THE BOYS OF AXLEFORD

Charles Camden

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THE

BOYS OF AXLEFORD

Willis Lewis.

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Frontispiece. P. 1

THE BOYS OF AXLEFORD

BY CHARLES CAMDEN

AUTHOR OF "WHEN I WAS YOUNG"

ILLUSTRATED BY

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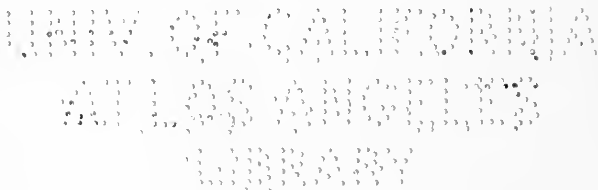

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I.

FIBBING BILL.

AXLEFORD SCHOOL was a nice warm-looking old place, with twisted chimneys, and windows in all kinds of funny places in its red walls, that were as ripe as red apples, and in its grey roof-ridges, that were like ever so many little ranges of mountains; and it looked out over a green paddock that almost bulged over a sloping mossy wall, like a plump lady's instep over her shoe, on to a winding country lane that led down to the village of Axleford. I suppose the village was called so because the little stream that ran across the lane came up to the axles of the carts

and waggons that forded it. There was a little wooden bridge for foot-passengers. Elms and chestnut trees grew along the wall of the school paddock, and almost covered the lane with their spreading branches. All round about the school there were woods and meadows, corn-fields and turnip-fields. On the side of the paddock nearest Axleford there was a great pond, that we could bathe in and fish in in warm weather, and skate and slide on in cold. There was a leaky old punt on it, too, that belonged to the school-house. And close by the school there was a ruined old grey church, with bushy ivy growing all about it, and no end of birds' nests in its walls; and a big old farmyard, full of empty barns, and cart-lodges, and stables, and cow-houses, and cattle-sheds, formed part of the school premises. Most of the boys who went to school at Axleford thought it a very jolly place. I was there for a good many years, and am going to tell you something about some of my school-

mates, good and bad. They won't mind my telling tales out of school now. A good many of them, perhaps, are not left to mind. I shall call them, at starting, names that papa, and mamma, and the girls, and the "kids" can understand, but you and I know that boys aren't called like that at school. So I shall give their proper nicknames too.

Fibbing Bill, for instance, *we* called Crammer. He wasn't a bad sort of fellow in some things, but then he did tell such awful lies. He was so fond of getting into scrapes that at first you thought him plucky, but he always tried to get out of his scrapes by a fib of some kind, and therefore you couldn't respect Crammer long. There are some scrapes that it is almost natural for you youngsters to get into (you wouldn't be youngsters, but precocious grandpapas, if you didn't get into them), and there are some scrapes you have no business whatever to get into; but, whichever kind you do get into, don't back out

of them by telling a lie, but take the consequences like men. Though it is a good many years since I had the cane, I can remember how it cuts when it comes down with a whistle on the palm and doubles back on the knuckles; but it is far better to have weals on your hands for weeks, than to hear conscience saying, "Oh, you mean little beggar!" when the lights are out in the bed-room, and the chaps that *have* got caned are snoring as comfortably as pigs, because they have no fear of being found out, after all, on the morrow.

One of the stables in the farmyard was our menagerie. We kept guinea-pigs and ferrets there, and they kept away the rats. And we kept rabbits, and a hedgehog, and a young fox, and three squirrels, and two ravens; pigeons and doves, two or three magpies and starlings (whose tongues we had split with a thin sixpence, and yet they wouldn't talk); linnets and goldfinches, and bullfinches, and canaries; blackbirds, and

thrushes, and larks; half a dozen puppies, and white mice, and field-mice, and dormice, and a mole; a newt in a porter-bottle, and a bowl of goldfish, that were always dying; and some snakes, like whip-thongs made of different coloured ribbons, that were always dying too, or else crawling away, just when we thought that we had tamed them; and I don't know how many newspaper-trayfuls of silkworms, and ever so many more things that I can't remember now.

Crammer was a rabbit-fancier. He had one big buck that he was especially proud of—a great, ugly, white-and-sandy fellow, as long as a hare, and ever so much fatter. Poor Bill used to tell crams about his rabbits, as he did about everything else, and he said that he had given five shillings for this old buck. He had bought it at Dulchester, from a man of the name of Blater, who sold rock, and brandy-balls, and things of that kind, in a stall in the High Street

on market-days, and kept a bird and rabbit-shop in one of the back lanes.

We soon found out from Blater what Crammer had paid for his rabbit; but that made no difference to Bill. He maintained as at first that he had paid five shillings, and bragged that he must understand rabbits a great deal better than Blater did, or else he wouldn't have been able to get such a pearl amongst bucks for so ridiculously low a price. Crammer called his buck Pearl. The rest of us called him Saturn, because, whenever he got the chance, he used to eat up his little ones. Nobody but his master could see anything in Pearl, except his bigness; but Crammer used to talk as if he was doing us a great favour when he lugged the big beast out of the hutch by his ugly, short, stiff ears (they hadn't a mite of lop in them), and let him hobble about on the stable floor, stopping to rest, and pant, and sit down every half-minute, just like a pursy, gouty old gentleman. We used to show our live stock

against one another's, just as, I dare say, you do now; and so do the grown-up costermongers in Bethnal Green, and the grown-up farmers at the Agricultural Hall. We grown-up people do much the same as you boys do; only, somehow, we can't manage to be so jolly over it.

One morning, however, when we ran into the stable as usual as soon as we were up, one of the fellows called out, "Look here, Bill! what 's the matter with your buck?" When Crammer did look, he was almost mad with rage, for Pearl was lying on his side, with his legs out and body swelled up like a bladder, quite dead. Poor Crammer could hardly help crying. We were very sorry for him at first, though we didn't think much of his rabbit. We were looking at the bits of stalks left in the hutch to see what the buck had been eating to poison him, when Crammer began to accuse us of killing it out of jealousy and spite. Then he began to blubber. Of course we couldn't help pitying him a bit, but we were

very angry that he should dare to accuse us of such a mean thing as that. It was just his accusing us this way that made us suspect him afterwards, when another rabbit died.

A little time after this, one of the chaps bought a real beauty of Blater. It was a white and black buck—as white as ermine and as glossy black as jet—and it had a regular butterfly smut. You might have fancied that a black butterfly had lighted on its nose. It had regular lop-ears, too—not oar-lop, or single lop—but both hung down like a King Charles's spaniel's ears. Even Crammer admitted at first that it was pretty good, and tried to buy it. When he couldn't get it, he made out that it wasn't worth much; but it was easy to see that he was quite savage because it wasn't his. It was such a very handsome buck that we called it Paris. Well, one evening we had been rung into school to write our exercises. Crammer sat next to me, and he came in rather late, and I noticed that he looked very queer, and got his

exercise-book and his dictionary out of his locker in a great hurry, and began to scribble away a good deal faster than he generally did. Presently, one of the little fellows found that he had left a book in the stable, and asked leave to go and fetch it. He came back quite pale, and as soon as he got inside the door he called out to the usher,

"Please, sir, one of the ferrets has got out, and is sucking Smith's buck."

