Bracebridge appeared to be thinking deeply. He had something to say, but hesitated to say it. Ambrose, with the instincts of a born gentleman, was always extremely careful of the feelings of others.

“Roy,”

“Yes.”

“You said just now to that cad of a fellow that you did not know——”

“Whether I should be able to repay the money. Yes. What of it?”

“That is a startling statement——”

“Not so very. But in the first place I am not at all sure that I shall be held responsible. Look here, Brose——”

They stopped at the foot of the steps leading to the President's room.

“Look here. Supposing there had been a fire, and the money had been burned. I should not have been told to restore it, should I?”

“I do not know that you would be held.”

“Now if one undertakes to hold money temporarily for others, and takes ordinary precautions for safe-keeping, do you think he would be held responsible for it if it were stolen?”

“But the safer plan would have been——”

“Am I held to take the safer plan? Of course, I regret that I did not take the safer plan, as you suggested, but am I held to have taken the safer plan? Wasn't the ordinary precaution sufficient? The door of that room was locked, the drawer of the table was locked, and it was not generally known that I kept the money there at all.”

“You seem to make out a good case for yourself," said Bracebridge laughing, “but we will let the President decide the case. It is too hard for us. But I did not intend to talk about that.”

“What then, old fellow?”

“You told Smithers, for the benefit of the whole yard I take it, that you did not know whether you would be able to pay back the money. Now I thought——”

But he stopped awkwardly upon seeing the deep blushes suffuse Henning's brow. What had he said? Were these blushes of shame or vexation? What could possibly be the matter?

“I—I—thought—that—I thought——”he stammered, at a loss how to proceed.

“Go on, old man. I know that whatever you would say, you do not intend to wound me.”

“Thank you, Roy. That's perfectly true. But perhaps I should not have broached the subject at all.”

"Go on; go on."

"Well, if you insist. I thought that you always had plenty of money. From what you say it seems that this is not the case. Now if—if you will allow me—if I might—if you would not be offended—if —oh! you understand me, Roy," he blurted out at last. "I want to help you pay it back."

Henning did not speak: indeed he could not have done so just at that moment. There was a very big lump in his throat. He hemmed and coughed once or twice, but that only made it worse. Bracebridge saw his friend's embarrassment, but did not speak. He took Roy's hand.

"I understand—true friend," said Roy, huskily, "but I can not explain."png—-\D.F Pg110 png—-\D.F Pg110

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He was silent for some time. He then said, partly to himself and partly aloud—"but I can. Why should I not do so? He is true and loyal. My father put no conditions of secrecy on me, or on his strange action. Ambrose?"

"Well?"

"Will you listen to me?"

"Of course I'll listen to you."

"Thank you. In order that you may know why I believe I shall not be able to pay back that money, I must first tell you of a peculiar thing my father has thought fit to impose upon me."

"Go ahead then, but since confidences are in order, let me tell you one first, which will make your story easier to tell, more probably. Next year you are going to study for the priesthood,"

"How on earth did you learn that?"

"At the Little Sisters' dinner. I was an unintentional eavesdropper, and I heard you say to the chaplain, as I was passing with some dish or something, these words—'for my own diocese: next year.' Let me congratulate you, Roy, on your choice. I have always thought ever since I first knew you that you were worthy of that high calling."

"You do surprise me, indeed," said Roy, "but your knowledge does not make my story the easier to tell."

Roy Henning then told Ambrose of his desire to enter the seminary, of his broaching the subject to his father during the last vacation, and of the strange test to which his father had thought fit to subject him.

"Now, Ambrose," he said, when he had finished his narration, "you may understand my conduct in refusing to play ball this year, on account of which so many of the boys seemed so disappointed. I have met with so many annoyances since last September that more than once before this loss of yesterday I had all but determined to leave old St. Cuthbert's, and be quit of it all. I would have done so if it had not been for you and Jack and Tom."

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"I am sincerely glad you did not."

"Well, I do not know whether I am. But let me go back to my subject. You see, that with my father's present peculiar view of things, it is by no means certain that he will make good this loss, and if he refuses I shall be in a bad pickle."

"Oh, Roy," said Bracebridge, with a vehemence that was almost passion, "let me do it. Let me do it for you. You know my father. You know that he has every confidence in me; he is not a crank, and——"

"Stop, Ambrose," said Roy, "I can not allow you, even by implication, to speak disrespectfully of my father. That I do not understand his motives is true. That it is mighty hard on me is equally true, but he is my father."

"There," said the other in dismay. "I am always putting my foot into it. Forgive me. I didn't mean anything; indeed I did not. Oh! Roy, you know what I mean. Let me help you out of this. It's as easy as A-B-C, you know. No one need know. Pshaw! one would be a poor friend, if, when quite able, he should hang back."

"Thanks, dear old fellow. Many thanks. We will see. We will see. If it comes to the worst, I won't hesitate to talk to you again about this. In the meantime we will drop it for the present."

With this Ambrose had to be content. The two friends then rapped at the President's door.

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CHAPTER XV

Suspicions

UPON the whole, Roy Henning was well pleased with the manner in which the boys had received him. Over-sensitive as he was, he had expected that they would either accuse him of

complicity, or openly blame him for the loss of the money. Taken altogether, they behaved remarkably well. The majority had real sympathy for him in the awkward position in which he found himself.

With a fine regard for his feelings, no one, after Roy's first announcement of his probable incapacity to refund, mentioned openly to him the question of restitution. Everybody understood that the President had arrived at some decision on this point, but all were in the dark as to its nature.

The days passed into weeks. Every effort was made to trace the thief, but without success. It became finally the general conclusion that some outsider, in no way connected with the college, was the culprit, and that he had gotten off safely with his booty. But in the many impromptu committees, organized in moments of unusual zeal for the purpose of "doing something," the unanswerable difficulty always arose—"How could a stranger know there was money in that particular room of the dozens in the college?"

The pitcher's cage was not purchased that winter. It was noticed by the boys that Andrew Garrett, as far as they could observe, never once spoke to his cousin about the loss. Roy, owing to the result of the thoughts of the sleepless night he had spent in the infirmary, imagined that Garrett had good reasons for keeping clear of him.

He was keenly alive to Garrett's every action, resulting from what he believed to be well-grounded suspicions. He did not fail to notice one peculiarity on the part of his cousin. Very soon after the robbery Garrett discarded the sky-blue sweater which had made him so conspicuous a figure in the yard ever since September. Roy confessed to himself that he was unable to attach any importance to this.

The theft had been too genuine a sensation at the college for all discussion to die out soon. In the course of time the whole yard appeared to be divided into two factions or parties. One side was loyal and strenuous in upholding Henning, claiming him to be beyond reproach and spotless in his integrity. As may be surmised, the leaders of this party were Jack Beecham, Tom Shealey, Ambrose Bracebridge, and Rob Jones, the first defender of Roy in his absence. These companions knew Henning well. They called him "Don Quixote."They teased him often, yet they knew that he was the soul of honor. Any one of these would as soon suspect himself as cast suspicion on Roy.

The existence of this party was the outgrowth of a popular indignation against a few boys who had, in discussing the robbery, persistently left the impression that they considered that there was an unsatisfactory mystery about it.

Out of kindness to Roy, little—scarcely anything—of what his friends heard in the yard reached his ears. When he did not happen to be present his friends were by no means backward in denouncing the opposition.

 Henning asked no questions, even of his friends, yet by a kind of unconscious assimilation he became aware of the strong sentiment against him, and of the strong resentment of those opposed to him. These things he learned more by averted glances and partially concealed avoidances than by overt act or speech. He never mentioned this to his friends, who thought he did not observe it. No one had ever told him of Jones' catlike spring at the throat of Smithers, yet Roy learned of it in some way, and while he was filled with gratitude toward Jones it only tended to confirm his own opinion that there was a large party antagonistic to him.

There was now only a mere speaking acquaintance between Henning and Garrett, which, as cousins, they could not avoid. They observed the merest civilities.

About the middle of February Henning and his friends were surprised to note that Garrett was spending money very freely. He had always availed himself of every little luxury that could be purchased within the college bounds, but now it seemed that he was more lavish than ever. Spring was approaching. Garrett purchased two or three baseball bats, a fine shield, mask, catcher's glove, and a number of the best baseballs. He evidently paid the highest prices, for upon inquiry it was found he had had no communication with the prefect, or with the sports' committee who usually secured some discount for cash. Clothes, shoes, hats, and ties were also lavishly purchased. What could it all mean? To add to the mystery Stockley and that boy Smithers, who had turned his pockets inside out in proof of his impecuniosity, were also spending considerable money, although a much less amount than Garrett.

 All this, of course, strengthened Roy's suspicions. Where did he get all the money? And why was he making such a lavish display? Roy was, nevertheless, puzzled by the evident fact that while all noticed Garrett's free purchasing, no one appeared to suspect him of any connection with the lost funds.

Henning could not in conscience mention his suspicions to any one. If any one would but broach the subject, then he would talk and take advice on what was the best line of action to pursue. His common-sense told him that to accuse his cousin publicly on his mere suspicion would be worse than useless.

To add to the complications of the situation, within a week or two of Garrett's expenditures Roy himself began to spend money freely. Where it came from was a mystery which was not cleared up for many a day. He expended quite a sum on books, baseball goods, shoes, etc.

It is quite certain that Henning did not realize how large the majority was who were in

opposition to him. Had he done so he would have acted with more discretion, for the time was critical for him. Even some of his best friends were sorely put to it to account for his outlay. More than one of his staunchest supporters began to waver in their allegiance. No one doubted his integrity, but some were not pleased with his want of prudence. Before closing this narrative we shall explain where this money came from, why Roy bought the particular goods he did, and why he bought them at this particular time.

"I wonder how it is," said Smithers, "that Henning has so much money to spend just now."

"Don't know I'm sure, but I suppose it is all right," replied Stockley.

"But isn't it strange that he who has been so close all the year should change and be lavish so suddenly?"

"Oh, come off! that's an innuendo! Give the fellow a show. You are hinting that it is the subscription money he is now spending, and that, consequently, he was the thief."

"Oh, say, don't put it that strong," said Smithers uneasily.

"But that's what you mean, all the same. I don't like him, but to do him justice, I don't think—I'm sure—he had any hand in getting away with that money."

"Why?"

"Oh, because—because I don't believe he had, that's all."

"But that's no proof."

"Didn't say it was. I said it was my belief."

Just at that moment Bracebridge and Garrett joined the speakers.

"Look here, Bracebridge," said Smithers, "Stockley says that he doesn't believe that Henning had anything to do with taking that money."

"I'm sick of all this talk," said Ambrose angrily; "just as if any one who knew Henning at all could entertain such a thought for a moment,"

"But why is he spending so much just now?"insinuated Smithers.

"I don't know, and I don't care. It's none of our business anyway."

But he did care. He was very uneasy. He remembered what Roy had told him of his home affairs. He was sorely puzzled, yet his loyalty did not waver.

"For my part," said Garrett, "although Henning is my relative and I am therefore naturally concerned in all that he does, I can not help thinking that his action is a little unfortunate."

"For your part," retorted Ambrose, "and for your own credit, you had better say as little as you can."

"For my part I shall say what I choose, and to whom I choose."

"Then do not choose to say it to me, for I won't hear it," and Ambrose walked away, very angry.

"Humph! the great mogul is getting quite huffy," remarked Smithers. "Well, never mind, Garrett, for although Henning is your cousin you are not to blame if he falls under suspicion."

In his heart Garrett knew Henning was innocent. But he did not like him. He was jealous of him. He saw in him qualities of mind and heart which he knew he himself did not possess, and, as is the case with all small natures, he was jealous. He had neither the wish nor the courage to state his belief in Roy's innocence.

On the other hand Garrett despised Smithers. The boy was poor. Every one knew that. But poverty is no disgrace, and never at St. Cuthbert's has it been a subject of reproach. There are some natures which become vicious because of their poverty. Smithers was one of these. He was one of those who, in season and out of season, was forever reiterating what he called his suspicions. This was the more base, because, had there been any foundation for them, gratitude should have compelled him to remain silent. On more than one—on many an occasion—Henning had quietly and unostentatiously helped this boy out of little financial difficulties, such as paying his library fees and fines, securing for him tennis shoes, and little things of that kind.

Garrett had just heard all this for the first time, and the better side of his nature at that moment, notwithstanding his strange remark to Bracebridge, was in the ascendant. Secretly he was ashamed of his comradeship with Smithers, who was perhaps one of the most undesirable boys at St. Cuthbert's.

"Shock"Smithers—so named on account of the permanently untidy condition of his hair—was, therefore, very much surprised indeed at what he next heard from Garrett.

"Of course," Garrett began, "as you speak with so much certainty about my cousin, you have positive proof of his guilt?"

Smithers began to laugh. He thought that a good joke.

“I see no laughing matter. I ask you a plain question. You have proof of Henning's guilt—which for some reason you are withholding?”

“Not—not exactly proof, you know, but, eh—but you know, eh—you know as well as I do how suspicion points to him.”

“Then you make all this to-do on mere suspicion?”

“Of course. We have nothing more than suspicions, have we?”

“Yes, certainly. You must have more than suspicion when you state publicly that Roy deserves to be in State's prison.”

“I—I did not say that. I—”

“Yes, you did. I heard you myself, and on that I largely based my own judgment. Don't lie.”

“I did not say that definitely, you know. I said that if what is said about him is true he ought to be there, Andy.”

“You are a liar! I myself heard you say it, and what is more, I have only just now heard how Roy has been treating you ever since September, giving you books, money, and buying things for you. You're a skunk! that's what you are.”

Garrett walked away. Smithers was left in no enviable frame of mind. The principal part of his chagrin arose, not from the fact that he had been mean and cowardly, but that it had been discovered that he had received assistance from any one, and especially from Roy Henning. [Pg 118] [Pg 119]

CHAPTER XVI

Roy Makes a Move

ROY HENNING gave much anxious consideration to the ugly tangle in which he found himself involved. He sincerely, but unavailingly, regretted that he had allowed himself to become the treasurer. Perhaps, he thought, if he had followed the letter of his father's wishes this unfortunate business would never have happened.

The more he thought over what he remembered to have seen on the night of the play the more convinced he became of the guilt of one who would be the very last he could wish to be implicated.

At times he doubted and wavered in his convictions. Was he absolutely sure that it was his cousin whom he had seen that night? Could it not have been some one else? There was no one else in the yard who wore a blue sweater. He was sure he had seen this on the boy who had entered the window. Yet was he absolutely sure that it was Andrew? When he put this question to himself and demanded an answer, he always gave it unhesitatingly in the affirmative. Yet, strange to say, at other times he doubted the accuracy of his conclusions. Might he not be mistaken after all? There was a possibility. The figure was in the glare of the arc light so short a time, and in the shadow so much longer. Was it not possible that he was mistaken after all?

The size of the boy certainly corresponded with his cousin's build and height, but, after all, most boys of about the same age resemble each other in build. Oh, if it had not been for that soft hat pulled down over the face! Could he have obtained but one glance at the face in the strong electric light there would be no hesitating. But this the thief took precautions against. The leaf of the hat was drawn well over the nose, making it impossible to see the face. [Pg 120]

There was no question about the blue sweater being there. The short black coat which Garrett usually wore over the sweater was there too. Was there a sufficient motive on the part of Andrew to commit such a crime? On this point the boy was much puzzled. Garrett, he knew, had plenty of money. There could be no pecuniary inducement to commit the crime. Ha, perhaps there was an inducement after all. Before Christmas had it not been an open secret that several boys had lost heavily—heavily for boys at school—on some foolish betting? Mr. Shalford had heard of this foolishness, found out a few of the bets, and forced the winners to return the money. He had broken up, apparently, the habit which periodically becomes a temporary mania with a certain class of boys. Perhaps Garrett had lost a bet and wanted money!

Henning could not believe that any personal pique against himself would be a sufficient inducement for his cousin to go to such lengths to gratify it. Felony is high payment for the gratification of spite. That threat of “getting even,” which Garrett had used against him last summer, Roy believed to be the expression of a momentary vexation. It is certain he did not connect it with anything so serious as this robbery. Long ago he had forgotten it, and he supposed Andrew had done so too.

[Pg 121] What then, supposing it were he who had committed the crime, could have been Garrett's motive? Roy could not fathom the difficulty. He had to leave it unsolved. He saw there was no proportion between Garrett's little pique and the enormity of this deed, which would forever

brand the perpetrator as belonging to the criminal class. Surely Andrew had more sense than to do such a thing; and yet!