Smith didn't wait to ask leave, but jumped over the form, and rushed off to the stable. He soon came back, carrying poor Paris dead in his arms. Everybody looked up except Crammer. He went on as if he did not know anything had happened.

The usher began to make inquiries.

"I choked the little brute off," said Smith, "but it was too late. It was my ferret, and how it could get out I don't know. I 'm certain the cage could only be opened from the outside—so

the ferret must have got out first, before it could let itself out."

We couldn't help laughing at that—Smith was always making speeches of that sort; but we were very sorry for him all the same; and I couldn't help believing that Crammer knew something about the matter. By-and-bye, as if he had just found out what all the disturbance was about, he looked up and said,

"Oh, yes, ferrets often get out of their cages; Blater's do—he told me so—only he keeps his with their mouths sewn up."

"How can he feed them?" asked Smith.

"Well, *I* don't know anything about your rabbit," answered Crammer; "I haven't been in the stable since dinner-time."

"Who said you had?" said Smith; and we all looked at Crammer very suspiciously.

The usher noticed that his pocket-handkerchief was twisted round one of his fingers, and asked him what was the matter with it.

"I 've cut it, sir."

"What with?"

"With a knife."

"Please, sir, I picked up this knife just under Smith's ferret-cage," said the little boy who had been in the stable.

Crammer looked very scared when the usher said, "Why, this is your knife, Bunting: here is your name on the handle;" but a moment after he cried out, as if he had made a great discovery,

"Then Francis Minor must have let the ferret out, sir. I haven't had that knife for a fortnight, and I always thought he prigged it. Don't you see, sir, the little blade 's broken? He must have done that when he was untwisting the wires."

We were almost certain now that it was Crammer that had got the ferret out and put him into the rabbit-hutch, and we were quite certain when the usher made him take the handkerchief off his finger, and we saw that the wound in it was far more like a bite than a knife-cut. But Cram-

mer still declared that he knew nothing about the ferret. He didn't stammer or turn red: as often as not those are signs that a fellow is innocent. He prated away like a Cheap Jack, and we did not believe one word he said. We were specially angry that he should be mean enough to throw the blame on poor little Francis Minor.

Of course it is just possible that Crammer didn't put Smith's ferret into Smith's hutch, but I don't think that we did wrong in sending him to Coventry for the rest of the half; and that and his conscience together (if he was guilty, as I am sure he was) must have been worse than a dozen canings.

When Bill came back next half, I do believe that he tried sometimes to keep from fibbing; but I 've known him tell a fib, out of habit, when there was nothing to be gained by it; and if he had thought a moment, he must have been sure no one could believe him. If a fellow is left-handed, you know, it 's a precious long time

before he can learn to bowl with his right, and when he has partly got into the way of it, he is apt every now and then to take the ball in his left. Well, it 's much the same when you have let yourself grow left-handed in your talk. But at last Bill got a scare that did him good.

It was just before the Christmas holidays. The fields were all covered with snow, and Bill and some other fellows were out in one of them, rolling over a great dumpling that they meant to carve into a snow-man when it was big enough. It grew so heavy at last that they had to call for help to turn it over. One of the chaps who ran up was a little fellow we used to call Miss Jemima for a joke, because he had long curls like a girl, and his collars had borders that the laundry-woman was obliged to Italian-iron; but that was his mamma's fault, and not his; and Miss Jemima, though we did call him so, was a plucky fellow enough.

When the new-comers put their backs and

their shoulders to the ball, it soon began to roll over again, until it came to the brink of a deep frozen ditch with pollards on the banks; some of them looked like worn-out brooms, and some, that had snow on the top, like great drum-sticks. There the other fellows got tired, and left Crammer and Miss Jemima to make the snow-man. Miss Jemima, as we found out afterwards, scrambled up to the top of the ball, and Crammer, for a lark, gave it a jog. It was just on the ledge of the ditch, and over it went crash through the ice! It blocked up the great hole it made, and when Crammer couldn't see anything of Miss Jemima, he thought that the little fellow must be drowning down below in the cold black water. He was in an awful fright, and ran back to the school shouting out for help. Plenty of help rushed back with him to the ditch, but even then he couldn't tell the truth. He said that the little fellow had scooped away the snow on the other side of the ball to make it tumble into the ditch,

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and that whilst he was doing so the ball had fallen in, taking him down with it. The masters, and the boys, and the servants broke up the ice in the ditch, and prodded everywhere with poles, but they couldn't find poor Miss Jemima. At last we thought that his body must have been carried down into the pond, but how it could have got there so soon (though the ditch *was* more like a rivulet than a common ditch) was a mystery. Anyhow, we made sure that we should never see Miss Jemima alive again. The Doctor sent into Dulchester for drags, and employed every man he could lay hands on to break up the pond; but nothing had been seen of the little fellow when at last we were rung into the school-room to late evening prayers. When the prayers were half over, in tottered Miss Jemima, as pale as a ghost, and with a streak and smear of clotted blood upon his forehead; and up from his knees jumped Crammer, crying, "Oh! don't hurt me! I didn't mean to do it."

If Crammer had not told a lie about the way in which the accident happened, Miss Jemima would have been looked for on the *other side of the ditch* as well as *in* it; and there he would have been found lying, stunned and bleeding, behind a ploughshare, against which he had been hurled. As things were, Miss Jemima had to spend his Christmas holidays at Axleford, raving in fever; and when we came back, his mamma was still with him, and the poor little chap was as thin and as weak as a starved mouse. Crammer came back with us, though the Doctor had vowed he would expel him. But Miss Jemima's mamma, though she did still have his collars Italian-ironed (he had no long curls left), had kindly asked the Doctor to give Bill another chance, because her little boy had asked her to do so; and before he left Axleford, new boys couldn't make out why Bill Bunting was still called Crammer. Names will stick, you know, long after they have ceased to be deserved.

II.

SULKY SAM.