"Why, oh! why did I," said Roy to himself, "go mooning about and looking out of that window after the play that night! Why didn't I go to bed at once, like the rest? Then I would never have been haunted with this memory. I am going to get this thing settled, and that soon. I'll see Garrett privately if I can, publicly if I must. I will make him exonerate me from all suspicion. I can not imagine how any suspicion became attached to me. He would hardly dare to set it afloat. This thing has to come to an end, and that at once."

These tormenting thoughts came to his mind one Sunday afternoon in early spring. Everything out of doors spoke of joy and cheerfulness. The trees had burst their buds, and the winter bareness of landscape had been once more turned into a thing of beauty. No trees were as yet in full leaf, but there was a delicate pale-green tracery on bough and twig, a sign of life and luxurious beauty later on, and full of the beauty of promise now. Beneath the feet the young grass was rich and soft, while here and there were seen the first white flowers in the vocal hedgerows.

Full of thoughts by no means attuned to the happy season, or in keeping with the loveliness of the day, Roy started out to find his cousin. He was just in the mood to "have it out" with him. He had worked himself up to a pitch of resolution, in which was blended no little anger at the injustice of his position. He was determined to have the wretched affair settled at once and forever. He was morally certain that no one save himself knew of his cousin's supposed delinquency, because, he argued and probably correctly, if any one else had known it, it would have been divulged long ago.

Searching the yard, study-hall, and gymnasium, as well as the large reading-room and playroom, he could find no trace of Garrett.

"He is out walking, I suppose. Oh, well! I'll catch him before supper and see what he has to say for himself."

Henning did not care to have his friends, Jack and Ambrose, with him just now. He wanted to be alone to think over the situation. With this object in view he went toward the college walk, a beautiful winding path, overshadowed by fine old elms, beeches, and oaks. Here and there along this half-mile of graveled way rustic seats had been placed for the convenience of the students. The path was irregularly circular. In the center the ground was much lower and was thickly covered with fine trees, whose tops in many instances barely reached the level of the footpath. On the outer side of the walk the ground rose and the slope was covered with noble forest trees.

The softness of the spring verdure, the sweet caress of the warm air, the repose of this charming spot, and its complete sequestration from the perennial noise and bustle of the yards and ballfields, tended to soothe the irritated feelings of our friend. He went to the farthest limit of the walk without meeting a single friend. There he sat down on a bench to rest. In a few minutes he heard approaching footsteps on the gravel. Determined to let the intruder upon his thoughts pass on unnoticed, he did not raise his head from his hands as the walker approached.

"Good afternoon, Roy."

Henning looked up and saw—Garrett. He was surprised by the way his cousin addressed him, for, never since the first week of the school-year had the cousins used any other form of address than their surnames.

"Oh! Good afternoon."

"Fine weather for early spring."

"Yes."

Roy saw that, by his manner, Garrett had something to say, but he wanted just then to have the saying. At all events he was determined to say the first word of consequence.

"I wonder you are willing to talk with me—are not afraid of being seen talking with me."

"I don't see why you should——"

Henning interrupted. He was quite ill-tempered this afternoon, and this was quite unusual with him.

"No, you don't see why," he said. "You haven't been the cause of my being suspected of that wretched thieving, have you! You are not hand and glove with those fellows who would stop at nothing if they could injure me."

"I must admit," said the other, "I have heard a great deal some of them say."

"And of course believe it all, or pretend to."

"Pretend to! What do you mean?"

"I mean that before them you pretended to believe me guilty. Knowing what you know, it must have been all a pretence."

"Knowing what I know! What do you mean?"

"You know very well, indeed, what I mean."

"I do not."

"Yes, you do; you are only pretending now. Your action now is of a piece with your whole conduct ever since December 28, when the money was taken." [Pg 124]

"Roy Henning! what on earth do you mean? You are either crazy, or laboring under some great mistake."

Garrett saw with alarm the trend of Henning's remarks. Was his cousin going to charge him with the theft? He was very well aware that Roy's charge, if he should make one, would receive much more credence in the yard than would any counter-charge against Roy. He became quite alarmed, for he was quick enough to see some very unpleasant consequences. His look of alarm tended to confirm Roy in his suspicions.

"No wonder you look frightened, cousin—dear cousin—loving cousin," said Henning sarcastically. He had a long time suffered greatly from innuendo and unfriendliness, but we must do Roy the justice to say that such a manner of speech was uncommon with him. Just at this moment he was nervous and over-irritable and had not complete control of himself or of his words.

"No wonder you look frightened," he continued, "now that the tables are beginning to turn. I have borne suspicion and averted looks from the boys long enough. You have to bring about a change. You can do it."

"And how, pray?"Garrett was getting angry.

"You know how very well. One word from you would clear me. And—you—have—got—to say it,"

"It seems to me that you are taking leave of your senses. How on earth will one word of mine clear you? The only way that could be done, it seems to me, would be to incriminate myself, and as to that—no, I thank you." [Pg 125]

"I care not one red cent whether you incriminate yourself or not. You must clear me—do you hear?"

"I would like to know how, and, moreover, I would like to see you make me."

"I can not—that is, I will not make you—but not for your own sake."

Henning remembered the promise he had made to himself of silence on the night he had spent in the infirmary. On the other hand Garrett was becoming very much afraid of his cousin. He had never seen him so excited or determined before. What did Roy know? What could he tell to harm him? He knew that his record with the faculty, and with the boys too, was not an enviable one. Whatever Roy would do he would undoubtedly be believed, and he realized that he would have hard work to disprove any allegations Roy might make.

"You speak correctly when you say you can not," Andrew retorted.

"I do not! I can make you if I will. For other reasons I do not wish it. You must do it without compulsion."

"Do what?"

"Clear me. Clear me of all suspicion."

"It seems to me that in the present state of the boys' minds that would be impossible. In saying what I have said about you, Roy, I have only followed the lead of others. Things have been hinted so often that at last I began to believe some of them—at least partly believe them."

"You coward," said Henning, now thoroughly angry. Both boys rose from the bench simultaneously and faced each other. By a singular chance each had his hands in his pockets. It appeared for an instant that they were coming to blows. So strained was the situation, that if either had at that moment taken his hand from his pocket it would have been a signal for a fight. Henning's face was white with anger. Garrett's was red with apprehension and vexation. [Pg 126]

"You are a coward," repeated Henning; "you know a great deal about this affair."

Garrett thought best to deny all knowledge.

"I do not."

"Indeed! and I suppose you know nothing of the loosened bars of the window of the committee-room?"

"No."

"I thought not. And I suppose you know nothing of the boy who was seen to have gone through that window on the night of the play?"

"No."

"Oh, no! Of course not. I suppose, too, there are half a dozen boys who sport sky-blue sweaters to make themselves conspicuous."

Henning waited a moment and Garrett said:

“It is no one's concern but my own what I wear.”

“Well, my dear, affectionate cousin, that blue sweater was seen—seen, mind—that night to go through that window and come out again.”

Garrett started violently. Henning took the motion for an admission of guilt, but Garrett had no intention of making such acknowledgment. Indeed he became as angry as Henning was.

“Whether I am guilty or not, a question I absolutely decline to discuss, do you think, you jackanapes, that I would admit it to you? Not if I know myself. Do you think I am going to swallow whole a story like that? You must think I am dreadfully green, or dreadfully afraid of you. If you have evidence, bring it forward. That you can, and will not, is to me, permit me to say, all buncombe. Bah! You weary me! Do what you can and what you dare,”

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Snapping his fingers with a show of righteous indignation, Garrett walked away. If the boy were guilty, if it were he who was seen to enter the room through that window on the night of the theft, he now acquitted himself of a splendid piece of acting. If he were innocent, then his indignation were natural. Henning would then have to acknowledge that he had done him a gross injustice. But Roy was firmly convinced that his cousin had brazened the thing out. He regretted that he had let him know that he would not compel him to make an acknowledgment of his guilt. Roy had never expected that he would do so. All he required from his cousin was that he would speak in his favor and make an effort to turn the tide of opinion, trusting in his friends for the rest.

When Andrew Garrett moved away Roy's first impulse was to follow him and compel a confession. Suddenly the thought came to him that perhaps he had blundered. Under the new and annoying impression he stood motionless until Garrett had disappeared along the winding walk. Once more, as his anger left him, he sat down and, head in hands, meditated on the ugly position in which he found himself, made worse than before if he had blundered.

He began now to have doubts regarding the identity of the thief. Was it not just possible that some other person possessed a blue sweater as well as his cousin? Could he have been mistaken, after all? The window from which he saw the thief was a hundred yards away. Could he, after all, positively identify a person at that distance at night? Was he not too much excited after the successful *Richelieu* performance to be in a condition to be certain? He had taken only a casual glance at the figure, and it was more than twenty-four hours afterward that he had remembered the boy wore the fatal blue sweater, which he now began to realize was the one and only means of identifying his cousin. Garrett must have some good grounds for his steady and persistent denials; yet that he should deny was not surprising to Roy for he knew his cousin fairly well.

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The young man would have remained long in his unpleasant and disturbing meditations had he not heard some one approaching, and singing some ridiculous parody which had recently “caught” the yard, having been cleverly introduced into a recent debate on the relative importance of the Hibernians and the Anglo-Saxons in this country. It ran:

“There came to the beach a poor exile of Erin,
The dew on his thin robe was beany and chill—
Ere the ship that had brought him had passed out of hearin',
He was Alderman Mike, introducing a bill.”

It was Jack Beecham's happy voice, and his merry laugh echoed through the trees. At that moment, as he turned a bend in the walk, he caught sight of Roy.

“Shame on the false Etruscan who lingers in his home,” he shouted. “Come on, Roy; Tom Shealey and myself are going for a good long tramp in the woods. Why, man, you look as doleful as a November day. What's up? Come on; a good walk will drive the blues away.”

The two friends took Henning for a good long tramp, which is the most satisfactory curative process for driving away depression of spirits, settling one's nerves, and banishing ill-temper.

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CHAPTER XVII

Garrett is Angry

WHEN Andrew left his cousin on the college walk he was in a very angry mood. He was quite sure that Henning did not know whether he was guilty or not, and he was satisfied that he had so guarded his words in his unexpected interview that Roy would not be able to take anything he had said as an admission of guilt. As soon as he discovered the drift of his cousin's remarks he made up his mind that he would not be betrayed into any speech that afterward might be used against him.

He had actually started out, as Henning had done, to find his cousin to talk with him. It will be remembered that he had used a very conciliatory tone, and spoke to his relative by his Christian

name. He was acting at the moment under one of the few good impulses that came to him at that period of his life. But all this was most unfortunately frustrated by Henning's miserable ill-humor of the moment.

Returning to the yard after this stormy interview, he met the two boys, who, unfortunately, exercised the worst influence over him of any boys in the school, Smithers and Stockley. Nothing could have been more inopportune than their presence just when he was sore in spirit and angry. He was sore and more or less ashamed at the part he had played in regard to his cousin's reputation. He was not always without touches of compunction on this subject. He was angry, too, because of the recent interview. He knew that on account of this very anger he would very likely do more injury to Henning. His mind was in that state that made it ripe for any mischief these two worthies might suggest.

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“We have been looking for you, Garrett. Where have you been?”said Smithers.

“Along the walk.”

“Some one in the yard said you had gone hobnobbing with your respectable relative,” remarked Stockley.

“I was talking with him for a while, but not hobnobbing, as you call it.”

“What had he to say?”asked Smithers. There was an ugly, vindictive leer on Smithers' face which Garrett never liked and which in his better moments he detested. He really despised him, and all his life he had never associated with this class of boy. Not being in very good humor, he said:

“He had no compliments for you, at any rate.”

“Didn't expect he had. It's not very likely that one hanging over a precipice with regard to his reputation, as he is, would have any compliments for any one. But what did he say, anyway?”

“Oh, nothing,” answered Garrett. “I find that he is more fully aware of the suspicions against him than I imagined. He is pretty sore under them, I can tell you.”

Smithers' eyes glittered with satisfaction. By a strange perversion he was pleased that Henning was suffering. Why? The answer is difficult. Because, perhaps, Henning had done him many a good turn. In time of necessity he was glad enough to receive assistance. When better times came for him, he promptly forgot. He lacked gratitude. He was only one more exemplification of the old adage: “If you want to lose a friend, lend him money, and if you want to gain an enemy put some one under great obligations to you.”

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“Sore, is he? I can make him sorer still. Have you heard what has been found?”asked Smithers, looking first at Stockley and then at Garrett.

Had the latter been a little more observant he would have noticed Smithers' eyelids twitch in an unmistakably nervous way, and his fingers open and close spasmodically.

“No, I have not. Not the stolen money, I suppose," laughed Garrett mirthlessly.

“Not much,” said Smithers, “that's not likely to be found. I guess that's gone for good.”

“What then?”

“A piece of writing,”

“Whose?”

“Henning's.”

“Of what nature? What has it to do with the suspicion in the yard?”

“It has a good deal to do with it.”

“Well, out with it, if you have anything to tell. I'm tired of this dallying. What's up?”

Garrett, still out of temper, was quite testy. It can be seen that he had very little respect for these boys. He made no pretense of choosing his words with them.

Smithers, nothing daunted by the surly manner in which he had been addressed, after more or less fumbling, drew from the inside pocket of his coat a crumpled sheet of letter-paper. It bore the college printed address on the top, and was dated December 23.

“Whose writing is that, do you think?”asked Smithers.

“I don't know. Let me look at it. Yes, I do though! It's my cousin's! What does he say?”

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He straightened out the creases and read the letter hurriedly.

“Phew! by all that's great, this is a stunner,” said Garrett.

The other two boys exchanged glances of satisfaction. Smithers' eyelids twitched more than ever.

“Where did you get this from?”

“No matter where it came from,” answered Stockley; “it's just what we want to settle this business. It has been hanging fire long enough. It ought to be settled for everybody's sake. I think this will do it.”

Garrett did not like his cousin, and hitherto had not been above doing him a bad turn occasionally. He was recognized, more or less, as the mouthpiece of those opposed to Roy. To do Andrew justice it must be admitted that he never quite realized what injury he was doing his cousin. A full realization of the injustice of his course was not to come to him for a long time, but now, since this interview, he was very uneasy. If Henning was determined to act on the offensive, he must prepare to defend himself. Here was a piece of paper, luckily thrown in his way, with which he could divert suspicion from himself should his cousin be goaded into retaliating. He knew enough of Roy's character to realize that he would have his hands full, if that individual decided to take the initiative in the tangle.

But what of the “find” of Smithers? What important piece of information did it contain which was evidently so detrimental to Henning as to draw the sudden exclamation of surprise from Garrett's lips? It was not a complete letter, but merely a first draft. It ran as follows: “My dear friend.”

The word “friend” had been marked through and "chum”inserted instead. [Pg 133]

“Your letter rec'd last Monday. Sorry to say that ... have no money now ... so can't possibly do the thing you wish ... awfully sorry ... feel like stealing the money rather than letting this thing go undone. However, wait till the end of Christmas week. It won't be too late then. Something's going to happen before that! Then we can go into partnership—at least for the merit of the thing. Keep everything dark. Don't say a single word to anybody about it. Mind now, chum, everything must be kept a secret, or—smash. Yours, Roy H.”

The missive, or first copy of one, looked mysterious enough. To these boys into whose possession it had by some means fallen, it had a decidedly dark-lantern appearance. To their minds, in view of what had happened near the end of the Christmas week, the words seemed to have a peculiarly sinister meaning in proportion to each one's prejudice.

Was the sketch of the proposed letter genuine? There was no doubt as to that in Garrett's mind. Everybody knew Henning's writing. Without hesitation Garrett pronounced it genuine.

But what could the letter mean? Had his cousin deliberately planned the robbery? Smithers believed, or said he believed, this to be the case. Garrett knew better. In spite of this letter he knew that was too absurd a notion to entertain. He was, nevertheless, shrewd enough to see the value of this crumpled note as a weapon of defense for himself.

He deliberately put it into his pocket.

“Hold on there, Garrett,” exclaimed Smithers, "that note belongs to me.”

“Excuse me,” replied Andrew, “but I believe it belongs strictly to Roy Henning.”

“No, it doesn't. It's my property. I risked—I mean I discovered it, and it's mine.” [Pg 134]

“I beg your pardon, but for the present you may consider it my property. There may be further risk, you know, for you. It will be quite safe, I assure you, in my keeping.”

“Well, I'll be hanged,” exclaimed the dismayed Smithers.