THE first time I saw Bear's Cub—that was our nickname for sulky Sam Thompson—was the first time I ever went into the school-room at Axleford. He was a little chap then—not much bigger than I was—and he had only been at school a few hours longer than I had been; but his school godfathers and godmothers (for the needlewoman and the servants thought him as grumpy as the fellows did) had already given him that name. He looked as if he deserved it. Some of the chaps wanted him to come out and play, instead of moping over his locker; but he wouldn't say a word to them, and, when at last they pulled the form from under him, he still

clung to the desk, without saying a word, but looking just as sulky as a young bear. It wasn't as if he was sorry at leaving home. It's natural enough for a little fellow to feel a bit down-hearted the first time he goes to a large school, and sees nothing but strange places and strange faces about him. But Bear's Cub wasn't like that. He wouldn't go out, just because the other fellows wanted him to go out. Well, just the kind of fellow he was then, I am sorry to say he continued to be all the time I knew him—or rather he grew worse, for nothing grows on any one like sulkiness, if you let it grow, instead of trying to shake yourself out of it. Of course, whilst he was a little fellow, his sulks got him plenty of teasing and drubbings too; but when he was too big to have forms pulled from under him, or his back "warmed" with a knotted pocket-handkerchief, he wasn't a bit more respected. We called him Old Bear's Cub, instead of Young Bear's Cub—that was the only difference.

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I will tell you how he behaved one holiday, when he was still Young Bear's Cub.

In most of the story-books about schoolmasters that I have read, they are made out to be great beasts. I don't think that is quite fair. If schoolmasters wrote story-books, perhaps they would have more reason to make out that all schoolboys are plaguesome *little* beasts; though that wouldn't be fair either. Both schoolboys and schoolmasters have good as well as bad amongst them. Our Doctor was one of the good ones. "Doctor" sounds as if a man must be grey and grim, but our Doctor was not old, and he was quite a jolly fellow. He seemed to like play just as well as we did—cricket, and football, and hockey on the ice, and chevy, and hare-and-hounds, and stag-warning. Of course he wasn't a "dunce at syntax," but he was a "dab at taw." He would even play at leap-frog, and set low backs for the little fellows. He was a capital rider, and could row, and swim, and skate, and

shoot, and knew ever so much besides Latin and Greek and mathematics—about birds, and weasels, and fire balloons, and things like that: so we thought a great deal of the Doctor. But, perhaps, what made us like him most was because he seemed almost as fidgety as we were at having to stay in school on very fine days. Every now and then, after we had been rung in, he would give us a sudden holiday in fine weather, and take us for a scamper across country.

Well, one glorious spring morning we had been rung in, and my class was pretending to be very busy over *Omnis Gallia est divisa* (we had just begun Cæsar); but with the sun shining in as it did on the hacked old desk, making it quite hot, we found it very hard to take any interest in *Omnis Gallia.* Gaul might have been divided into fifty thousand parts for anything we cared. We rather wished, indeed, that it had been broken up into so many little bits that they could not have been picked up to bother us.

Instead of looking out words in our dictionaries, we took to drawing pictures in them. There were so many names cut on the desk, and so much ink had been splashed over it, and so many faces and figures had been drawn there already, that there was not room for any more; so we drew our designs on the fly-leaves of our dictionaries—etchings something like this—

(mind, young gentlemen, I am not holding them up in any way as *models*.) And then we looked out of window, and the willow-warblers were

having such a spree about the elms on the other side of the paddock, that it really seemed as if they were doing it to show off and plague us, because we were kept in, whilst they were so jolly. The little fellows in their brown dress-coats and white waistcoats were behaving as if the sunshine had got into their heads. They chased one another round the tops of the trees, and jumped up from swaying twigs like Clowns from springing-boards. They seemed to have so much life in them that they didn't know how to live fast enough. They were a tantalizing sight for little schoolboys expected to get up the first chapter of Cæsar. Just, however, as we were settling down to *Omnis Gallia* in earnest (fearing that, if we didn't, we shouldn't get out all day), in came the Doctor, with a "put-away-your-books" look on his face.

"Well, boys," he said, "we 've had rather disagreeable weather lately"—he always made some excuse like that—"and, perhaps, a little fresh air

won't do any of us any harm. So we'll put off business till the afternoon. Put away your books, and we'll start for D'Arcy Tower."

In a second the lockers had gobbled up all the books, not to come out again until evening school —we soon learnt what the Doctor's "afternoon" meant—and out we tumbled round him like hounds round a huntsman. He generally was the only master who went with us on these holiday scampers. The under-masters could go or stay as they liked; and almost always they "elected," as the Yankees say, to stay.

I was in the same class with Bear's Cub then, and we ran out of school together. Bear's Cub, for a wonder, was in a good temper, and—a greater wonder still—he kept in a good temper until we had almost got out of Axleford. A bear with a sore head, though, might have been good-tempered that morning. When we tramped over the little bridge at Axleford (making as great a clatter as we could on the loose old planks), the

willows were all hung with yellow catkins, and little fish were leaping up from the water as if they had been just let out from school like us, and the little sedge-warblers were chattering like a parcel of girls, and playing hide-and-seek in the rushes, and swinging on the reeds with their heads down, like little acrobats. The people in the village looked as if they would like a holiday too. Mrs. Smith, who sold sugar and soap, and tea and tin pots, and mops and mousetraps, and brooms and blacking-brushes, and grindstones and gunpowder, and lanterns and lucifer-matches and lollipops, was standing at her shop door, smoothing out her apron, and she gave us a grin as we went by. The blacksmith and his man stopped hammering as we passed the forge, and leaned their chins on their hammer-handles to get a good stare at us; and the parson's groom, who had brought down his master's horse to be shod, touched his hat to the Doctor, and then said to the blacksmith,

"What a sight o' 'olidays them young gents gits!"

"I hopes their parents likes it," growled the surly old blacksmith.

But what did we care what he said? We only told Bear's Cub to make a bow to his uncle. He generally turned doubly sulky when we told him that the old blacksmith must be his uncle; but, as I have said, he was in a wonderful good temper that morning. The wheelwright was a nice old fellow: he let us use his tools sometimes, and helped us to shape our ships. He was standing in front of his cottage—on the little green littered with white chips and yellow shavings—painting a waggon blue and red. One of the fellows gave Bear's Cub a shove up against it. He should not have done so, of course; but, after all, Bear's Cub only got a little paint on his face and hands—so it was not worth while making a to-do about. But Sam turned sulky at once, and when old Chips said that *he* had more

reason to look black, and the fellow that had shoved him said, for a joke (schoolboys' jokes, you know, are not always very brilliant), that Sam looked *blue*, Bear's Cub marched off by himself, and wouldn't have another word to say to us. It didn't hurt us, but it couldn't have been very pleasant for him. That is the mistake sulky folks make. Nobody cares for their sulks—they are only punishing themselves.