“Shouldn't wonder in the least—some day," replied Garret imperturbably.

“But it's mine,”

“Beg to differ with you. It never was yours. It is mine now, at least for a time. I haven't decided yet what to do with it—whether to tear it up, or restore it to its rightful owner.”

He intended to do neither one nor the other. He had formed his plan, but he had not the slightest intention of taking either Stockley or Smithers into his confidence. The latter was very angry at the loss of the letter, but he knew very well that he could not get it back until Garrett pleased to return it. His ill humor was not lessened when Garrett said as he walked away:

“By the way, I should recommend you to say nothing about this so-called 'find' of yours, you fellows, for I am strongly under the impression that it is bogus, and besides, it might be difficult to convince people you came by it honestly.”

Smithers' eyelids exhibited that nervous twitching more rapidly than ever. [Pg 135]

CHAPTER XVIII

A Talk

SHEALEY and Beecham captured Roy Henning and took him for a long stroll through the woods that Sunday afternoon. He, in the keen enjoyment of witnessing nature once again

awake from its long winter slumber, for a time forgot his annoyances, and was the merriest of the three. The time passed as only a bright holiday can pass with the light-hearted.

Now there was a hunt for the nimble squirrel, which always got safely away. Anon there was a plunge into the thickest coppice for spring flowers. From these dense undergrowths the three more than once emerged minus the treasures they sought, and plus a number of scratches on hands and face, and with not a little damage to Sunday suits. In the sunny spots they found the first delicate fern fronds. In one particularly romantic spot they found a number of beautiful fungi. Jack Beecham dexterously made a little birch-bark box, which he filled with soft green moss, carefully placing his treasures therein. In their journey they were lucky enough to come across some morels, and one or two of those vegetable curiosities, the earth-star. With these boys a ramble into the country was much more than so many steps taken to a certain spot, and so many back again. Their studies had sharpened their powers of outdoor observation, so that a walk was an intellectual exercise as well as a physical one.

Many times during that afternoon Roy recalled the interview with his cousin a few minutes before starting, but with a certain determination he put the matter from his mind for the present, intent on giving himself entirely to the enjoyment of the beauties of nature on an ideal spring day, and to the pleasant companionship of two very delightful fellow-students. For a time he forgot all about Garrett.

When the journey was near its end; when the tired and healthy, hungry three were once more nearing the college grounds, the thoughts of what he had said and done with regard to his cousin, and that same cousin's noncommittal responses, once more filled Roy's mind and made him thoughtful and reserved again.

“There you are,” scolded Jack Beecham; “I do declare, Roy, you ought to live in the woods altogether. As soon as you come near home you at once put on a long face, turn down the corners of your mouth, and look as sour as—as vinegar and water.”

“Yes,” added Tom Shealey, “I'm going to call you in future Old Glum—that's the only name that suits you now. What on earth is the use of being so sober and somber about things?”

“Just at present,” answered Roy, “I do not think I have anything to make me unusually cheerful; nothing certainly that would make me dance and sing with joy.”

“Afraid of your semi-annual exam?”asked Beecham.

“No. That examination does not bother me. The Little Go, as our English cousins call it, will, I believe, be somewhat of a picnic for me.”

“That's what you think,” said Jack, “but we don't all think that way, do we, Tom?”

“Indeed, no,” answered Tom Shealey grimly. The half-yearly had certain terrors for poor Tom. He had not shone with particular brilliancy in the examination in minor logic. He assured his friends that the examiners were unanimous that he had not shown any remarkable scintillations of genius in his mathematical trial, and the least said about the opinion entertained of him by his professor in geology and astronomy, the better for Tom's reputation as a hard student.

“Well, then, Roy,” asked Beecham, “if you are not afraid of the semi, why do you look so gloomy?”

“I wish most heartily, Jack, that something would turn up to settle that wretched robbery business. At all events, one great load is off my mind. Yesterday I received a letter from my father. I think I have already told you that he is a pretty stern man. Well, he's all right. He wrote that he had the fullest confidence in me in this money business.”

“Whoopla,” shouted Shealey, “good for the old gentleman. Whoop! Don't you know, old fellow, I was terribly afraid for you from that quarter. He's a brick,”

“He tells me that every effort should be made to discover the culprit. He even said he was willing to bear a good share of the expense of securing a detective and so forth, considering that his son was the one who had the management of the funds.”

“What's the matter with Henning père?”shouted Shealey the irrepressible.

“Wait, Tom. He wrote more. He is willing to send me a check for the seventy-two dollars, if by paying it back into the fund I do not compromise myself.”

“How? What does he mean?”asked Beecham.

“This way, I suppose. If I pay it back I shall be considered by some to have—to speak plainly—to have taken it myself, or to have had some knowledge of the guilty party, and, consequently, to have connived at it.”

“Does any living soul in his sound senses, you Don Quixote,” exclaimed Beecham, with an earnestness curiously resembling anger, “for an infinitesimal moment imagine you knew anything of it,”

The generous tone of voice, the absolute confidence it displayed, was grateful and soothing to the worried boy. His suspicions of his own cousin, which were not dissipated by that afternoon's encounter, was the difficulty with him now. The letter of his father said: “to have any knowledge

of the guilty party.”Of course, conniving was out of the question. But Garrett! What to think of that which he saw on the night of the play! Could he have been mistaken? Oh, if Garrett that afternoon had only openly denied all knowledge of it, how happy Roy would be now! Under his present knowledge, however, he felt he could not accept the money from his father. Under a full conviction of his cousin's guilt he had made that strange promise of silence, and this he was determined to keep, let come what might. Thus his quandary, which arose on his part from a certain sense of honor, for he would not act upon a mere suspicion, and he also earnestly desired to save a relative the shame of being accused.

“No, I really believe,” said Henning, in answer to Beecham's indignant question, “I really believe that even those boys who profess to suspect me do not believe what they say. I do not believe there is a boy in the yard, nor a single member of the faculty, who has the least real suspicion that I know anything about the theft.”

“I guess not,” said Jack, and then added, “well, then, it's settled, isn't it?”

“Unfortunately, no. There is something in this affair, which, until the robber is caught and the whole question disposed of forever, I can not mention; yet it is important enough for me to be prevented in honor from writing for that money.” [Pg 139]

Jack Beecham and Tom Shealey looked at each other in blank surprise. They then indulged in a long stare—not a mere look or glance, but a long, open stare—at Roy. Under the two pairs of very wide-open eyes he remained as inscrutable as a sphinx. There was not a movement of eyes or lips which could give them the slightest clue by which they might arrive at some understanding of the strange announcement.

“You don't mean to say,” said Shealey, with eyes still wide open, “that, after all, you are in some way impli— oh! hang it all, I'm talking nonsense now,”

Roy Henning burst out laughing. Notwithstanding his worry he enjoyed his friends' bewilderment.

“I guess you are,” he said.

“Look here, Mr. Roy Aloysius Henning,” said Jack Beecham, “I consider you the most inexplicable, inexorable, incomprehensible creature on the face of the footstool. Now look here! No humbug, you know—we, your friends, I, Tom, and Brose, for here he comes—demand from you an explanation right here and now. You must tell us the whole affair.”

“No.”

“Yes.”

“No. I can not do it.”

“If you don't do it, I'll——”Jack stopped dismayed. He saw that Roy was firm. “I'll fling some more big names at you.”

“Can't help it, Jackie. I guess I can stand 'em.”

“But this thing's got to be straightened out,” [Pg 140]

“If so, it has to be done without my taking any part in the straightening—see?”

“But, man alive! You are the most interested! If you know anything of importance, why not inform your friends, and let us ferret out the truth or falsity of your surmises?”

“No. It can not be done. If I am to be exonerated from these very unjust and, I confess, very annoying aspersions, it must be done gratuitously and of the free will of the person or persons malignant enough to start the rumors. Do you not see, my friends, that if you began to move in order to exonerate me, everybody would consider you as acting as my agents and under my direction——”

“Quixotic nonsense——”began Beecham.

“Wait, Jack. This is the penalty you pay for your friendship. I will tell you this much, in gratitude for your interest and loyalty. I have made a solemn pledge to keep absolutely silent with respect to any suspicions I may have until the whole is settled and cleared up.”

“But you in the meantime are suffering,” said Jack.

“Can't help it. Better suffer than be unjust. Better bear a little, than perhaps do another an almost irreparable injury.”

His friends began to have some glimmerings of the reasons why he would not move or be moved. All of them were aware of his delicacy of conscience. They knew of his high sense of honor, of his exactitude, which amounted in their eyes to scrupulosity. It was, therefore, with no small amount of admiration, which, however, they disguised under much banter and teasing, that they acquiesced in Henning's view of his own conduct in the matter. [Pg 141]

“Roy, you're a chump,” said Shealey.

“Yes, and a gump,” added Jack Beecham.

“And my quota of abuse is,” said Bracebridge, who by this time understood the drift of the talk, “is that you are a—what shall I say—oh! yes—that you are a frump, whatever that is; it rhymes anyway.”

Roy bowed low, as if receiving compliments and bouquets. When he left to go to his classroom to write to his father, Jack Beecham said:

“That fellow is a second Bayard—*sans reproche*.”

“So say all who know him,” added Shealey, and Ambrose said: “Amen.”

CHAPTER XIX

The Unexpected

IT WAS remarkable, and even surprised Garrett himself, that Smithers and Stockley made no capital out of their knowledge of the existence of what appeared to be an incriminating document. The sketch of the letter which they had shown with such assurance to Garrett, and which that individual, with an assumption of superiority that had completely cowed the two, had coolly kept in his possession, did have something of a suspicious appearance.

Why did Garrett retain it? Was it a last card held in reserve to play against his cousin's hand? Did he believe the letter to be genuine? Finally, after all, did he wish to spare his cousin?

At this time this last consideration had no weight with him. He had various reasons for acting as he had done. One strong one was that he proposed to hold all the threads of the plot in his own hands and manipulate them to his own advantage. He was by no means sure how this evidence of Roy's supposed complicity would be received by the boys. He felt sure that many would pooh-pooh such a document as worthless. He did not desire to prove nothing by overstepping the mark in attempting to prove too much.

Suspicious as the letter looked objectively, Garrett was not so stupid as not to know there must be some very good explanation of the words; although unsupported by an explanation they certainly did appear to incriminate the writer, in view of all that had happened since they were penned.

Smithers saw plainly enough that without the letter being produced (confound that Garrett's impudence!) his words would have no weight. This young man was quite well aware that he bore a very odorous—in fact a malodorous—reputation among even his friends. Many knew of his despicable ingratitude toward Roy Henning.

Stockley had a plan of his own which he told to neither Smithers nor Garrett, and had adopted a Fabian policy. Thus it happened that Roy Henning was spared the knowledge that one of these boys had in his possession a copy or draft of a letter of his, which he could, had he so wished, use against him and thus cause him more annoyance.

Meanwhile time flew on. The warm weather had come. It was now very pleasant to be out of doors, and, of course, the great question now occupying all interest was that of the prospects of the ball team. It was found to the general satisfaction that there was very good material after all, in spite of the lack of the winter practice.

Harry Gill, a fast friend of Henning, and a great supporter of Rob Jones, was chosen captain and manager. He was a popular boy who could write a pleasing challenge and gain and retain the good will of those teams who even refused to play St. Cuthbert's. To the surprise of all he secured a game with the celebrated Blandyke team, to be played on the home grounds. This was delightful news for the yard, the more so because it was so unexpected.

The Blandykes had assured the St. Cuthbert's boys early in the spring, that they had played them for the last time, not because of any disagreement or because they had been beaten previously, but because their faculty had ruled against the long travel. Yet here was Gill, at the very opening of the season, securing the first great game without hitch or flaw, and on the home grounds.

The boys were jubilant. Their satisfaction was increased when they learned that Gill, by his irresistible charm of manner, had induced Henning to practice with the team. He could not get Roy to promise to play in the match game, but to have him in the practice games was something. Every one admitted that Roy was an exceptionally fine player. Much of the beginning of the undercurrent of talk against him in the previous fall was, it will be remembered, owing to his refusal to have any more to do with sports, and especially with baseball.

How could he now reconcile himself to his father's positive injunction to engage in no sports and yet play practice games? Roy had thought the matter over and had come to a decision.

His father had told him there were to be no sports. This he adhered to scrupulously. His father had said there was to be enough exercise only by which to keep a sound mind in a sound body. Now to him, as to many another healthy, hearty boy, after the long dormant months of winter,

there was need of good outdoor exercise. Where could one find it better than in the great game? But was not this sport, in the understanding of his father? Roy thought it was not, that is, practice games were not. With match games it was different. He reasoned that his father knew that he was athletic, that wheeling could not always suffice, and that long walks were a mere winter expedient. He therefore arrived at the eminently satisfactory conclusion that his father did not intend, when he told him to keep a sound mind in a sound body, that he should be altogether excluded from the game which, above all others, was best able to secure that end. Casuists may argue pro and con on the soundness of Roy's conclusion if they will. We leave it to them.

It is well known that there is nothing in a college so well adapted to the breaking up of animosities and of undesirable alliances and dangerous particular friendships which lead to no good, as baseball. The adage, “birds of a feather flock together,” is particularly true of boys at school during the winter season. Crowded together in a certain circumscribed space of one or two or three halls, according to the excellence of the college equipment, the very best boys are often forced to form acquaintances with those with whom they would otherwise not closely associate.

This had been particularly the case this year at St. Cuthbert's, owing to the diversity of opinion as to the question of the identity of the undiscovered thief. As we know, many boys were inclined to suspect Roy Henning. Among these were some of the best ball-players. Now Harry Gill, captain and manager, was substitute pitcher. Stockley was a splendid first baseman, and could pitch well. Smithers, too, although not liked generally by the boys, was too fine a player to be ignored. Beecham, of course, was on the team, as was Bracebridge. Garrett, so the boys declared, “would have eaten his hat”to have been selected for a place on the first nine. Gill, however, appointed strictly according to merit, and Andrew rose no higher than substitute for third baseman. That, however, was something in a place like St. Cuthbert's, because the substitutes, beside traveling with the team, were always the opposing team in practice games, and during the spring and early summer saw a deal of fine work.

It is an axiom that in order to play good ball, all differences of opinion must be dropped. No team could be enthusiastic for victory with three or four currents of self-interest or animosity thwarting and dampening all efforts and rendering harmonious and united action impossible.

All disagreements had been dropped, or at least hidden away. All were enthusiastic. When Gill announced to the team that Roy Henning had consented to play at all practice games, the percentage of enthusiasm, if it could be measured in that way, rose very high. Now all bickerings and animosities seemed to be forgotten, and they actually were for a time. As far as team work went, there was one heart and one soul. The prospects were indeed bright.

What a splendid player Roy was! He stood there in the pitcher's box, a picture of fine young manhood. His long brown hair blowing over his forehead appeared to get into his eyes at every move. With a graceful leonine backward movement of the head he would toss the hair out of his way. He was never excited. He always had his wits about him. In a critical moment he could be relied upon. He had the habit of keeping a piece of chewing gum in his mouth. To the uninitiated it appeared the most important part of the game for him to keep his jaws in steady, slow motion. Some said it kept him from becoming excited—that the attention required to keep up the regular, slow motion of his molars prevented any other kind of distraction. Be this as it may, he never showed excitement, but was always calm and cool, and not unfrequently at critical moments exasperatingly slow.

And then what an arm he had, and what movement! He seemed merely to put his hand forward and the ball went high, or low, or wherever he willed. He was a great acquisition to the team. The baseball enthusiasts, which is equivalent to saying all the boys, certainly had some excuse for chagrin when, without explanation, he retired from the game the year before.

Who does not love the sight of ball players on the diamond, especially in the early summer! The bright uniforms, the brighter faces flushed with the joy of living and of anticipation! Then the merry shout and laugh! How it makes the blood tingle, and sends the spirit of youth once more through one's veins!

In the last practice game before the match with the Blandykes the boys in their uniforms, white shirts and blue pants, stockings, and caps, presented a picturesque scene. The kindly sun, as yet not too hot, flushed their cheeks, while the liquid blue above and the fresh tender grass beneath their feet lent additional zest to their enjoyment. It was the first important practice game the boys had played.

When at length it came to an end all the players clustered around Roy Henning at the home plate, congratulating him on his pitching. Jack Beecham and Ambrose stood a little apart, watching the group.

“Isn't it a pity, Brose, that Roy won't play against the Blandykes next Tuesday,” remarked Jack.

“Indeed it is—a thousand pities. But you may be sure he knows what he is doing.”

“Guess he does. But there's a particularly sable individual in the woodpile somewhere! I wonder what it all means?”

“Many beside you have wondered,” responded Bracebridge.

“Oh, he must play next week—must, must, we can't do without him! He must play, and that's all

there is about it.”

“I am afraid he won't though. Hello, what's up? Look, here comes Mr. Shalford. How serious he looks,” [Pg 148]

The two boys touched their hats as the prefect approached.

“Have you seen Henning, boys? Ah, there he is,”

The prefect went to the group surrounding their ideal pitcher. They were using all the art persuasive they could command to extort a promise from him to play in the forthcoming match game. It is hard to say how much longer he would have had to withstand their importunities, had they not suddenly ceased upon catching sight of Mr. Shalford.

“Henning, I want you.”

Roy disengaged himself from the crowd.

“Here's a telegram for you. The President told me to give it to you at once, and you are to go to him immediately.”

Outside of strictly business circles, the arrival of a telegram has always its preliminary terrors. The yellow missive may contain such startling news! The message which Roy's father had sent him was startling enough. It read:

“Ethel is believed to be dying. Come at once. G. H.”

Roy went over to where Beecham and Bracebridge were standing. Without a word he placed the telegram in Ambrose's hand. After reading it the three friends at once moved toward the college. The crowd of boys, lately so loud and clamorous, were silent now, in the presence of some unknown calamity.

Roy walked on as if stunned, for a little while scarcely knowing where he was going. Jack and Ambrose, after one sympathetic pressure of his hand, walked with him in silent sympathy. [Pg 149]

CHAPTER XX

The Fairest Lily

THE President was waiting for Henning in his office. The two friends left Roy at the door, and quietly stole out of the corridor into the sunshine, where with subdued voices they discussed the misfortune which was overshadowing their friend.

“I never knew a boy to meet with so many misfortunes in one year as Roy has done,” said Beecham.

“It is hard,” replied Bracebridge, “but God knows best. I sometimes think he is being tried, as gold is tried in the furnace, for some great purpose.”

Beecham was silent. Such thoughts were just a little above Jack's ordinary plane of thinking. Bracebridge continued:

“What do you say if, during his absence, we make a grand effort to find the thief? What a glorious thing it would be if he could come back cleared of all suspicion,”

Beecham was never patient when the words “suspicion” and “Henning” were mentioned in the same connection. This time he said something quite rough, and, to tell the truth, quite unlike himself. Ambrose looked up in surprise.

“You must excuse me. I lose all patience in this affair.”

“All right, old fellow. We will make a big effort, eh?”

“You may bet your last little round red cent we will.” [Pg 150]

Henning reappeared. He had but little time to spare if he would catch the six o'clock train. By traveling all night he would reach home by seven o'clock in the morning. Hurriedly changing his clothes, he shook hands with the two and was driven to the depot. Both promised to write as soon as there was anything important to write about.

While Roy Henning is traveling homeward as fast as a night express can take him, we will explain the reason why the telegram had been sent. This can not be done better than by going to the Henning home, and there tracing the course of events.

“I think it's real mean to rain like this,” said Tommy Henning, early in the morning of the day on which Roy, his big brother, had received the alarming telegram. Tommy let his picture book

drop to the floor, and swung his fat little legs backward and forward. Soon tiring of this, he flattened his nose against the window pane of the drawing-room where the two children had been trying to amuse themselves.

"What's mean, Tommy?"asked his sister, Ethel.

"Oh, things," and with this broad generalization he continued to exercise his legs. "What's the use if it's going to rain all the time?"

"But it isn't going to rain all day. It will clear up before long, see if it doesn't."

Tommy was a real boy and, like his big brother, hated above all things to be obliged to remain indoors. It had been raining for twenty-four hours, and he longed to get outside in the free, fresh air, being particularly anxious just now to take Ethel for a ride in the boat on the big pond below the orchard.

[Pg 151] Tommy was sturdy, but his sister was a frail girl, of shy and nervous disposition. Her chief characteristic was her passionate love for her brother Tom, who did not show much appreciation of her affection, because he did not realize its depth. He loved his sister, but in a somewhat boisterous manner. Not unfrequently he showed his affection in a way that was rather painful than otherwise to the delicate child. This was because he did not think. He did not intend to be rough, yet he secretly thought that it was a hardship that she was not a boy, for then he could have "lots more fun." They got along well together, however, and loved each other very dearly.

True to Ethel's prediction, it soon ceased raining, the clouds breaking and rolling away in great masses. Tom's vivacity returned with the sunshine.

"Ma! ma! may we go down to the pond now, and get some of those lilies?"begged Tommy, as he rushed into his mother's room.

"I am afraid not for the present, my son," replied his mother, "at least Ethel can not go. It is a little chilly after the rain, and besides, the boat will be full of water."

Ethel did not really care about going just then, but seeing how anxious her brother was to enjoy the ride and get the beautiful flowers, the first lilies of the summer, she also pleaded for permission. At length under the combined pleading of the two, Mrs. Henning consented.

"Now, Tommy," she said, "if I let you go, you must promise me not to go near the mill-race."

"All right, Ma; there's lots of room without going near there," and the handsome little fellow scampered off in high glee, with the full intention of keeping his promise.

The injunction was not an unnecessary one. The mill-race was a dangerous spot. At the sluice [Pg 152] there was a considerable current of water which would take a boat caught in it over the bank and dangerously dash it into deep water, if it escaped being broken to pieces on some large boulders which had formerly been a part of the masonry of an old mill.

The pond was noted in the neighborhood for the profusion and beauty of its water-lilies. The children found no greater delight in the summer than in gathering them and adorning their pretty suburban home with them.

The boy found there was not much water in the boat. With Ethel's assistance he bailed it out and they were soon among the water-lilies. They formed a pretty picture—these two children, Tom in his white flannel shirt adorned with a pretty pink tie, a special Christmas gift of Ethel; she in her pink dress and white sunbonnet, her lap almost covered with luxuriant flowers.

"That's enough, Tom; plenty for to-day," said Ethel.

"All right. Now for a good row around the pond while you cut the stalks."

Tommy had a good voice, and as he rowed he began to sing:

> "See our oars with feathered spray
> Sparkle in the beam of day,
> As along the lake we glide
> Swiftly o'er the silent tide."

The pond was large enough to afford the boy a good pull with the oars. He enjoyed it immensely. The boat had glided from shore to shore several times, when Master Tommy Henning began to look for fresh excitement. Stealthily he began to pull stronger on one oar than on the other, and so gradually to near the mill-race. [Pg 153]

"Oh, Tom! Tommy! look, look, we are getting near the dam," shouted Ethel, very much frightened.

"That's nothing. There's no danger here," said the boy. He made a turn, then came nearer than before to the dangerous spot.

"I'm so frightened! Tom, please, Tom, don't go so near," pleaded Ethel.

"That's because you are a girl. If you were a boy you wouldn't be frightened a little bit."

He rowed away for a little space, and soon in a spirit of pure bravado he pulled nearer a few

feet. Ethel began screaming with fright.

“That's just like girls. They always scream at something or other,” said the ungallant Tommy.

Ethel was very much frightened. She trembled violently, but Tom affected not to see. With another stroke he went still nearer to the mill-race. At this Ethel gave a prolonged, agonizing shriek of fear, which made even her madcap brother feel a little uncomfortable, although he still persisted in teasing her, for he knew his strength and as yet had the boat under complete control.

“I'm going nearer yet, Sis,” he said to the greatly frightened little girl, and began to turn the prow of the boat a little.

She began one more wild shriek of terror, but stopped suddenly. She could scream no more. The horror of her perilous position rendered her mute. She could do nothing but shiver and tremble violently. Her eyes were wide and staring.

“What do you stop screaming for? You ain't out of danger yet. Girls always scream longer than that in one breath.”

There was no reply. Tom looked around to see his sister burst into a very torrent of tears. This was too much for the boy. [Pg 154]

“Oh, come, Ethel. I was only fooling. Don't cry. There's no danger. See,”

He headed the boat in the opposite direction and began to row away from the dangerous locality. Ethel continued to sob convulsively, unable to restrain herself. She had been thoroughly frightened, and now she could not speak. Her eyes were staring wildly; the blue veins on her forehead stood out rigidly. She seemed choking as if half stifled with the horror she had felt. Tom was now heartily ashamed of himself, and heartily wished he had not disobeyed.

“Stop crying, Ethie, and I'll give you my new box of paints,” said he anxiously.

The magnitude of the inducement was the measure of Tom's anxiety. But with even this tempting offer of his greatest wealth, she could not refrain from weeping and sobbing.

“I never thought you would take on so, or I never would go near the old thing. I just did it for fun," urged the boy persistently. All his coaxing was of no avail and he became alarmed at her hysterical sobbing. To add to his confusion, as he neared the boat-landing he saw his mother standing on the bank. She had heard the screaming, and rushed down to the pond, fearing some accident had happened.

“What have you been doing to your sister?”she asked sternly.

“I thought I would scare her a little bit—only a little, though; that's all, Mama.”

“And you went near the dam?”

“Not very close—true if I did. There was no danger.”

Ethel's pale face and hysterical weeping told how near he had been.

“Go to the house, sir, and stay there for the rest of the day,” said his mother, in a tone Tommy knew from experience was not to be disobeyed. [Pg 155]

This was a great punishment for Tommy, for, of all things, he loved to be out of doors in the free air of heaven. There was, however, a certain manliness about the little fellow, so he went to his punishment without a word. He could not understand why his sister had screamed so much, and more especially why she did not now stop crying.

Ethel did not easily recover from her fright. Her mother brought her to the house and laid her on a cushioned lounge, where she remained all the afternoon completely prostrated. Tommy was told to stay in the same room, which he did more or less sulkily. He thought his punishment excessive, and he showed his resentment to his sister by being a little bit cross to her. Early in the afternoon he worked himself into the belief that he was actually the injured one. All this was a proceeding most unusual with Tommy.

The little girl lay on the lounge quite weakened and very sick from her adventure. She did not move, but lay still and quiet, with an occasional hard sob, resembling the last muttering of a storm in the distance. Toward four o'clock of that long afternoon she said faintly to her brother:

“Tommy, I am so thirsty; will you get me a drink?”

Now Master Tom was still quite ill-tempered and, contrary to his usual custom, very much disinclined to oblige her. Seeing a glass of water on the table, he handed it to her, saying:

“Here's some. Drink this.”

She touched her feverish lips to it and said: “It's quite warm. It has been here all day. Mama brought it in this morning for the canary.” [Pg 156]

“Well, it's good water, anyhow,” said Master Tommy, and he went back to his seat and sulked.

She sighed and closed her eyes without allaying her thirst. Presently Mrs. Henning came into the room, and saw, with alarm, that Ethel was in a high fever. She telephoned at once for the

family physician, who was in his office when the message came. When he came he looked very grave, and declared that the child would not live more than twenty-four hours. The physician knew Ethel's constitution well. She had grown up an extremely delicate child. He gave no hope of her recovery. He declared the attack had been brought on by some unwonted exertion beyond her strength, or by some extraordinary strain caused by great fear or overwhelming grief. When told of what had occurred on the pond he shook his head ominously, and frankly told the mother to expect the worst, recommending, as a conscientious physician, that a priest be called without delay.

CHAPTER XXI

The Passing of Ethel

AS SOON as Tommy realized that Ethel was really sick there came a revulsion of feeling such as all generous natures are subject to. He was no longer angry or sulky. He racked his brains to discover means by which he could make amends for his unkindness of the afternoon.

Tommy had one great treasure which no one was allowed to touch. This was a precious silver mug, a birthday present. He never used it except on some very extraordinary occasion. It was rarely taken from his mother's china-closet, where it occupied a place of honor. Now he thought of this mug, but first he took a pitcher out to the pump and used the handle vigorously until his arms ached. He then went to the cupboard and took out his great treasure, carrying it and the pitcher to where Ethel was lying.

“Sissie dear,” he said softly, “I'm awful sorry I've been mean to you 's afternoon. I didn't know you were sick, sure. If I had known that I'd got you a barrelful of water, sure I would.”

Ethel opened her eyes with a pleasant smile. She knew that Tommy loved her. He was trying to make amends. That was enough to make her happy.

“Here, Ethel, dear. I've brought you the coldest water I could get from the well, and here's my silver cup to drink it out of.”

 The little sufferer was now too far gone to care for water. Wishing to respond to her brother's kindness she took the mug and put it to her lips, as if drinking a long draught. But Tommy saw she was not drinking.

“Why, Ethel, you only make believe! Don't be afraid to drink. I'll keep on carrying in pitchers all night if you want 'em. 'Taint no trouble at all for me.”

Ethel saw his generosity of purpose and smiled again.

“Drink some more, Ethel. It's good.”She could not resist such importunity, and she drank some of the water, more than she needed, in order to please him.

Tommy exaggerated his fault in his own eyes. Now, in order to make amends, he strove urgently to make his sister drink, coaxing her at least every ten minutes to do so, until at last she was fain to tell him it was impossible for her to take any more. If he could not make her drink, he could, nevertheless, keep the water cool, so he changed it at least every fifteen minutes. Who shall say but what the angels carried these crude acts of reparation to the Mercy Seat, and brought back blessings for sorrowful Tommy?

Ethel realized that she was very ill. The doctor's grave face confirmed her worst fears. She did not fear to die. Had she not gone to confession every week for a year past, and although the pure little child knew it not, the good priest knew full well that for weeks together he scarcely found matter for absolution. She did not want to die, not yet at least, if it were the will of God, until she had made her First Communion. Her pure soul had not yet been strengthened by the Bread of Angels. How ardently for months she had longed for the day of her First Communion, and now it seemed so hard to die before that great event. Would not the sweet Jesus spare her at least until she could receive Him! Long and earnestly, on her couch of suffering, she prayed that she might receive this supreme happiness. She knew that she was dying. The frightful pain in her back told her, as she lay there in such helplessness, that her weakness could not long battle against so sudden and so violent an attack. But oh, to be deprived of the great privilege!

“Lord, I am not worthy! Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst come to me! Come, oh, come, my Lord Jesus,” she repeated again and again, between her acts of contrition.

It was in this hour of supreme suspense and anxiety of her parents that Ethel's beautiful character shone forth. Patient, humble, thankful for the least kindness shown, or office performed for her, she fairly broke the heart of father and mother, who now realized, more completely than ever, what a beautiful treasure they were losing.

The priest was grieved to see this stricken one of his flock. Ethel's eyes brightened when she saw him. He heard the child's last confession and administered Extreme Unction. Long the confession lasted—those guileless self-accusations of an almost guiltless soul. When the family were re-admitted they saw that both priest and penitent had been weeping.

“Has the poor child told you her greatest desire, Father?”asked the grieving mother.

“Yes. I have no hesitation in giving her Holy Communion. She was sufficiently prepared a year ago. If you will make the proper preparations I will bring the Holy Sacrament and administer First Communion.”

Not until Tommy saw the priest visit the house, and learned that his sister had been anointed did he realize that she was dangerously ill. When the priest left, he rushed to the couch, and kneeling, took Ethel's hand and covered it with tears and kisses, crying passionately with heartrending sobs: [Pg 160]

“Ethel, Ethel, Ethel! don't die, don't die yet! Ask God and His Mother to make you well again. You know they will if you ask them.”His cry was an unconscious tribute to his sister's goodness.

Ethel waited with joy and calmness the approach of her Lord. Very soon the priest, bearing the Sacred Host, arrived and the whole household assembled to honor the divine Visitor, and to pray for the departing soul.

Notwithstanding her intense pain, Ethel appeared to be in a transport of joy. Her calm, waxlike face was faintly flushed at the fulfilment of her ardent longings. As she lay making fervent acts of love and thanksgiving, she resembled an angel rather than a child of human clay. So thought her spiritual director as he gave her the last absolution and blessing and began to recite the prayers for the dying.

Tommy's grief became deeper and more demonstrative. His mother gently drew him into the next room, telling him it was for Ethel's good, as he was disturbing her recollection and happiness. With this assurance he became content, although he sobbed as if his heart would break.

Silently, and in helpless, though resigned, anguish the father and mother watched through the long night the flickering spark of life fade and expire. More than once during these long hours they believed the beautiful soul had flown to God, its Maker. Hoping against hope, they earnestly desired that she might last until Roy should reach home at seven, but about three the end came. [Pg 161]

“Fetch the boy,” said the father, in a whisper. Mrs. Henning softly left the room. She found Tommy, his face all tear-stained, asleep on the mat just outside the door. Gently waking him, she told him to come to Ethel. The boy, alert in a moment at the sound of her name, came slowly into the room. Neither father nor mother spoke, but the latter led him to the couch where lay the lifeless form of his sister still holding the crucifix in her hand. Her pure soul had flown.