Every now and then we had a cut across the fields, but Bear's Cub trudged on by the road, walking through all the puddles—as if *that* would serve us out! Such a jolly scamper we had. Perhaps we didn't think much then about the beauty of the things all around us, but they are beautiful to remember now. The bees were out, and a white butterfly or two, and white long-legged lambs were butting at their mothers in grass that you seemed to hear growing, sprinkled all over with buttercups and daisies. There were primroses on the hedge-banks and in the damp

cracks of the mossy rotten old stiles and gate-posts. The blackthorns were in blossom in the hedges, and the plum trees and cherry trees in the orchards; and golden daffodils were nodding in the cottage gardens, and great patches in the woods were as blue as the sky with wild hyacinths. The chaffinches were singing in the orchards, and pruning their striped wings and their red breasts with their blue bills. Every now and then we heard the cuckoo; and the skylarks, ever so high up, were singing as if they would break a blood-vessel. But what we cared most for then was the birds' nests; and we found a titmouse's. School-boys do not think much of a tell-tale-tit, but they think a good deal of a long-tailed tit, and we were very proud of our find. I think, however, that it served us right to get our hands scratched as we did in pulling the nest out of the bush. The titmice must have had so much trouble in bringing all that moss and wool and cobweb together, putting such a neat arched roof upon

their home, making such a funny little doorway in its side, whitewashing it with lichen, and furnishing it with a soft feather bed.

But of course we didn't think like that then. We exulted over our spoil, and thought Bear's Cub (if we thought of him at all) a moping muff to be trudging along the road all by himself, when he might have been present at such a capture. And so I still think he was. Well, at last we got to D'Arcy Tower—all that is left of D'Arcy Hall. At least the other parts are turned into stables and barns, and cow-houses and cart-lodges. The low farmhouse built on to the Tower is pretty old, but it is not nearly so old as the Tower, and yet it looks as if it wouldn't last half so long. There are eight storeys in the brick Tower, and you go up it by a winding staircase lighted with little pointed windows; and sparrows and jackdaws and starlings build in the ivy that almost covers up the little windows, and from the top you can see for miles round—meadows and

fields, and woods and marshes, farmhouses and churches, and rivers and the sea with ships on it. The Tower was a jolly place to climb about, and, besides the other birds, two great owls lived in the dark cobwebby room half-way up; and once one of the big fellows got a little owl out of their nest, though it was dangerous work, for the floor was as rotten as thawing ice in some places, and the owls flew at him, and tried to peck his eyes out.

D'Arcy Tower, however, was a long way from Axleford, and we were very hungry, as well as rather tired, when we got there. So the Doctor went into the farmhouse to have a talk with the farmer, and presently we were called into a long broad low kitchen, with a brick floor, and a wood fire on the hearth, and we sat down on any seats that we could find, and lunched off home-made bread, and a cheese almost as big as a cart-wheel: the little fellows had new milk, and the big fellows home-brewed ale.

Whilst we were enjoying ourselves, Bear's Cub limped up and peeped in; but instead of coming in to get some grub himself, the stupid turned away, and went and sat down on the wall of the well. There he sat moping whilst we finished our lunch, and there he sat moping whilst we swarmed like ants over the Tower and the farm buildings.

"Yer may git as many sparrers' nists as ye likes, young gen'lemen," said the farmer; "the little warmin!"

(He meant the sparrows, not us.)

There were long wreaths of blown sparrows' eggs dangling and crossing in the farm kitchen, and the farmer belonged to a club that paid so much a dozen for sparrows' heads. He had lived amongst birds all his life, and yet he did not know what good the sparrows did his garden, and his orchard, and his farm-crops. If he had known, he would have called *us* "little warmin," when he saw us pulling out the hay the little brown-

coats had twisted into homes. Perhaps the Doctor would have stopped us if he had seen us; but he was telling some of the big fellows the history of the Tower, showing them that the barn had once been the banqueting-chamber of the old Hall, and a root-house, with a great fire-place in each corner, the kitchen; and pointing out that the facings and the ornamental copings were not stone, but moulded brick-earth—stone being scarce in that clayey country. Some of the smacks that we could just see from the top of the Tower, he said, were dredging for stone. A few of us little chaps liked to hear about all that; but most of us, I suppose, were a great deal more interested in the birds' nests.

If we were doing mischief, however, we didn't know it; and I don't think that Bear's Cub was any better employed, sitting sulking on the wall of the well. The good-natured farmer's wife brought him out a great hunk of bread and cheese, but he wouldn't eat it; and when she

asked him why he didn't go with the rest, he said that we were "a set of beasts;" so she left him to sit and sulk.

There he sat sulking when we tramped away from the farm. When the last of us turned the corner of the long, high-hedged chase, we could just see him crawling out of the gate of the straw-yard like a sulky snail.

It came on to rain before we got home, and we had to go at the double; but Bear's Cub wouldn't hurry. He came back drenched, and was laid up with a bad cold; but he didn't get much pity from anybody, because he had brought it on himself by his sulkiness.

III.

DASHING GEORGE.

ONE of the nicest fellows at Axleford was dashing George Rippingale. I was not at school long with him, because he was ever so much older than I; but long after he had left school we used to talk about him. He was a tall, dark, handsome, clever, plucky fellow, and so we were proud of him. But we were very fond of him too—especially the youngsters. He wouldn't let us be put upon if he could help it; and he was a very generous chap too, and he used to show us how to do our exercises, and things like that. When he had left school, and any of the big fellows was afraid to do anything,

we used to say, "Ah! Rippingale would have done it;" and we little fellows who had been at school with him used to cock over the little fellows who hadn't, as if knowing him somehow made us finer fellows ourselves. He went to Addiscombe when he left school, and he was killed at Aliwal. Poor old Rip! I could tell you dozens of dashing things he did, but I have only room for two stories.

On the road to Dulchester there was a farm called Little Rowlands, and such a queer old farmer lived there. All the time I was at school he wore the same clothes, week-days and Sundays; hat, and boots, and everything looked as if they had been taken off a scarecrow. Indeed, some of the scarecrows about Axleford were better dressed than old Lufkin. And yet he was one of the richest men in all Calfinghamshire. He touched his dusty broad-brimmed hat to the banker when he met him in Dulchester High Street on market-days; but when old

Lufkin went into the bank, the banker used to ask him into the bank parlour; and when he left, the banker used to come out to the front door with him, and stand talking with him on the steps. Besides the heaps of money he had in the bank, it was said that old Lufkin kept a lot at home, hidden in all kinds of queer places, for fear the bank should break. I don't know whether this was true; but, at any rate, he never asked any one to his house, and he tried to keep every one except his men off his farm. He kept three or four fierce dogs, and he always had a great surly beast of a bull. He was obliged to kill one or two, because they gored I don't know how many people; but when he got rid of one big brute, he always bought a bigger. The one I am going to tell you about was the biggest and surliest of them all—a great brindled brute, with frizzled brown curls, that looked as if they had been singed, between his sharp horns, and eyes like hot coals. His bellow was very much

like a lion's roar, and he lashed his sides with his tufted tail just like a lion. When old Belzebull—that was the name we gave the beast—was in any of the meadows near the road, and looked over the hedge, or the stile, or the gate at us—blowing out his breath as if he was smoking through his nose—we little chaps used to feel funky. We should have been afraid to go into the same field with him, as Rippingale did, though we *were* all head-over-ears in love with the pretty little girl whom Rippingale went to save. She was the Doctor's niece, and had just come on a visit to the school-house. She had gone out for a walk by herself, and climbed over into one of old Lufkin's pastures to gather the white lace-like hemlock that was growing in the ditches. Belzebull was in the next meadow, and when he saw her red cloak in the middle of the milky blossoms, he gave a growl and made a rush at her (the gate of his meadow was open). Rippingale was coming back from Dulchester, and heard her

scream. When he looked over the stile, pretty little Annie Scott was running away on the farther side of the pasture, with the bull after her. In a second Rippingale had vaulted over the stile, and in half a minute more he had pulled up a hedge-stake, and was tearing across the pasture. He only got across it just in time. Annie was standing with her back against a tree, and the bull had shut his eyes to make his run at her. Just as the bull dashed in, Rippingale dashed in too, gave him a tremendous clout across the nose with his stick, caught up Annie in his other arm, and got as far off with her as he could before the bull had time to turn. Belzebull was in a tremendous rage when he found he had missed his aim and only furrowed up the bark. He stamped with his fore-feet and bellowed, and drew back as if he meant to give the tree another charge; but in a second he was after Rippingale and Annie. Rippingale had to turn then, and back and dodge as if he was playing at chevy, and go

through the broadside exercise with his big stick. At last, however, he managed to reach the stile, and drop Annie over it into the road; but, as he turned to do so, the bull got at him, and tossed him up into the trees. Fortunately he was standing sideways, and so the bull only caught him between the horns. But when he came down again he fell flat, face downwards; and the second time Belzebull played battledore and shuttlecock with him, one of the sharp horns would have run right through Rippingale's ribs, if it had not happened to strike against his knife in his waistcoat-pocket. This time, however, Rippingale managed to catch hold of the branches; and then he crawled along them, and dropped down alongside poor scared little Annie from the ends of the other branches that overhung the road. Just didn't we youngsters wish that we had been able to do dashing things like that, when we saw how fond she was of Rip?

And now for my other story:—

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The leaky old punt in the school-pond was not the only boat we could get. The Axleford miller kept three or four, which we used to hire sometimes on holidays. His was a water-mill, about a quarter of a mile from the village. Well, one Saturday after dinner, Rippingale said, "Now, then, youngsters, who wants a row? I'll stand the boat, and you must pull me, you know. *Quis?*" Lots of us shouted "*Ego!*" and I was one of the six he picked out. It was a very hot afternoon, and when we got down to it, the dusty, mossy old mill looked as if it would nod itself into the river if it did not take care. "The-bigger-rogue-the-better-luck, the bigger-rogue-the-better-luck," it was muttering drowsily, just as if it was talking in its sleep. The miller and his man were both snoring, with their legs spread out on the floury floor, and their backs resting against fat sacks, and you couldn't help fancying that if they didn't soon wake, the stones would think they had a right to have a rest too, and the white meal

would stop running out of the brown spouts. The miller's wife let us into the little garden that led down to the rotten steps, where the boats were poking their heads together, as if they were whispering secrets.

"You 'd better not go fur this afternoon, Master Jarge," she said to Rippingale. "There 's thunder in the air."

He was a favourite with the miller's wife, just as he was with almost everybody else. He chose a four-oared boat, and off we went—in a splashing spurt at first.

"Talk about cuttersmen!" we said, and we caught crabs, and one of the tholes broke, and a fellow tumbled back with his legs up in the air. But that kind of thing, and laughing at it, was too hot work to keep up long. There was a tiny breeze now and then on the river, though even the quaker-grass scarcely moved in the meadows, and the wet weeds smelt cool, and the willow-leaves looked cool as they dipped into the water;

but everything else was awfully hot. Everything was very still too. When a fish leapt, it made you jump. It was not long before we could see the thunder-clouds working up from the sea, but Rippingale thought that the storm would not break for a good while; and so on and on we went—a good deal farther than we thought we were going, though we did only "spoon the batter." The river was a very little one — so narrow in some places that the oars had nothing but reeds and rushes to dip into, and sometimes we had to unship them to keep them from striking against the banks; and so shallow in some places that we had to take off our shoes and stockings, and tuck up our trousers, and push the boat over the shoals. The water felt so refreshing that Rippingale proposed a bathe. We did not think anything of the storm whilst we were splashing about in the water, and chasing one another naked, like savages, along the banks; but when we were putting on our clothes, darkness suddenly

seemed dropped into the air like ink into water: not a leaf moved, and we seemed to be breathing out of a lime-kiln. Then there came a little puff of wind, and then the sky was cracked right down to the ground with a broad jagged flash of blue and pink lightning, and then the thunder thumped and rattled and rumbled as if the heavens had given way and all the stars were tumbling in; and then down came the rain in one thick square mass that drenched us to the skin and half filled the boat before we had time even to look for shelter. Some of us felt scared, but Rippingale said,

"Keep your pluck up. It was my fault; but there's no great harm done. We won't go under the trees—the Doctor says they attract the lightning. Keep close together behind me, and we'll creep under the hedges to that farm-house yonder."

So after him we trotted. Sometimes we kept under the hedges, and sometimes we made a cut

across a narrow field. The rain made some of it rather heavy country; but when we got blown, Rippingale would take us in tow, or give us a ride pick-a-back. The rain ceased when we got within about a mile of the farm, but the lightning still flashed and the thunder still rolled. Presently there came a flash that made us put our hands up to our eyes, and directly after it a clap that seemed to shake the ground.

"I'm sure that was a thunderbolt," said Rippingale, whilst the clap was changing into a sullen growl. "I wonder what's struck?"

When we looked up, smoke was rolling up from the thatch of the big barn at the farm.

"Come along, boys!" shouted Rippingale, and off he started at a gallop. By the time we got to the farm the barn was in a blaze, and the fire was spreading to the other farm-buildings and the ricks, and making spiteful licks at the roof of the farmhouse.

"Now then, boys, do something or other—pull

out those pigs, if you can't do anything else," said Rippingale.