Seeing that she had passed away, the boy bent down and kissed her white forehead and her lips. His mother involuntarily moved a step nearer, intending to catch and console him in his first wild burst of grief. To her surprise the boy neither wept nor spoke. He took one long look at the placid face of his dead sister, and turned away, going out into the open air of the warm night. By the first gray streaks of dawn he wandered through the garden path down to the pond. There lay the boat as he had left it, half drawn up on the shore, and there, withered, lay the lilies she had gathered. The boy remembered how she had used all her little strength to pull up one large bud. She had, at length, laughingly succeeded, dropping it into the boat and letting the long stalk hang in the water.

As the gloaming of the sad day of the funeral drew on Tommy took his beads from his pocket. Then came the realization that he was alone to say them.

“Ethel! Ethel,” he cried, and the floodgates of his tears were open. Big, strong Roy caught him up in his arms as he would a baby. There Tommy, resting his tired little head on his big brother's breast, wept unrestrainedly.

On the day of the passing of Ethel Roy pondered long about sending a message to his friends at St. Cuthbert's. He could not decide to whom to send it. Bracebridge, Beecham, Shealey, Gill, and Jones, all were thought of, but he remained undecided. While thinking over this, his aunt, Andrew Garrett's mother, entered the room. Roy loved this good and beautiful woman almost as much as he loved his own mother, whom she was supporting and comforting in her sudden affliction. [Pg 162]

“I am glad you received my telegram in time," she said. “You will be just now such a support and comfort to your mother and father, Roy, in their sorrow.”She kissed him on the forehead.

“When the sickness came to Ethel,” she continued, "they were both too distracted by grief to think of sending for you, so I wired in your father's name.”

Roy made up his mind about his message. He filled out a blank:

“Dear Andrew: Ethel passed away at three. Pray and get prayers for her. I know you will. Roy.”

For many a long day after, Roy Henning had reason to bless the influence which prompted him to send this message to his cousin, rather than to any one else. The message had the effect of working a wonderful change in Andrew Garrett, so that when Roy next saw him, he scarcely recognized him. Many strange things will happen before Roy again sees his cousin. [Pg 163]

CHAPTER XXII

Roy and His Father

WHEN, in four or five days, the grief in the household had subsided sufficiently to lose some of its poignancy, Mr. Henning called his son to his study for the purpose of having a long talk with him concerning his prospects and the affairs at St. Cuthbert's. He was still under the impression that the extraordinary test to which he had submitted his son was a wise one.

The two sat opposite each other in large, leather-covered reading-chairs in a very wealthy man's private “den.” Roy waited respectfully for his father to begin. Full of the thoughts of Ethel, he began to speak of his recent loss.

“So the poor child is gone, gone! I never thought she would last very long; she was too frail and delicate. If she had grown up I am sure she would have become a nun. Ah, that reminds me! Do you still hold to the notion you mentioned to me last summer?”

“Of the priesthood? Most assuredly, sir.”

“Humph,”

The white whiskers looked whiter as the florid face became more florid.

“H—um! So! I thought then that it was a mere passing fancy of yours, and that it would soon go. As you have asked for no more money than the small—yes, very small—allowance I settled on, I began to think—yes, I began to believe, that you had more of the Henning family spirit—yes, more of the real family spirit—than at first I gave you credit for. So far, so good. So you are determined, if possible, to become a priest?”

“Yes, sir,” said the young man firmly.

“Now tell me, my boy, how you have passed through the tests I set.”

Roy was silent. He thought of the many times he had experienced more or less bitterly rebellious thoughts against these tests.

“Don't be afraid, Roy. Speak plainly. Have you failed?”

“No, father,” he answered emphatically; “I have not.”

“That is good. I am very glad to hear that.”

“I confess that it was very hard. Frequently I felt like writing to you about the prohibition of sports and of my—my shortness of cash.”

“So most of your troubles came from lack of cash, eh?”

“Oh, no! Really the greatest test of obedience I have ever had was to follow your instruction strictly when you declared that I should engage in no sports except enough to keep a sound mind in a sound body.”

“Yes, I remember to have said that.”

“That, sir, was a hard blow to me. All the unpleasantness of the year has arisen from trying to be faithful to your command.”

“How so? Explain.”

“As you know, I am an enthusiastic and pretty good ball-player.”

“Yes, I have heard enough about that to be well acquainted with the fact.”

“And I am a good all-round athlete as well. As a consequence, I stood high in the councils of the college athletic circles. When I announced my intention of retiring from the football eleven, and the baseball nine there was a good deal of disagreeable talk. I must confess, father, this was the hardest thing I ever had to do in my whole life.”

“So?”

“Yes, and the worst of it was I was made miserable by insinuations and innuendos that I had betrayed the college teams. I was disloyal. I was acting out of pique or spite. This was all very hard to bear because I was actuated by the very best intentions. I wanted to prove to you that I was a dutiful and obedient son.”

“I never doubted that, my boy, never for a moment doubted that,”

“I thank you, sir.”

“Poor lad! all this is too bad; but tell me about the robbery. By the way, you never sent for that check; but tell me all about it, that is, as far as it concerns yourself.”

“I will, sir. Not being allowed to engage in any sports by your orders, I did not see why I could not make myself useful in some other way. Late in the fall there was much talk about the

following season's games. In order to keep the team in practice it was decided to take up a collection among the boys and purchase a pitcher's cage, to be placed in the play-room, where indoor practice could be had all the winter. The boys appointed me solicitor and treasurer. I kept the money in the table-drawer in the committee-room off the playroom. From that drawer the money was stolen. What made my chagrin the deeper was that I had been warned by a close friend to place the money with the college treasurer for safer keeping. This I intended to do, but during the Christmas holidays it escaped my memory.” [Pg 166]

“I do not see why you could not have written for that check. As far as I can see there is nothing in all this story to prevent you from replacing the money. Surely you and your cousin Andrew did everything in your power to trace the thief and get the money back?”

Here was a critical moment for Roy. Blood is thicker than water with the father as well as the son. Mr. Henning never dreamed but that Andrew would make this a family affair and exert himself with his cousin to recover the stolen money. It was a temptation for Roy. Should he expose Andrew's conduct? Should he permit his father to know that he had a nephew who was selfish and cowardly and mean, and not above trading upon another's reputation? Roy had to think rapidly in making up his mind what to do. His father's keen eyes were upon him. The old gentleman was awaiting an answer. Roy's good angel prevailed. The boy replied:

“Everything, I believe, was done that could be done to detect the thieves by myself and my friends, but without success. Had we found the thief and discovered that the money had been disposed of beyond recovery I should then have written gladly to you to replace it, after your generous offer.”

“That's right; that's right.”

“But,” continued Roy with some hesitation, which his father did not fail to notice, “affairs turned out so differently from what I expected. Whether from natural causes, or from design, I do not know, but there were two or three opinions soon prevalent about the robbery, and there was one party who—who gave it out that they—they suspected me.”

“Suspected you,” almost shouted the lawyer. "The scoundrels! Who were they, Roy; who were they?” [Pg 167]

“Some whose names are not worth mentioning, and whose reputations are still worse.”

“Dear me, dear me! The rascals, to suspect my son,” fumed the old man. He walked excitedly up and down the room. By some occult process he connected these suspicions with his son's stringency of cash, and blamed himself in proportion to his indignation.

“My boy, my boy! this is all too bad, too bad! If I had allowed you your regular amount all this would not have happened. Such a thing could not then have happened.”

“I do not see that, father, unless by having plenty of money as usual I should not have undertaken the treasurership. I do not see how this consequence flows from the premises. Indeed I think it more than likely had matters been normal with me I should have been treasurer just the same.”

“Well, we must rectify all this. You want to go back to St. Cuthbert's, or do you wish to stay away?”

“I want to go back, sir, of course, and graduate. And please, father,” said Roy right loyally, “please do not think these few boys represent St. Cuthbert's. There are not a finer set of fellows in the world. These I spoke of are the exceptions.”

This remark thoroughly pleased the father who was himself an alumnus of old St. Cuthbert's.

“And besides,” continued the young man, “I want to go back and live down the ugly rumor—for that is all it is—and make somebody eat his words. I know, I feel certain it will come out all right. Matters always do. I want to be there. If I were to stay away now, would it not be, at least for some, a sort of tacit acknowledgment, or at least it might be so construed by some unfriendly to me, who might say I knew more than I chose to tell and so kept away as soon as I had a chance to do so?” [Pg 168]

“You are right, my boy; you are right. Go back and fight it down. Suspected of dishonesty! A Henning, too, preposterous! Yes, yes, you must go back, boy. You must go back.”

“I am glad you look at it in that light, sir. I think it the best thing to do.”

Mr. Henning drew from his pocket a bunch of keys. Opening his desk he took out a roll of bills.

“You must consider your test, your trial, as over. It is over as far as I am concerned, and I am more than satisfied with you. You are free now to take up what sports you like, and spend, in moderation, what money you like, and in fact I leave your course of action entirely to yourself. I am sure I need have no fear for your prudence. Here, take this; you will need it.”

Mr. Henning handed over to his son a fair-sized roll of bills. How much he gave we will not state, but leave the amount to the imagination of the reader, merely remarking that Mr. Henning was a very rich man, did few things by halves, and, at the moment, was actuated by the most generous impulse. In giving Roy the money, he remarked: “Give your cousin Andrew twenty-five dollars, with my regards. I suppose schoolboys are never very flush at this time of the year. I

never was.”

While Roy, with a bounding heart, was thanking his father, a loud ring of the door bell disturbed the quiet of the house. In a moment one of the servants brought in a telegram.

“For Master Roy, sir,” she said.

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With a bow and a “Permit me” to his father, Roy opened the envelope and read:

“Come at once. Great news! St. C. 8. B. 3. Ambrose.”

The mystified boy showed the telegram to his father.

“Perhaps the first part refers to the robbery. You had better go. Can you bid your mother and aunt farewell and be ready at the depot by 7.30?”

“Yes, quite easily.”

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“Very good. The carriage will be ready for you to catch the 7.30 train.”

CHAPTER XXIII

The Great Blow

NOTWITHSTANDING the death of his little sister, Roy left home with a lightened heart, owing to the more perfect and decidedly pleasanter understanding with his father. Had he not full permission to play ball, or do anything else he chose! If the reader thinks this was a small reason for being light-hearted, then it is safe to say that same reader never was a boy. Every real boy knows what that permission meant. Roy, as we know, was conscientious. We know the struggle he went through. We know some of the unpleasant consequences which followed from conscientiously carrying out his father's wishes. Just in proportion as the restriction had been bitter, this freedom now was sweet. He was a strong, healthy, vigorous boy, all his life used to outdoor exercise, delighting in all manly sports. Now he was free again! Free to enjoy it all! The promised delights appeared all the more entrancing from his long abstention from them. Would he not surprise the boys! No, he would give the credit, all of it, to Harry Gill. He would make it appear that the manager's diplomacy had been irresistible. Gill should have an extra feather in his cap!

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And Garrett! What a pity he was developing such undesirable traits of character! Could he not be weaned in some way from those companions with whom at present he seemed so infatuated? Roy was convinced that he was not really a bad fellow at heart. How could he be with such a mother as Aunt Helen? Was there ever a finer, more lovable woman, except his own mother? Her gentle touch, her womanly way, her wise and soothing words! What a treasure Andrew had, did he but realize it! No, he could not be really bad with her influence, and the memory of her, and her prayers for him!

These were some of the thoughts which passed through Roy's mind as the train sped along in the darkness. Then he remembered Bracebridge's telegram. He took it out of his pocket and read it again. He puzzled again over those words “Come at once.”What could they mean? Had the thief been discovered?

His heart gave a great leap at the thought. But what if, after all, his suspicions had been well founded! What if the thief should prove to be Andrew Garrett! The thought made him sick at heart; and yet—and yet! oh, he must be mistaken in that surmise! Ambrose would not have wired him to come at once had the guilt been traced to Garrett. He would certainly have been in no hurry to bring him back to so unpleasant a state of affairs. In that supposition it would have been “great news" indeed, but most disastrous news. No, it must be some one else, if the message meant what he hoped it did mean.

“And so the first great match has come off victoriously," he said to himself. “Good! good,”

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He fell into a train of pleasant thoughts during which he looked so bright and so happy that an old lady on the opposite seat, who had watched him for some time, smiled kindly at him. Roy returned the smile. She was quite advanced in years and evidently traveled but rarely. She liked the look of the bright, handsome face before her, whose youthful sparkling eyes spoke goodness and enthusiasm, and whose clear skin at this moment showed a decided flush of joy.

“Are you going home?”she ventured timidly.

“No, ma'am. I'm leaving home.”

She looked puzzled. It was contrary to her experience to see children so happy on leaving home. Roy enjoyed her puzzled look for a minute, and then explained:

“I am not going home, but I have just left the best father and mother in the world, and am now going back to school to join the best and truest friends a fellow could find anywhere on this round earth.”

“Is that so! I am glad to hear it. If they are all like you they must be good boys.”

Roy actually blushed. Just then the conductor called the old lady's station. As she arose and with the assistance of Roy gathered her traveling impedimenta, she said:

“Keep that bright smile, my dear, and remember that no one can keep so bright a face unless he keeps a bright soul within. I am an old woman, and I know what I say.”

Now while Roy retires to his sleeper to get as much rest as is possible on the rail, we will hurry forward and learn why he was wired to come at once, and find out what has been happening during the last few days at St. Cuthbert's.

The Blandyke team arrived before noon on the day Ambrose had sent the message to his friend. Their manager told Gill that the condition of their coming was that they returned on the 3.50 train of that afternoon. The game, consequently, began at one o'clock. It was over by three, with the result already known.

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The day had been extremely hot, with not a breath of air stirring. The atmosphere was stifling. All nature seemed to be in a dead calm. Even the dogs sought shady spots and lay still and panted. The afternoon seemed more oppressive than an August day, because so early in the summer every one was unaccustomed to the great heat.

As the game was finished by three o'clock on a recreation day, there were three vacant hours before supper time. Owing to the unusual sultriness few cared to tramp over the hills, or along the lower road of the valley. A few, however, started out, either to walk, or hunt black squirrels on the higher, wooded grounds in the rear of the college.

About four a slight breeze began to blow from the southwest, cooling the atmosphere very considerably.

“Ah, that's fine,” said Jack Beecham, as he faced the breeze and filled his lungs with the cooler air. "That's fine! My, but it was hot! Never knew it so hot in May before in my life. Oh, look, Ambrose," and he pointed to the direction from which the breeze was coming, “look at that queer-shaped cloud,”

Bracebridge looked toward the southwest. Dark, coppery clouds were forming and rapidly approaching. The temperature dropped suddenly many degrees. The cooler breeze became stronger and soon it was a wind. Before many minutes elapsed it was a very high wind in which it was difficult to stand steadily.

Suddenly a brilliant flash of lightning leaped from the now leaden sky. The boys could hear the electric discharge snap and crackle against the sides of the buildings. It was followed almost instantly by a deafening crash of thunder, tropical in its intensity. Down came the rain, not in drops, but apparently in sheets of water. Flash followed flash, peal succeeded peal, and the wind grew more furious every moment.

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Bracebridge, Shealey, Beecham, and Harry Gill watched the terrific war from the Philosophy classroom window.

Ever and anon the downpour would cease, but the wind did not abate. At intervals could be seen the havoc the wind was doing. The air was thick with leaves and twigs and straw. In the lowlands the boys saw the rail fences carried away like matches and deposited over the fields. An old wooden windmill tower was toppled over. Boards and shingles and slates were flying everywhere.

All knew that such violent warfare must be brief. Already in the west there was a streak of light beneath the clouds. Before the storm had spent its fury the watchers at the window were to witness a remarkable sight.

Behind the college there was, as has often been remarked, thickly wooded high ground. The boys at the window were watching the hillside path, which every now and then was obscured by the rain. Suddenly a forked bolt struck the largest tree on the hillside, and hurled to the ground across the college walk at least one-third of it. The boys looked at each other in a frightened way. In the mind of each was: “What if the college had been struck,”

When the deafening thunder-crash had passed, Bracebridge, for the sake of saying something, remarked:

“It's lucky that none of us were out in such a storm.”