According we pulled down tarry planks and prickly furze, and lugged out squealing pigs by the legs, and the ears, and the tail, fancying ourselves little heroes, though there was not the slightest danger now, as the storm was over. Danger for us youngsters, that is: Rippingale ran into plenty of danger, and behaved like a real hero. The farmer and his men, and people from the neighbouring farms and the nearest village, and two rural policemen, were rushing about knocking their heads together as if that by itself would do any good. A boy had gone off at full gallop for the engine, and till that came the bewildered people seemed to think they could most profitably employ their time in getting in one another's way. The farmer's wife and her servants were pitching basins and looking-glasses out of bed-room windows. One man, more sensible than the rest, was trying to get

the horses out of the stable; but they would not face the fire in the yard, and laid down their ears, and lashed out with their heels, and bit, and literally screamed in frantic fear.

"You should blindfold them," cried Rippingale; and he ran into the stable, not caring a fig for their bare yellow teeth and heavy hoofs, and slipped corn-sacks over their heads, and then he and the man led them out in pairs. As the last pair clumped out of the stable, its thatch caught. Meantime buckets had been got out, but the people didn't seem to know what to do with them.

"Why, make a chain down to the horse-pond there," cried Rippingale; and he hustled the sleepy men, and women, and children, and us youngsters, about until he had got two lines, one to send up the full buckets, and the other to pass back the empties. When the other farmers' men who were not in the bucket chain had got some one to tell them what to do, they were brave

enough in climbing up to all kinds of dangerous places to pitch the water from, but Rippingale was just as brave with his bucket. The buckets, though, couldn't do much good without an engine, however bravely the water was pitched out of them. The fire was fiercer than ever, when up rattled the little red County Insurance engine behind four horses, almost swinging over, although it was heavily ballasted with sitting and standing smock-frocks. Beside the engine a police inspector was galloping as if for a wager.

"Who 's that?" he said, as he jumped off his horse. "*He's* a cool young customer."

We youngsters, who overheard him, felt very proud that, busy as he was, the great man should have had his attention attracted to our dashing George. Rippingale was then walking along a black blistered beam toe and heel, as calmly as if he was only measuring a hop-skip-and-jump, to get a good place to pitch his bucketful from. When the engine was got to

work, Rippingale sometimes pumped away at that, and sometimes he helped in sending up the full buckets (he made us keep on the "empties" side).

The fire was got under in the yard at last, but by that time the house had caught. It had caught and been put out ever so many times, but now it flared up like a great bonfire. The roof was thatch, and there was almost as much timber as brick in the walls. Only one window in the upper storey was free from flames, and out of that there came a horrid shriek. The farmer's wife shrieked as horribly when she heard it.

"It's little Peter!" she howled. "Ye towd me, Jane, you took him down to the cottage hours ago."

Little Peter was the farmer's wife's lame sickly little boy. He was asleep in his cot when the fire broke out, and had been left to sleep. As soon as the house was seriously threatened, the flustered mistress had bidden her flustered maid

carry him out of harm's way; but the fire had made her lose her head, and she had forgotten to see that Jane did as she was bid. Now the poor woman could do nothing but shriek, and wring her hands, and make mad rushes at the house. If she had not been held back, she would have dashed up the blazing staircase. The farmer was on the other side of the house, and the other men looked scared when they saw the flames rushing up in two broad twisted horns, close to the window of the room in which poor lame little Peter was shrieking.

But Rippingale was not scared. There was a plank in front of the house, and he put it up against the window, and ran up it like a rope-dancer, and smashed in the leaden lattice with its diamond panes, when he could not squeeze through the open part out of which little Peter's screams kept coming. The plank tumbled just as he got in, and for a minute the flames joined across the window. We thought we should never

see our dashing George again; but out through the smoke came something with a flop, and Rip was lying on his back in the courtyard, as black as a collier, and with one arm broken, but not hurt otherwise; and little Peter was lying on him, panting for breath, but with only his night-gown singed. Oh, what a fuss everybody made with Rippingale, though the house was still burning! The inspector put down Rip's name in his report of the fire, as the one who had "rendered the most efficient assistance," and Rippingale had a long paragraph all to himself in the *Calfingham Standard*, headed "Juvenile Gallantry," and ending, "We understand that this noble young gentleman is to enter the Indian service. We predict for him a Wellingtonian career."

Poor Rip did not live long enough to be made a duke; but the farmer and his wife were very much disappointed and disgusted to learn that he had not been made, at the very least, a colonel the day after he left Axleford.

IV.

SHY DICK.

THERE are three birds that ought not to be put into an aviary: the blackbird, and the robin, and the wren; the blackbird is too fond of cocking over little birds, and the robin is too fond of fighting, and the poor little wren is too timid ever to be comfortable in a crowd. Well, a school is a kind of aviary, and I have sometimes thought that it would be a much nicer kind of aviary if you could keep out of it the bullies who are like the blackbirds, and the boys who are always picking quarrels, and wanting to "have it out," like the robins, and the poor little scared chaps like the wrens. But, after all, all

kinds of people must rub shoulders *with* all kinds of people when they grow up, and, therefore, perhaps it is just as well that they should have to begin to rub shoulders when they are young. The bullies get taken down; the fighting boys often find more than their match; the scared little coddled boys, fresh from the nursemaid's kisses, have their babyish peevishness shamed out of them, and learn to pluck up a manlier spirit of their own.

"Miss Jemima"—the little fellow I have told you about, with the long curls and the Italian-ironed collars—was one of the wrens when he first came to Axleford, but he had quite grown out of his wrennishness before the end of his second half, as perhaps you will remember. And yet he was always a gentler fellow in his ways than most of us. Some fellows turn from timid wrens into bullying blackbirds, but Shy Dick was not like that. He was always a plucky fellow at bottom, and really plucky fellows never are

bullies. He was simply shy when he first came to school, because, I suppose, he was *born* shy, like the wrens (he used to blush all over his face and neck, like a girl—right up to the top of his ears), and because he had never had any boys to play with until he came to Axleford.

But we used to make cruel fun of poor little Dick when he first came. We used to put his hair in paper, and promise to buy him a smelling-bottle on his birthday; and make him blush like a peony by telling him *not* to blush; and a great deal of brilliant wit of that kind. His first half, and part of his second, must have been hard times for poor little Dick. If a boy *is* shy, he does not like to be thought spoony; and that is what we thought Miss Jemima, as you may guess from the name we gave him.

It was in the autumn of his first year at school that Shy Dick first came out—showed us that he *wasn't* a Miss Jemima. There was a fellow at Axleford of the name of Close; Titus was his

other name, but he ought rather to have been called Caligula, or something of that kind. He was a big fellow, and, by taking care not to fight with fellows that could have licked him, he had got the reputation, somehow, of being a terrible fellow if he did choose to fight. Not that all of us believed in him. If he had been better tempered, perhaps we might have done so; but he was such a nasty bully, that it is strange that it was left to Miss Jemima to show that he was a great hulking coward.