“We would have been nicely drenched, eh?”said Tom Shealey.

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“No one of common-sense would be out,” said Beecham; “all would run to shelter somewhere.”

“But some may have been too far away to reach it. You know how sudden the storm was,” observed Bracebridge.

“What on earth is that?”suddenly exclaimed Tom Shealey, as he pointed to something or some one crossing the yard. After the last thunder-crash the rain had ceased suddenly. The wind dropped, and the storm, furious while it lasted, spent itself. The boys threw open the classroom window to get a better view of the yard. Some one had entered from the field gate nearest the woods. He was drenched; his hat was gone; his hair dishevelled. He was white and frightened.

Although his clothes clung to his skin he was making violent, meaningless gestures as he ran, and appeared to be gibbering or muttering something as if in that stage of fright which borders on imbecility.

“It is Smithers,” shouted Shealey. “Let's go and see what's up. Hurry,”

“What's up, Smithers? What's happened?”asked Shealey, a moment later, hatless and breathless.

The frightened boy had a scared, wild look. He muttered something quite unintelligible. His lips were dry and white.

“Now be calm. Tell us quietly what has happened," said Bracebridge.

Smithers again gibbered something. The listeners could make nothing of it. They began to think the boy had lost his reason.

“—prefect—dead—struck—innocent,” were some of the words caught by the listening boys.

“Good gracious,” exclaimed Beecham, “the prefect is dead, struck by lightning, up on the hill walk. Is that it, Smithers?” [Pg 176]

The one appealed to, not fully comprehending the question, and half beside himself, nodded assent.

“Gill, quick, go at once to the President. Then take care of this fellow. Send a priest as soon as you can up the hill. Jack and Tom, you come with me.”

Ambrose naturally assumed the leadership in the emergency. The three ran along the walk and up the hillside path as fast as their legs could carry them. [Pg 177]

CHAPTER XXIV

The Fallen Tree

HAVING seen from the classroom a large part of the great oak fall when the bolt came, the three boys supposed that was the spot where the tragedy must have taken place. They noticed the havoc the storm had wrought. Many large limbs of trees were scattered across their path. In several places the walk was washed out, leaving large gullies. On the thickly wooded hillside the damage was the greatest.

Arriving at the oak tree they were at a loss. They saw no sign of any human being. They picked up Smithers' plaid cloth cap which he had lost in his wild flight homeward. Beecham began to beat it against a young sapling to rid it of some of the mud.

“We must go farther yet. This is not the place," said Ambrose.

Fully one-third of the great oak tree had been riven from the trunk. It lay across their path, necessitating a detour amid the still dripping underbrush to pass it. The oak was in the full of its early summer foliage, forming an impenetrable green wall across the hillside path.

As they were threading their way through the thick low growth on the upper side, Jack Beecham glanced into the dense mass of fallen foliage. His eyes were caught by something black beneath the green. Thinking it was perhaps an old log, blown there by the storm before the lightning damaged the oak, he was about to pass on, but gave a second look. The black thing under the leaves was surely not a bough! Again he peered into the tree-top. [Pg 178]

“Great heavens! there he is under that oak,” he said.

The three pushing aside the boughs saw the bleeding, white face of some one who was apparently dead.

“Poor Mr. Shalford,” exclaimed Shealey.

“Nonsense! Don't you see that's not Mr. Shalford at all. It's one of the boys. Who can it be?”

They all looked again into the leaves, and were satisfied that it was not their prefect.

“Who is it?”asked Shealey.

“I believe it is—it is Stockley,” said Bracebridge.

“You don't say,” exclaimed Shealey, “at all events we must get him out of that tangle, dead or alive.”

“I don't believe that oak killed him, anyway," remarked Jack Beecham.

“Why?”asked Ambrose, in a whisper, for in the presence of death they were awed.

“Look here,” said Beecham, “no big limb has reached him. These twigs and leaves would give

one a sharp switch when falling, and probably knock him down, but they are too small to break any bones.”

“Maybe that's true. Well, we shall soon find out," said Ambrose. “Now, boys, how are we to get him clear of that tree-top?”

They procured a strong stick, and while two lifted as many of the small boughs as they could, Bracebridge pushed the pole over the prostrate body. He then raised his end, the other being on the ground on the other side of the body. The two other boys took hold of Stockley's shoulders and successfully drew him from under the tree, as, fortunately, he had not been caught by any of the larger limbs. Gently as possible they drew him out from under the mass of foliage, but gentle as they were, they necessarily used some force. To their surprise—and satisfaction—they heard him groan. He was not dead after all, but undoubtedly badly hurt.

No sooner had Stockley been extricated than Mr. Shalford appeared. The boys who were bending over the prostrate body looked up.

“Oh, sir,” said Ambrose, “we thought it was you,” and he pointed to Stockley. There was love in the tone, making Mr. Shalford treasure the simple words for many a day.

“Why?”

“That stupid Smithers said so. I think he was too frightened to know what he was saying.”

The moving of Stockley restored him to a state of semi-consciousness, in which he talked incoherently. One arm hung loosely, evidently broken above the elbow. When touched in the ribs the suffering boy groaned aloud, so that it was quite probable that some were fractured. There was a cut on the forehead, and another on the lower lip. The injuries, as far as could be then learned, while serious, were not necessarily fatal.

A priest from the college having arrived, the rest withdrew some paces while the minister of God tried to elicit some act of conscious sorrow for sin. It seemed to the boys that he succeeded, for from the distance they saw him raise his hand and make the sign of the cross as in sacramental absolution.

“I do not think he will die,” said the priest as the others drew near. “See there, that is what must have done the mischief. He was caught up here in the wind-storm, and one of those dead limbs struck him. You say you found him beneath the tops of the fallen oak. Those twigs could not have inflicted these injuries.”

Intermittently Stockley muttered incoherent words. Bracebridge and Beecham knelt on either side of him, nervously anxious to catch every sound. Unknown to each other, both had simultaneously formed a strange suspicion. Once both distinctly heard the words: “Clear—Henning.” What could that mean? They caught the word “letter,” but to neither did this convey intelligence, because neither knew of the existence of the copy or draft of that letter which Roy Henning had written to some unknown friend. They heard other disconnected words, for instance, "sweater,” and “Garrett,” but these words had no meaning for them. They did not, for all that, lose a single word, but stored up everything in their memories, being sure that something would come of it in good time.

Harry Gill and others arrived with a wire mattress, the best temporary substitute for a stretcher. There was no lack of willing hands to convey the injured boy down the hill to the infirmary.

Gill's report of Smithers' frantic words spread like wildfire in the yard. Most of the boys believed the kindly prefect had been killed by a falling tree. Few had seen him after the report began, because he had at once started for the walk.

Notwithstanding the appalling nature of the accident, when the boys saw Mr. Shalford return safe and sound they could scarce refrain from giving a hearty cheer. One began to wave his hat and was on the point of opening his mouth. Mr. Shalford was immensely surprised at such a strange proceeding at such a solemn moment, never for a moment dreaming it was all for him. He stopped all noise with an imperative “Hush,”

All the boys clustered around the infirmary steps awaiting the reappearance of the prefect. In about half an hour he came. He told the boys the extent of Stockley's injuries, and said that it was the physician's opinion that none of the wounds were likely to prove fatal.

“Hurrah for Mr. Shalford,” shouted George McLeod.

“McLeod, are you taking leave of your senses? If you don't be quiet I'll send you back to Mr. Silverton to the division yard.”

But the boys took up McLeod's lead and gave three cheers for the prefect.

“And what on earth is that for?”he asked.

“Why, sir, don't you know? Smithers said you were killed,”

“Smithers was too excited to know what he was saying.”

“But you are not killed—that's the point. Hurrah!" In spite of himself the prefect was again

cheered. Do what he would, put his fingers to his lips, point to the infirmary, wave down the noise with his hand, he could not stop the boys giving one more shout for his safety.

When Bracebridge and Beecham were again alone in their room, the former said:

“What do you make of it all?”

“I think it is very important.”

“I think so too.”

“You heard all he said?”

“Every word.”

“I am not sure,” said Jack, “but I believe there is a rift in the cloud for dear old Roy. Fancy, Brose! suppose this wounded boy should know all about the robbery,”

“And we could make him tell,” added Bracebridge.

“I tell you what I think,” continued Jack, “it is my conviction that he not only knows all about the thieving, but that he——”

“Oh, don't say that,” urged Ambrose. “I know what you think. I believe I think the same, but don't like to give it expression.”

“I don't mind doing so if it will lead to the clearing of Henning.”

“I wish I knew what he meant—what was on his mind when he mentioned Garrett and his sweater! And what could he mean by repeating frequently, 'letter, letter, Garrett.' It's all a mystery to me as yet. I do wish Roy was here. Maybe he knows what the words mean. Perhaps Roy could get Stockley to tell who the thief was, that is, supposing he really knows.”

“It seems clear to me,” said Beecham, “that Stockley knows something. But who can say what that something is? Say! Suppose you telegraph for Henning. Give him to-day's score, too. He'll want to know that.”

“That's a great idea. I'll do it,” said Ambrose.

“All right. Do it at once, so that he may get the message in time to start to-night and be here early to-morrow morning, should he consider the affair important enough.”

Thus the telegraphic message was sent to Roy Henning.

When Smithers had recovered from his fright sufficiently to be able to talk sensibly, Beecham and Shealey plied him with questions about the accident. He said, substantially:

“We were at the other end of the forest path when the storm came up—Stockley and I. We took shelter in the cave for some time until the water began to flow in from above and drove us out. Then we made for home. It was very dangerous. Sticks and limbs were flying in all directions. We had passed the big oak by about thirty feet when Stockley was struck by a piece of a branch about four feet long and as thick as your arm. It hit him on the arm and on the chest or side. He fell with a scream. At that moment there came a brilliant flash, and a bolt of lightning struck quite close to us, blinding me for a few seconds. I was about ten feet ahead of Stockley when it came. I was so frightened I thought I would go crazy. When I could see again I saw the oak tree falling right where he was lying. I never was so frightened in my life. Then I ran home, believing he was killed. I don't remember how I got down the hill, or what I said after.”

“Will you answer me one question, Smithers?" asked Beecham.

“If I can, yes. What is it?”

“When the accident happened were you two talking about Henning and the robbery last Christmas?”

“Yes,” he answered, “we were. I'm sorry now I had anything to do with it.”

“With what?”asked Beecham with a nervous start. Foolish fellow. He was not cool enough. The other fellow took immediate alarm.

“Oh, nothing,” and he refused to say anything more, and walked away.

“That was too bad,” said Beecham to himself, very much chagrined. “If I had been a little more diplomatic I might have wormed out of him all he knew of the matter.”

Now Jack was indeed sorely puzzled. Did Smithers mean that he was sorry that he had talked to Stockley about it, or did he mean that he was now, under the influence of a great fright, sorry that he had participated in the robbery?

Beecham sat a long time on a bench tilted against the wall, disconsolate and severely bringing himself to task.

“Here am I,” he said, “with conceit enough to imagine I have brains enough to become a lawyer, and at the very first opportunity for an important cross-questioning I make a decided goose of myself. Pshaw! I wish some one would kick me! I deserve it,”

When Beecham found Bracebridge and told him what he had done, the latter laughingly admitted the sentence which Jack had passed upon himself ought to be immediately executed, and volunteered to be the executioner.

“You did make a mess, of it, certainly. There's no telling what the boy knows—much more than he will ever reveal, I'm thinking. We can now only wait for Roy. He wired that he would be here to-morrow morning.”

“'Rah for Roy! He's the one we want,” shouted Jack with renewed enthusiasm. [Pg 185]

CHAPTER XXV

Surprises for Roy

HENNING arrived at the Cuthberton depot at seven in the morning. In stepping from the sleeper he was surprised to see Ambrose Bracebridge awaiting him.

“Welcome back, old fellow, to St. Cuthbert's," said Ambrose. “I was very sorry to hear of your loss. May she rest in peace,” and the gentlemanly boy raised his hat reverently.

“Thank you,” said Roy, warmly shaking hands, "thanks. It was very sudden. Poor little Ethel died a saint if ever there was one.”

“I have not forgotten you in your absence. I have the promise of five Masses for her from the Fathers. I felt sure that would be pleasing to you.”

“Thanks, indeed,” He was touched by his friend's thoughtfulness, and the remembrance of Ethel brought a big lump into his throat, and for a moment there was a catching of the breath. “Excuse me, Ambrose. Your kindness—our sudden loss—my heart is wrenched—her—she—oh! you know how it is,”

“Yes, yes, I know——”

“And I have come back,” said Roy, certainly irrelevantly, "I have come back under the most favorable conditions with respect to my father.”

“Yes?”answered Ambrose, quite ignorant of what the conditions might be. Roy saw that for all their talks, Bracebridge remembered nothing of the previous relations between himself and his father. He saw by his questioning “yes,” and by his eyes, which were nothing less than interrogation points, that his friend was curious to learn more, although he delicately refrained from asking. [Pg 186]

“It's a long story, Brosie, old man. I can't tell it to you now on the platform here. I'll tell you some time to-day—after we have had breakfast. I am as hungry as a wolf. Let's go to a hotel and get breakfast.”

“No, the college carriage is outside waiting for you, and breakfast for four is to be ready by the time we get back.”

“For four?”

“Why, yes. Didn't I tell you that Harry Gill and Jack are waiting outside in the carriage? The ticket man at the gate wouldn't let them in. I was the least suspicious-looking of the three, I suppose.”

“Let's be off, then,” said Roy.

Both made a grab simultaneously at Roy's suitcase.

“No, you don't.”

“Yes, I do,” answered Ambrose, keeping hold of it. They both tugged for a moment or two, much to the amusement of two ladies in an opposite train who burst out into merry laughter at the friendly contest.

Warm greetings awaited Roy in the carriage. After the welcoming was over, and the delicate condolences tendered, Roy leaned over to Gill's ear and whispered something. Whatever the whispering was about it ended by Roy putting his finger over his lips as an admonition to remain silent.

The information conveyed to Gill must have been of a startling nature for he immediately proceeded to behave as if he were suffering from a fit. He threw up his heels into Bracebridge's lap, clutched the carriage strap with one hand and Beecham's coat collar by the other, and began to scream at the top of his voice. Roy held his sides at the other's antics. Ambrose guessed the cause of Gill's jubilation, but Jack Beecham was quite in the dark. [Pg 187]

“Here! take this maniac off, or I'll soon be a physical wreck,” he shouted.

“By the way, Ambrose,” asked Henning, “what is the great news you wired you had for me? But

first how did the great game come off?”

Then all three in their enthusiasm began to talk at once and independently of each other. Each described what he considered the beauties and fine points of the game.

In the midst of this jumble of words, from which Roy managed to pick out a deal of information about the game, the carriage drove into the college grounds.

The prefect at once hurried the four into the infirmary building where a somewhat elaborate breakfast had been prepared for them.

“Get along, boys. Clear out now. These boys are hungry. You can see Roy after breakfast. There is plenty of time to hear all the news, if he has any to tell. Now, John, let no boy into the infirmary this morning without my permission.”

“All right, Mr. Shalford. I'll keep them out, sure enough,” answered the kind old fellow who attended to the wants of the sick. This time he was as good as his word, for as soon as the four were fairly inside he shut the door and locked it.

During the breakfast—such a breakfast the infirmarian explained he had to get up once in a while to keep his hand in for convalescents who had to be coaxed to eat to get strong, an explanation readily admitted by the four—Henning's three friends told him of the wind-storm and of the accident to Stockley. They told him how through Smithers' incoherence of speech they had first believed that Mr. Shalford had been crushed by the falling oak; how Stockley had been found beneath the branches, and, finally, how when he had returned to semi-consciousness he had uttered some very strange words which might mean nothing at all or a great deal for Henning. Roy, as he gradually learned the full particulars became very much interested and finally intensely excited. Was he going to have the wretched affair of the robbery cleared up at last? Did this boy know who the thief was? Could he point him out? Would he do so? And what if, after all, his suspicions about his own cousin should prove correct!

While he was thus pondering, and listening to his friends' suggestions and information, Mr. Shalford came in.

“Henning,” he said, “you may be surprised that I did not let Garrett go to the depot to meet you. The fact is, these rascals here begged so hard that I could not find the heart to refuse them, and you know that the old-fashioned carriage will only hold four. To make amends I will send Garrett to you at once. He has asked several times to be allowed to come in, but I refused until you had finished your breakfast.”

A minute later Andrew Garrett entered, holding out his hand in sympathy to Roy, as he walked across the room. There was a wonderful change in the boy. He looked better than he had looked for months. The blotches and disfiguring pimples had disappeared. Healthy food, regular meals, and being much out of doors had effected that. But there was a change of countenance as well as of face. There was a look of candor not usually seen there of late. The eyes were steady and had lost much of their restlessness. There was at this moment a gratifying air about Garrett which plainly indicated that he wanted to repair any injustice and wrong which he had formerly done to his cousin.

Henning was very much puzzled at the change, which was more apparent to him than to the others who witnessed the meeting.

“Poor little cousin Ethel. Oh, Roy, I'm so sorry. She was such a charming child,”

Roy looked at him in surprise. Could this be the boy who had done him so much injury and had kept the secret all these months? What to make of the tone, the evident look of candor, the change in Garrett, Roy did not know. Sensible fellow as he was, he made the most of it, judging that if the present meeting were merely a piece of good acting on Andrew's part, he would sooner or later find out the true state of affairs. So he offered his hand to Garrett and it was pressed with genuine sympathy.

“And how does Aunty bear the shock?”

Roy told him.

“And mother? Did you see my mother?”

“I did, Andrew, and she grieves quite as much as my mother and father. She sends her love, and Papa sends this with his kindest regards to his nephew.”

Roy gave the sealed envelope, containing the elder Henning's present. Garrett did not open it at once. He said:

“I have several things I wish to say to you when we are alone. Of course you have heard by this time all about the accident to Stockley?”

He then whispered to Roy:

“There's more behind this than you think. Get rid of these fellows for a little while. I have a lot to say to you.”

“I can not just now,” Roy whispered back. “You see they are in a way my guests for the present.

To send them away would not only offend, but it would be very unkind.”

“Very well then; as soon as you can be alone in the yard this morning?”

“All right.”

Garrett then joined in the general conversation around the breakfast table. Roy was much puzzled. He could not understand Andrew at all. Never during the whole time that Garrett had been with him at St. Cuthbert's had he acted in so cousinly a manner. Roy wondered whether the change had been brought about by Ethel's death. Yet unless Andrew was playing a much deeper game than his cousin gave him credit for being able to play, his advances—for they were in Roy's estimation distinct advances—were genuine. He gave up the problem as too hard of solution—and waited.

His cogitations were soon cut short. The physician came down stairs from his morning visit to the injured boy.

“No, I do not think the boy will die,” they heard him remark to the infirmarian, “I am sure he will not, although he thinks he is going to. He'll be all right in a few weeks. What? I told you last night—two ribs and his arm.”

“Can he see any one?”asked the infirmarian.

“He had better be kept quiet for a few days. By the way, he said something about wanting to see a Troy, or a Joy, or some such name—and some one else. Who was it, Denning, Heming, Henning—some such name.”

“It's all one person, doctor. It's Roy Henning he wants to see. May he see him?”

“Yes, I think it would be better to let him see this boy as soon as he wishes. There appears to be something important that he has to say which he wants to get off his mind. Yes, let him see this boy—a chum of his, I suppose. Perhaps it will do him good. Can not do any harm.” [Pg 191]

“A chum of his! Ugh,” said Roy, *sotto voce*. There was really so comical a look of disgust on his face that the other boys, who were watching him closely, burst out laughing. The infirmarian came in:

“The doctor says ye can see the one with a broken arm, though what he do be wantin' ye for, I dunno. It's sorry I am to be hearing ye lost your sister, Master Roy, an' sure the Lord'll be having mercy on her.”

“Thank you very much, for your kind wishes.”

His friends now left him, wishing him all sorts of success in the interview. He thanked them, but did not go upstairs. Instead, he went to the window and looked out as if expecting some one. Some time later his friends were surprised to see him still standing there. Mr. Shalford thought that by this time the interview must be nearly over. He, too, was surprised to see Henning gazing out of the breakfast-room window. The prefect went over to him.

“Why are you not talking with Stockley?”he asked rather sharply.

“For two reasons, sir. I am a little nervous at present. You know how much depends for me on what that boy will say. I want to be cool, so I am waiting a little while. Secondly, I do not intend to go there alone.”

“Not go alone! Why! What do you mean? Are you afraid?”

“No, sir. But if this fellow should, and somehow I think he can, say something to exculpate me, what good would his statement, or perhaps admission, be to me without witnesses? I should be just where I was before.” [Pg 192]

“You are right. You should have witnesses. Whom do you want?”

“Ambrose and Jack and Rob Jones, if you like, sir.”

“No; two are enough. I will send Bracebridge and Beecham to you at once.” [Pg 193]

CHAPTER XXVI

Stockley's Story

When our unfortunate treasurer of the pitching cage fund entered the sickroom he was scarcely prepared for what he found there. The room, to his imagination, resembled an emergency hospital. The air was impregnated with the odors of arnica, and iodine and ether—decidedly sickly smells to one coming in suddenly and not accustomed to them.

On the table near the bed where Stockley was lying were a number of bottles, gauze, and sponges and the remains of a light breakfast. The boy was propped up with pillows, his broken arm in splints resting on one, while another was gently pressed against his fractured ribs.

Stockley was not an ill-featured boy. It is true that he had somewhat neglected his personal appearance of late, but there was nothing about him that was really repulsive, and now after his alcohol bath and with his hair well brushed from his forehead he appeared quite presentable. He had a fine mouth and his eyes were large and clear. His forehead was high and intelligent, and notwithstanding his faults one could not fail to recognize a sort of innate nobility in him, and Roy discovered something more than even this as he watched him. He saw on his face a softened, chastened look. His countenance showed that softening effect which appears in so peculiar yet unmistakable a way immediately after receiving one of the sacraments of the Church. His look was subdued and yet exalted. There was a species of radiance on the face which Roy felt he could not define, but yet was quite discernible. There was also a change of manner of speech. Stockley had been very close to the gates of death and that tremendous fact had changed his views, and the sacrament of Penance had the effect of softening his hitherto somewhat hard exterior conduct and manner and he was even now under the apprehension that it was quite doubtful whether he would recover from his injuries, although the physician had told him that unless most unexpected complications ensued there was no danger. He was nevertheless quite frightened, and was now very serious. It must not be understood, however, that the story he told was due to his fright, for he had quite a different motive in relating what he did.

Roy saw the change in the boy, yet he could not help but regard him with disfavor, although he determined to be perfectly just to him. He was anxious, also, to keep his wits about him in order to lose nothing of what might be said. In justice to himself he meant to get the whole story, although in his heart of hearts he had the sickening dread that this boy lying wounded and bruised before him would confirm his worst fears concerning his cousin Garrett.

Henning realized that the present moment was a critical one in his life; that now, or perhaps never, would all suspicion be removed. He felt that if this interview should result in nothing not already known, and he remain under the unjust and cruel suspicion, it would compel him to reconsider seriously his purpose of entering the seminary. Was there not also a possibility that the bishop would reject him—would be compelled to reject him—upon learning that his character for honesty was impugned?

All this and much more he saw as he stood by the bedside of the injured boy, waiting for him to speak. While waiting he offered a fervent prayer to the Sacred Heart for direction for himself, and that if it were in Stockley's power to do so, he might clear up everything.

To see Henning at this moment one would never imagine that he was very much excited. His two friends thought he was taking the matter very coolly. He stood at the bedside with his hands in the side pockets of his trousers, and with as much apparent nonchalance as if he were watching a ball-game.

Perceiving that Stockley would not, or at least did not begin the conversation, he remarked:

“I am sorry that you have met with so serious and so terrible an accident.”

There was no reply. Stockley put out his uninjured hand, but Roy did not take it. He felt that there was something in the character of the boy lying before him that was entirely antagonistic to his own character and disposition. They were the opposites of each other in almost everything. The one was animated with noble and generous impulses, with exalted ideals of life and duty and goodness. The other, as far as Roy had known him, was the antithesis of all this. Seeing that Stockley did not speak, he again made an attempt to open the conversation.

“The infirmarian tells me that you wish to say something to me.”

“Yes,” said the other in a low voice. He was really suffering a great deal of pain. “Yes, won't you all take chairs? Sit down, all of you.”

“Thanks, I prefer to stand,” said Roy, but the other two found seats.

“But it is rather a long story I have determined to tell. It will take some time.”

Roy sat down.

“That's right. It makes it easier for me to say what I am going to tell.”

Henning nodded his head, without venturing a reply.

“You seem rather sour with me.”

“No. Excuse me if I appear so. I am anxious to hear what you have to say.”

“By the way, where is Smithers? Why hasn't he been up here to see me? Where is he?”

“I know nothing about him. You know I have only arrived from home this morning. As yet I have no news of the yard.”

“Well, he might have come, seeing how thick we have been. But there! I'm not going to say anything about him, or about anybody but myself.”

Roy nodded his head in approbation.

“Ah! that suits you. You pious fellows are so particular about what is said about one's neighbor. I must be careful. You are right, of course, and besides I received a pretty close call, up there on

the hillside, so I am going to try to undo some of the harm I have done. The chaplain has urged me, too.”

“Yes, be careful, please. But what is your story?”

“I was brought up,” he began in a low voice, “in a strange, unwholesome way. I suppose heredity, or at least environment, must have something to do with my tendencies and disposition. The only piece of good fortune I have had was in being sent to St. Cuthbert's, but, now when it is too late, I see how I have missed my chances here. Ever since I can remember, my father has been a heavy drinker and our home has been one of squalid discomfort, and I became more or less soured with everything and everybody and found myself doing many a mean thing. Do you know who it was who put the suspicion of theft on you? Three of us worked that, or strictly speaking, two; It was I and Smithers, and occasionally—once in a great while—your cousin Garrett.”

“So I have thought all along; in fact I knew it,” said Henning, “but why on earth did you do such a thing? Do you not know how much I have suffered from this? And you must know how terribly hard this was to bear.”

“I know very well. Why did we do it? I, for one, was thoroughly envious of your popularity. I was angry, as a good many others were, at your refusal to play baseball or football. I did not, and to tell you the truth, do not like you, and I wanted to do something to vex you. Of course I see these things now in a different light after confession. You know I have been to confession, don't you.”

“I suspected as much. I am glad of that. So you started the cowardly rumor against my honesty all the time knowing I was innocent.”

Henning was determined to be diplomatic, so the question was not put as in anger, or with any apparent excitement or resentment, but rather as if he were helping the boy make a full confession by suggesting to him facts known to both.

“Yes, I acted this way knowing you to be innocent," answered Stockley.

“Did you realize that you might have ruined me for life?”

“To be honest, I never dreamed of such a result. It was done simply to annoy you, and for no other reason, on my part.”

“Did you suggest this to Garrett or he to you?" asked Roy.

“To do him justice, I must say that we, Smithers and I, suggested it to him. We had a hard job to bring him over, in fact he never did really come over. He would never let the letter be circulated.”

“Letter! What letter? What do you mean?”

“Don't you know? That was my biggest card and it fell flat. Don't know? Oh, well, if you don't know about the letter, you must ask your cousin. He wouldn't give it up. I guess he's got it yet.”

Roy was much mystified. He could not imagine what the letter could be, or what bearing it had on the case.

“Stockley, you have told us some things of importance. Now will you not go farther? You know I am innocent of the robbery, and of any possible connection with it?”

“No doubt about that,” said the other.

“Now to make your story complete, and of immense value to me, will you not reiterate your statement before Bracebridge and Beecham here that you know me to be innocent of all the charges which have been circulated about me in the yard?”

“Why, yes. I repeat emphatically that you are guiltless of them all.”

“Thanks! thanks! You are sure of what you say?”

“Quite sure. You are scot-free.”

“Thanks again. Now, Stockley, as you are quite sure, do you not see the only way in which you can convince others that you are correct is to admit you know the thief?”

The boy on the bed laughed.

“Well, Henning, I suppose you think you have caught me nicely. You think I have either said too much or too little. If I had not been to confession I should not have allowed you to drive me into this corner, but I did not intend to stop at this. Yes, I will tell you the name of the thief.”

“Who is he?”asked Roy, as calmly as he could, although he felt himself half choking with suppressed excitement.

“I must continue my story. When I have done you will know. What time is it?”

“Twenty minutes to ten,” answered Roy.

“You've got it yet,” said the boy, pointing his finger at Roy's watch, which he still held in his hand.

"What? The watch? Oh! yes."It was a rather small gold hunting-case watch.

"That watch was the cause of the robbery," said Stockley dramatically. Henning clicked the watch shut with a start, and put it back in his pocket.

"This watch the cause of the robbery! What on earth are you talking about? Your senses must be leaving you——"

"Just wait. You'll soon see I'm not wandering. Why should there be such an unequal distribution of wealth, and of the good things of the world? Why can you have all that heart can desire, and why must I get along with a mere pittance, just enough to make me wince under my own indigence? Look at my father and yours; my home and your home. Your father is a wealthy and honored lawyer with a home like a palace; mine, as I said before, one of squalid discomfort. My father gave me five dollars to get through the school year with, yours probably gave you a hundred."

Henning began to pity the boy. Laying his hand gently on Stockley he said:

"Hold on. I begin to catch your view, but you are getting on too fast. I am going to tell you something which I have never breathed to a living soul. Do you know how much money I had to spend this year?" [Pg 200]

"As I said," replied the other, "about a hundred, or perhaps much more."

"You are mistaken. I had just twenty-five dollars—not one cent more—and you see that's a very small amount for me, because I am supposed—just as you suppose now—to have plenty."

"Oh! Come off! You gave Smithers nearly ten,"

"I know it, and it left me fifteen."

Jack and Ambrose were never so surprised in their lives—and felt like cheering. Stockley remained silent. This was a revelation to him. He had supposed that a rich man's son, because he was a rich man's son, always had all the money he wanted. He was sharp enough to realize Roy's position during the year.

"My, that must have been hard on you,"

"It was hard," replied Roy.

Another long pause. The injured boy was thinking new thoughts. [Pg 201]

CHAPTER XXVII

Stockley's Story (Continued)

"I'VE been thinking," said Stockley, at length breaking the silence. "I've been thinking that if I had known last Christmas what you have told me now things might have happened very differently. I guess I am not the only fellow who has seen hard lines here. Yes, things would have been different."

"How so?"asked Henning.

"It's this way. I told you that it was your gold watch that was the cause—or the occasion—of all the trouble that came to you. It happened this way. For some time before Christmas I envied you, your good clothes, this gold watch, and—and your popularity. Along by Christmas my father neglected me. He sent me no money, which he might easily have done had he given me one thought. The more nearly broke I was at holiday time the deeper my envy. I knew, for I watched you closely, that you were collecting a pretty sum for the cage. I saw where you kept the money. The idea of securing a gold watch for myself took strong hold upon me. It did not take long or many attempts to loosen one of the outside window bars. Then on the *Richelieu* night when everybody was full of thoughts of the play, when the prefects were hurrying the boys to bed, I entered through the window and secured the money."

"And it wasn't—it wasn't—"Roy choked up.

"Who? It wasn't anybody but myself. Smithers had no hand in it then." [Pg 202]

Roy Henning's heart gave a great bound of relief. It was not his cousin, after all. Thank God, thank God! The family honor was saved! How glad he was now of his silence! Was ever silence so golden? What irretrievable damage a hasty word could have done. The thief known, on his own confession, and before witnesses. His cousin exonerated! Thank God, thank God! Of course Roy was curious now to know all the details and it was with the utmost difficulty that he restrained his excitement sufficiently to be able to speak in a natural tone.

"How did you manage to do it?"

"Umph! This information which you have been seeking for the last five months does not seem

to affect you much.”

“With that we can deal later. Now I am curious to know how you did it. Please tell me.”

“As you take the matter so coolly, I will. I laid my plans well. I determined, if caught in lifting the grating, to be hunting for a ball, which I had previously dropped down there. I watched my time. I made the entry while the boys were in the chapel at night prayers. I settled with myself that if I were caught coming out, to bring the money to you to prove to you how foolish you were to leave it in a common table drawer. In the dark it took only a minute to lift the grating. You know that it is thick iron with small holes. Three boys did actually walk over the grating that night while I was crouching beneath it with the money in my pocket.”

Henning startled both Stockley and his companions by saying, dramatically:

“I saw you that night there.”

“What, you saw me! Oh, I say, that's a likely story—and didn't say a word all this time,”

“I can prove it.”

“How?”

“Why did you wear Garrett's blue sweater?”

“Guess you did see me then, for I wore it. I wanted a disguise. If any one saw me near that window with Garrett's sweater on they would take me for him, provided I hid my face well—which I did. No one would suspect Garrett of thieving.”