This Titus Close had picked out a poor weak little chap in Shy Dick's class to tyrannize over especially. He did it on the sly, for, though Rippingale had left school, the other big fellows would soon have sent Mr. Titus to grass, and then to Coventry, if they had found out that he was up to games like that. Well, one day, after morning school, Shy Dick saw poor little Ted Siderfin taking a bit of black "breeching" out of his locker.

"What 's that?" said Dick.

"Mr. Close's warming-strap," said Ted; "and I must make haste, or he 'll lick me worse." And then he burst out crying, and told Dick that every day before dinner he had to carry down the leathern thong to "the limes" (there was a thick clump of them at the farthest end of the paddock) to be welted with it by the tyrannical Titus.

Shy Dick blushed up to the top of his ears at the thought of becoming a public character; but the blood came from a brave little heart, and he made up his mind that he would do his best to save his class-fellow from any more of such cruelty.

"I 'll go with you," said Dick, "and we 'll both pitch into him. That 's fair with a great big fellow like that. Mamma told me not to fight, but I 'm sure she wouldn't mind, if she knew all about it."

Ted Siderfin almost forgot the daily drubbing

he had been expecting in his astonishment. Even poor weakly little Ted—following the fashion, like other weak people—had been in the habit of poking fun at Miss Jemima. But now Shy Dick puffed out his nostrils, and, though he shook all over, it was through excitement, not funkiness. He had to hurry Siderfin down to the limes. Ted knew that he was likely to catch double through being late; but still he thought he was not likely to better himself by taking a little chap like Shy Dick with him, however brave Miss Jemima might look and talk when the dread Titus was out of sight.

When the little fellows had gone down the side of the hollow in the paddock that hid them from the other boys, they found Titus stamping like a wild bull on the yellow leaves under the limes.

"Why didn't you come before, you young beggar?" he said, seizing Ted by the collar and snatching the warming-strap; "and what's *that* young beggar come for?"

But, as he spoke, there was a look in Shy Dick's eyes that made Titus feel queer. However, he gave Ted one cruel lash across the shoulders with the thong. The leather had no sooner fallen than Miss Jemima flew at him like a wild cat. Shy Dick didn't know anything about fighting, and, trusting to the light of Nature, I am afraid that he scratched as if he had been a real Miss Jemima, as well as cuffed and kicked most lustily. Anyhow, he bunged up the eyes of the dread Titus, gave him a bloody nose, and got him down upon his back. Shy Dick got a black eye and a bloody nose himself, but, though the blood spurted all over his Italian-ironed collar, he—"spoony Miss Jemima" five minutes before—did not care a straw for such inconveniences. He rather looked upon them as a soldier looks upon his medals. He had fought against odds in a good cause, and had conquered. He had suddenly become a little man. If Titus Close had not been an awful coward, of course Miss Jemima could not have

licked him like that; but Titus Close *was* an awful coward. When Miss Jemima flew at him —showing by the way he went in that he knew nothing about boxing—instead of brushing off the little fellow as contemptuously as a lion whisks off a fly, or laughing at his little fists as a mother laughs when her baby beats her, Titus grew sick and cold, and in a few minutes was lying on his back, rubbing his shins, and looking a very miserable object. He was very proud of his good looks—the servants and the needle-woman thought him a handsome fellow; but his rosy cheeks were scratched, and his black eyes were made black, or were soon to become so, in another sense, and his Roman nose was staining the worked shirt-front he was so cocky over. Moreover, great tall Titus Close was lying on the yellow leaves, actually whimpering; and it was little Shy Dick Ford—the scoffed-at Miss Jemima—who had floored him and made him blubber. Ted Siderfin took no part in the fight,

though it was fought on his behalf; but when he found that his brutal despot was really down, powerless, he wanted to kick him. But Shy Dick would not suffer that.

"No, Ted," he said, "if you wanted to do that, you should have pitched into him when he was able to hit back again."

A mighty deal we all made of Miss Jemima after this. The big fellows taught him "science," as an improvement on his rough-and-tumble, and yet womanish, style of fighting. (Even his warmest admirers were forced to apologize for the scratching). The little fellows—especially little Ted Siderfin—thought almost as much of him as they did of Hercules, or any of those fighting-men they were so fond of reading about in Lemprière, when they ought to have been learning their *Propria quæ maribus*, or getting up their Delectus.

If Dick had not been a very good sort of little fellow, he would have been spoilt by the notice

he got. Axleford must have seemed a very different place to him from what it had seemed—say, at our last breaking-up ball. We always had a breaking-up ball at the end of each half. The sisters and cousins of the fellows who lived in Dulchester and round about there used to be invited, and we had what we *called* punch—a mild infusion of lemon-pips, as I remember it now, with just a hint now and then that it was spirit-haunted—and altogether the affair was very jolly. We knew the girls, because we had the same dancing-master, and once or twice every half he used to brigade us together, for a kind of field-day, in the Cups Assembly Room at Dulchester. He was a queer, clever little fellow. His name was Thorne, but it ought to have been Rosebud, he was such a soft, smiling little chap. Sometimes, however, even *he* could not help getting out of patience with us, when we wouldn't pay any attention to his taps on the back of his little kit, or his "one-two-three-four."

But it was his violin pupils that troubled him most. One of them, I remember, always made a bungle of his "stopping," and was making such a terrible bungle of it one day, that poor little Mr. Thorne threw down *his* fiddle, pushed his fingers into his ears, and cried out in agony,

"My dear sir, it is *wicked* to behave so! what was your little finger *made for?*"

But I was talking about Shy Dick's first breaking-up ball at Axleford. Though we did laugh at him, he made us jealous, because the girls looked at him so. He was a very good-looking little chap, and he looked uncommonly good-looking that night, spruced up with his long curls and Italian-ironed collar. The girls, however, soon began to sneer at Shy Dick, when he stuck close to the wall, without saying a word to any of them, and blushing all over when they whisked by him. So we put up little Mary Russell to "take a rise" out of Shy Dick. She was a black-eyed, roguish little puss, game for any

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kind of fun. She went up to Dick, and put her hand upon her heart, and made him a profound bow, and said, "Beautiful Miss Jemima, may I have the honour of waltzing with you?" And then she caught him round the waist, and whirled him round the room, whilst poor Dick looked ready to cry from shame, and we were all almost crying with laughing.

V.

LAZY TOM.