Again Henning was thankful that he had kept his resolution of silence. It was not for Garrett's sake he had made it. Why it was made, and kept in the face of such suspicious circumstances, the reader will learn ere long.

“Did you purchase the gold watch you wanted with your—your ill-gotten gains?”

“I did not. I was afraid to do so. I saw at once if I did I should compromise myself. I saw that I should have to tell where I got the money for such a purpose. Everybody, and especially the faculty, knew that I did not have overmuch pocket-money. My common-sense, after all, told me I could not use the money here. So I made myself a felon for nothing. What is left—most of it—is now with the President.”

Stockley paused a minute, and then continued:

“Don't think this is an easy task for me, boys. I promised the chaplain to straighten things out, and as you had to have the essentials, you might as well have the details also. I shall never face the boys again, for as soon as I can be moved I am to be sent home. Anyway, Henning, I like the way you received the story.”

“I am very thankful to you that you make it so clear and circumstantial.”

“You remember in the early spring there was a good deal of money spent by the boys. If I remember rightly you yourself bought a number of books, bats, balls, and shoes. Well, at that time I ventured to spend some, but I was horribly suspicious all the time. Somehow I imagined that every dollar I spent was marked in some invisible way and would be traced back to me. No, I tell you that has done me no good, given me not one moment of satisfaction, and has only added an extra burden to my conscience.”

“Did Smithers have a hand in this thievery?" asked Roy.

“Leave others out. You said that to me just now, and now you are trying to get some one else incriminated.”

“No, I am not. I am merely acting in self-defense. You have cleared me of all suspicion. I must, if he was implicated in this wretched affair, have him clear me also.”

“You need not bother about Smithers,” said Bracebridge; “that charming and courageous individual departed for unknown pastures between two suns. You will see him no more. The boys say he is daffy on account of the storm. Let it go at that, Roy.”

Henning was surprised at this news, but not altogether pleased. Matters had thus far gone so propitiously that he wanted every knot in the tangle straightened out.

“That's all right, Roy,” said Bracebridge. “There will be no more trouble from that quarter.”He then turned to Stockley, saying:

“I must say that we are obliged to you for your candor. It is rather a manly acknowledgment after all.”

“You see, I went to confession last night, and——”

“I understand. You are properly trying to undo the wrong you have done. You will never be able to undo the mental torture you have inflicted on Henning all these months.”

“I never shall. I am sorry for all that now, and I ask your pardon, Henning.”

The three boys were discovering that there was something manly in Stockley after all.

"That's all right," said Roy heartily. "It's all over now. Try and keep straight for the future."

"Now," said Bracebridge, "there is only one thing more to be done. Of course you will sign a paper exonerating Henning from all possible implication, now you have acknowledged your own guilt. Our word as witnesses would be sufficient, but it would come with better grace from you, don't you think so?"

"There's not much gracefulness in the whole wretched business, I'm thinking, but I'll sign."

That afternoon, with the permission of the prefect, there was posted on the bulletin board a notice which created more intense excitement than anything since the loss of the money during the Christmas holidays. It ran as follows:

> "This is to certify that I, of my own free will and without coercion, admit that I stole the seventy-two dollars last Christmas week, and that no one now at the college had the least thing to do with planning or carrying out the theft except myself."
>
> "John Stockley."

CHAPTER XXVIII

The Unraveled Tangle

UNPLEASANT as the interview had been to Roy, he no sooner left the sickroom than he found his spirits rise with a great bound. At last! At last he was cleared! Now the way was smoothed for him. All aspersions on his character would be scattered like the morning mist before the sun, as soon as the contents of the precious paper were made known.

The three boys left the infirmary at about half an hour after eleven o'clock. In a quarter of an hour classes would be dismissed for the day, it being a customary half-holiday.

Jack Beecham was eager to post the notice on the bulletin board at once. They took the wiser and safer course. They decided to see the prefect first, as nothing appeared on the board without his sanction, and when it did it was regarded as official.

"Come in," they heard him call in response to their rap at the door.

"Great news, Mr. Shalford," shouted Jack Beecham before he entered the room. "Everything's settled. Roy's all right now. The head of the clique has done it this time—in black and white, too; see, sir."

Mr. Shalford arose, smiling, and extended his hand to Henning.

"I am very glad. It has been an ugly business. It has caused no end of anxiety. The rumors and charges were always so intangible that I never could trace one to its source. But let me see the paper."

This boys' true friend gave a low whistle as he read Stockley's acknowledgment.

"So you are cleared, Henning; and the thief is known? That's capital. Poor boy! Isn't it too bad, boys, to find a student—one of us—a thief, a burglar, a felon! Oh, the pity of it! Well, pray for him, boys, pray for him. Leave this note with me, Henning. I'll see that it does its work. Congratulations, all of you. Whatever you have, Roy, you have some loyal friends. Congratulations, congratulations, all of you,"

The note was immediately posted. Then the excitement began, at first among half-a-dozen around the board, then among other groups, and in a very short time throughout the college. George McLeod and Ernest Winters simply went wild, and in less than an hour they could scarcely speak at all, so hoarse were they from shouting.

Where was Henning? A rush was made to the Philosophy classroom. He was not there. Perhaps he was with the rector or the prefect of studies. Both these places were invaded by excited boys, but Roy was not forthcoming.

Just as the big bell rang for dinner, George McLeod made a rush for the chapel, sure that he would find his friend there. And there he did find the three, Jack, Ambrose, and Roy, pouring out their thanksgiving with grateful hearts for the happy turn events had taken.

"Come, Roy; it's dinner. The big bell has rung; come on."

Roy did not move, nor did his companions. He evidently intended to avoid the crowd, waiting until they should all be at dinner, knowing that in the refectory they would have to remain quiet.

This time he miscalculated entirely. No sooner did he make his appearance than the whole of the students of the senior refectory rose to their feet and gave three hearty cheers for Roy Henning. The prefect made no attempt to stop the demonstration, while Ernest Winters, out in

the middle of the room, was fairly dancing with joy and excitement.

At a given signal from Mr. Shalford all cheering ceased. Every one resumed his seat—except Ernest, who danced on in his glee, to the intense amusement of all, and to his own utter confusion when he discovered that he was the only boy now making any noise in the refectory.

Before the laugh at his expense had subsided the prefect whispered to Roy:

“Shall I give talking at table in honor of the event?”

“To-morrow, please, sir,” replied Roy, “now I want to think a little.”

Mr. Shalford gave a look and a nod to the reader, and the meal, save for the reader's voice, was finished in silence.

If the boys were not allowed to talk for a little while, there was no lack of signs and signals. Harry Gill was frantic to signal across the room his congratulations, and had a fit of coughing for trying to eat his dinner and at the same time send a series of telegraphic messages to Roy.

Henning was pleased to see that Andrew Garrett was quite demonstrative of good will. Andrew, for a long time tried to catch his cousin's eye. When he did so, he dropped his knife and fork and imitated a handshaking. Roy did the same to his cousin, and was repaid by seeing a look of intense pleasure spread over Andrew's face.

Of course all these signs and signals and other unusual occurrences were breaches of discipline which, at any other time would not have gone unchecked and unpunished. But Mr. Shalford knew exactly “how it was.”He had been a real boy himself once, and knew exactly when not to see too much. He believed in the scriptural motto, “Be not over just.”

And after dinner! What a scene the yard presented for a few minutes! The delighted boys shook Roy's hand until his arm fairly ached. His arm ached because he allowed it to be shaken by others, instead of himself shaking every hand extended. In this business he was unexperienced.

In the midst of the enthusiasm, which resembled that which follows an important and successful baseball game, only more intense, Harry Gill jumped upon a long bench by the wall and shouted:

“Listen, gentlemen. I have good news for you. Hi, there! listen. Listen there, boys, listen, listen! Roy Henning has promised to pitch for the rest of the year! Did—you—hear that—boys?”

Roy suddenly remembered that he had intended to give Gill the credit for this. He jumped on the bench in a second. Raising his hand, the hero of the hour obtained silence in a much shorter time than Gill had done.

“If I pitch for the rest of the year,” he said, “it is all Gill's fault. I simply could not resist his importunities. Oh, he's a sly one,”

“It isn't,” said Gill laughing.

“It is.”

“It is not.”

“It is.”

Then there was a cheer which could be heard down at Cuthberton.

After a time Roy, Jack, Ambrose, and Rob Jones extricated themselves from the throng of happy boys, and with Gill and Andrew Garrett repaired to the Philosophy classroom, or Hilson's parlor, as it was called, which the other members of the class considerately left at their disposal for the time being.

“Oh, what a day we're having,” sighed Jack Beecham as he sank into a chair.

“Glorious, isn't it?”said the jubilant Bracebridge.

“And now that we are alone,” began Andrew Garrett, "that is, among special friends, I want to say something.”

All were silent in an instant. Gill, who did not appear to have realized the previous strained relations between the two cousins began to say something funny, but he was checked by an unmistakably significant glance from Ambrose, who had become quite serious, for he rather expected a scene, if not an explosion. Shealey, who had come in, was too full of fun and nonsense to imagine that anybody just now could be serious, but when he saw the nervous look on Ambrose's face, and the evident nervousness of Garrett, he, too, realized that it was time to suspend bantering.

All the friends were standing in a group around Henning, laughing and chattering as only boys thoroughly happy can laugh and chatter, when Garrett began to speak. At the sound of his voice, they all, with Roy in the center, turned and faced Garrett as he stood two or three feet away.

“I want to say something,” Garrett began again, "and I think it only fair, Roy, to say it before these others, as well as to you.”

Henning bowed slightly, having only a faint idea of what was coming. At present he was too pleased to know that Garrett was not implicated and that the family name was untarnished.

[Pg 211] "I want to say that I consider myself to have been a pretty mean and small sort of a fellow in this whole business."

"Oh! Don't——"began Roy in protest.

"Wait a minute, Roy. This is the task I have set myself, for it seems to me the only possible way in which I can make reparation. I want to say that I had a good deal to do with those rumors. I got in, somehow, with a crowd of boys I ought to have been ashamed to associate with. How it all happened I don't exactly know. Things went from bad to worse with me, and pretty far, too. It seems a dream to me now. About a week ago suddenly I began to realize my position. How this realization came about I don't know. It must have been dear little Ethel's prayers for me, but I began to think of my position, think of what I was doing, and, yes, to think of the sin of it all. You were away, Roy, and when I remembered your trouble and grief at home, and when, finally, your brotherly telegram came, I began to be thoroughly ashamed of myself. So now all I can do is to ask your pardon, and the pardon of all these, your loyal and staunch friends."

As he listened to this manly avowal, there arose in Roy Henning's breast an admiration for his cousin's moral courage. The other auditors were deeply impressed. They waited with curiosity to see what Roy would do. And he? He did precisely what might be expected of him. Without saying a word, he stepped forward, took Garrett's hand and shook it warmly. Then:

"It's all over, old man. Let bygones be bygones. I forgive everything and forget."

"Thanks, very much. I do not deserve this, but you shall see I shall deserve it."

There was a world of pathos and earnestness in Andrew's voice at that moment.

[Pg 212] The rest of the gathering of friends extended their hands, and Andrew shook hands all around.

"Now," said Roy, "will you permit me to ask a few questions, to clear up some obscure points in my mind?"

"Certainly; anything," said Andrew, with alacrity.

"How did that wretched Stockley come to wear your blue sweater? He tells me he did, and, besides, I saw him get down below that grating that night and I thought it was you."

"Thought it was me," said Garrett in the greatest amazement. "You thought it was I, and all this time you thought I was the thief, and yet stood all I said against you, and never said a word! Oh, Roy! No wonder on that Sunday afternoon you insisted on my clearing you,"

Andrew Garrett appeared to be fairly overcome by his cousin's generosity.

"Why, oh, why didn't I know all this before? How differently I would have acted. Believe me, it is only this very day I learned that the thief wore my sweater that night. Before going to bed on the night of the play I hung my sweater on a peg in the study-hall. The next morning I saw that it had been used by some one, for there were dirt stains on it and some rust marks from contact with rusty iron. I determined not to wear it after that. I had no idea the thief had used it, though."

"Thanks," said Roy. "Now one more question, Andrew."

"Fire away."

"This morning Stockley said something about a letter which you knew something of—one in some way connected with me. Can you tell me anything about it?"

[Pg 213] Now it so happened that the affair of the letter was the only incident in the untoward conduct of Garrett for many months past in which he could take any kind of satisfaction. It will be remembered that he had refused to allow Stockley and Smithers to circulate it among the boys. He had retained it ever since.

"That's easy enough," he answered, as he drew the crumpled letter from his pocket.

"But I have to ask you a question now, for the wording of the letter certainly looks compromising enough. Listen to this, gentlemen."Andrew read the scrap of paper to the astonished listeners.

> "Dec. 23rd. My dear chum: Your letter received last Monday. Sorry to say that"—"here's a blank," said Garrett, and then continued, "have no money just now, so can not do the thing you wish. Awfully sorry. Feel like stealing the money rather than letting this thing go undone. However, wait till the end of Christmas week. Something's going to turn up before that—then we can go into partnership in this, at least for the merit—keep everything dark. Don't say a word to anybody about it. Mind, now, chum, everything must be kept secret or—smash! Yours, Roy H."

When Garrett began to read the note, Henning looked puzzled. After a time he seemed to remember all about it, and then he—blushed.

"Oh! that's——"but he stopped suddenly. He was going to make a revelation of some kind, and

suddenly thought better of it. He blushed profusely—like a girl. He was awkward. For a moment he appeared embarrassed in no slight degree. Twice he was going to say something; twice he changed his mind.

His friends were very much puzzled. Was there a shade of truth in some of the charges made against Roy after all? Had their idol fallen? Was he, after all, not to be their hero? Was he a lesser character than all along they had judged him?

Roy saw these fleeting fancies on their wavering faces, all except Ambrose's. He never doubted, nor did he show the least sign of wavering. Roy saw wonder and incipient doubt elsewhere, at which he blushed the more furiously.

The situation was certainly dramatic. A climax had come to-day. Was there, after all, to be an anticlimax? Was the idol to be shattered at the very last moment?

“What does it all mean, Roy?”asked Garrett.

“I would rather not say,” was the reply.

“You had better, Roy,” said Bracebridge, in confidential tones.

Still blushing, Roy said:

“I say, you fellows, you don't mean to say there is anything crooked in this, do you?”

“No,” replied Andrew Garrett, “but an enemy of yours could make mighty good capital out of it all the same. Tell us what it means, Roy.”

“If you must know, then, it's merely this,” answered Roy, a little angrily, not exactly with his friends, but more at the exigencies of the situation. "There is a poor—quite poor—student in a seminary who is and has been a great friend of mine, in fact pretty much of a hero, as you would say if you knew his story. He had the greatest longing to get home last Christmas to see his widowed mother after years of absence. He could not afford it, and, like a real friend, asked me to assist him. Unfortunately my funds were very low—too low to help him. I expected that my mother would send me her usual Christmas present. I found out that she was willing to do so, and I wrote to her to send most of it to my friend instead. There's your great mystery! I was short of funds because my father cut down my allowance this year.”

“So that's the reason you were so close this year?" asked Andrew.

“What?”

“Because your father cut down, and yet, by Jove! you were willing to send what you did get to some one else. Well, I call that noble, indeed I do. Oh, I wish I had known all this before! If I had but known! If I had——”

“Say, you fellows, haven't you done catechising me?”said Roy Henning, attempting to divert their attention from himself.

“If you please, cousin, one more question,” said Andrew.

Roy made a wry face, and a mock gesture of impatience.

“You would try the patience of a saint,”

“May I?”

“Well, fire ahead.”

“You say that all along you thought I was the thief?”

“I certainly did, Andrew,” answered Roy, serious in a minute, “for no one but you here ever wore a blue sweater.”

“Then why did you not, especially as I had acted so meanly toward you—why did you not do or say something that would point suspicion to me, or openly make the charge?”

The question aroused considerable emotion in Roy's breast. It showed itself in the workings of the muscles of his cheeks. Taking Andrew Garrett by the hand, he looked into his eyes.

“Shall I tell you, Andrew?”

“Yes, please do.”

“If I spoke or moved in this I knew it would break your mother's heart.”

Andrew could stand no more. He broke down. Boy as he was, with all a boy's natural distaste for displaying emotion before others, he was not ashamed to rest his head for a moment on his cousin's shoulder and sob. The only words that fell from his lips were:

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