THERE is a proverb about a dog that was so lazy that it used to lean against the wall to bark. Well, really, I do believe that if Tom Pine had been a dog he would have been lazier than that: *he* would have leaned against the wall *without* barking. He was a great tall fellow, and we called him *Ingens Pinus. Agitatur ventis,* you know, is the rest of the sentence in the Delectus, but Tom Pine was never agitated by anything. The little chaps used to do pretty nearly what they liked with him, because they knew he wouldn't whop them, whatever they did. Good nature had something to do with this, but lazi-

ness had more. Tom was not a stupid fellow, and could say funny things sometimes when he chose to take the trouble; but both in and out of school he was most abominably lazy. Big as he was, he was only in Eutropius, and got taken down by little fellows that could almost have run between his legs without ducking. Tom didn't care. I think, indeed, that he liked to get to the bottom of the class, because there he could lounge against the wall and rest his book and his elbow on the window-seat. Sometimes, however, he answered right by chance, and was obliged to go up a place or two; but he soon dropped down again, and looked quite relieved when he got back to his old corner. Tom was pretty big when he first came to Axleford, and had been put into a big fellows' class; but he soon came dropping down from one lower class to another. He was a funny fellow sometimes, as I have said, and he used to say that he knew he couldn't get to be top-boy of the school, and so

he meant to be bottom-boy before he had finished—that that was far easier, and more out of the common. At first the Doctor lectured him, and when the lectures did him no good, the Doctor licked him. But lectures and lickings were all the same to Lazy Tom. In a lazy kind of way he rather liked the Doctor for taking so much trouble about him, and never bore any malice against him, however hard he might hit—and the Doctor *could* hit precious hard (though he was such a nice fellow) when his lips turned white because he thought a chap was obstinately defying him—but the lickings could not drive the laziness out of Ingens Pinus, any more than the lectures. Then the Doctor thought of expelling Tom because of the bad example he set; but Tom was so good-natured that the Doctor couldn't make up his mind to do so—especially since, after all, Tom did very little harm, for the boys roasted him even more than the masters did. So Tom dropped down into the care of the under-masters,

and they reported him, and kept him in, and gave him impositions, and made fun of him; but no good came of it. He had stood the Doctor's satire, and so he was not likely to mind theirs much. He took his canings so good-naturedly that the Doctor got tired of caning him, and the ushers of reporting him. When he got an imposition, he simply said that it *was* an imposition; and, as for being kept in, *that* was no punishment, since his favourite employment during play-hours was snoring on one of the school-room forms. On hot afternoons he always went to sleep in school-time also, with his head inside his locker; and when he was roused up by having his ears pulled, or a cut of the cane across his shoulders, he used to yawn, and rub his eyes, and stretch his long arms, in such a comically cool fashion, that we were ready to die with laughing, and the masters could not help laughing either. And then, as soon as he got the chance, off he would drop again. On hot afternoons, especially

when we had suet-pudding at dinner, Tom Pine was always going to sleep like fat Joe in "Pickwick." Tom's way of doing his sums made us laugh too. He used to put down all the figures from 1 to 0, until he came to the right one. Although he had dropped to the Eutropius class, he had heard the Doctor talking about "conjectural emendations" to the Horace class, and those Tom called *his* conjectural emendations.

Tom was such a good-natured, comical fellow, that if he had not been lazy out of school as well, perhaps he might have made some of us follow his lazy example in school; but it was impossible to take a fellow who scarcely ever did anything briskly for a model. When Tom did play, he did it so drowsily, and so soon gave up, that, when sides were chosen, he was generally left almost to the last. He could give tremendous drives at cricket, if he *did* get at the ball; but then he was sure to be run out. He had the coolness to propose that he should have a fellow to run for

his hits. He never cared to bowl, and he was not a mite of use in fielding. He put his hands on his knees very scientifically, and there he kept them. His favourite out-door "exercise" was going adrift on the pond in the old punt. He used to lie down on his back, pull his hat over his eyes, and let the leaky old tub blunder about as it pleased, sometimes stern foremost, and generally broadside on.

The drill-sergeant tried hard to smarten Tom up, but it was no good. "You 've the makins of a man in you, No. 9," the old fellow used to say; "and it 's a disgrace to your Queen and your country that you should be sich a lout." Quite little fellows could make their sword-sticks rattle all about big Tom, without getting a single hit back. When we went through the extension motions, the sergeant ordered Tom to the front, and jerked his arms out for him as if he had been a semaphore. That was the only way to make Tom go through them. When we went at

the double, Tom got his heels nicely trodden on; and when the sergeant growled out "counter-mar-r-ch!" instead of turning, Tom used to go on mooning all by himself right ahead. He was ready enough to stop when the sergeant told us to "mark time," but then he never lifted his feet. "Stand at ease" was the only order he really obeyed. Lazy Tom was a sore trial to Sergeant Joyce. The sergeant looked upon perfect drill as the whole duty of man. He was very fond of boasting that he had seen "hactif service in the Penins'lur;" but since that service consisted merely in having been disembarked at some Spanish town at the beginning of a fortnight, and re-embarked at it, without having fired a shot, at the end of the fortnight, and he had never since had an opportunity of distinguishing himself on the tented field, the sergeant's military career did not furnish much material for interesting stories. Not being able to tell us these, he tried to keep up our respect for his military character by playing

the martinet. He wore a military stock, although the rest of his attire was mufti, and his fingers used to itch to lay his cane across Tom Pine's shoulders. The sergeant had so often reported Tom, that, like the ushers, he had grown tired of doing so. Indeed, the sergeant had not a very great respect for the Doctor. Now and then he had a bout with the sergeant with the basket-hilted sticks, but the Doctor was not a scientific swordsman. All that he cared about was to hit as hard and as often as he could—no matter what cuts and thrusts he laid himself open to. He despised guards and parries, and banged away like an Irishman with his shillelagh. This dashing style of fencing made the Doctor seem the better man in our eyes; and the consciousness of this made the tremendous whacks which the sergeant got across the arms and the calves of the legs hurt all the more—the seeming victory was obtained by such shamefully illegitimate means. "Sir, s-s-s-sir," the poor wincing,

indignant sergeant used to stutter, "if we had been f-f-ightin' with st-ste-steel, I should have k-k-killed you a d-d-dozen times in f-f-five minutes." To such an authority as the Doctor, therefore, the sergeant was very unwilling to appeal; he knew that he would have to countermarch himself at the double from Axleford, if he laid his cane across our shoulders; and so Ingens Pinus cast a dark shadow on Sergeant Joyce's life—at least the four hours a week of it he spent at Axleford.

Just one thing more to show you what a lazy fellow Tom was. There was a great garden at Axleford, and once or twice during the fruit season we were turned into it to pick and pull *ad libitum.* (Perhaps we sometimes did the same without leave, but I won't tell tales out of school of *that* kind.) Well, one day, when we were all in the garden, I saw Lazy Tom lying on his back in his shirt-sleeves, with his hands locked under his head. He had laid himself down under a

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gooseberry-bush, and he was eating the gooseberries that drooped right into his mouth.

Yet even Lazy Tom could exert himself under the stimulus of abnormal motives. He had a grandmother who was very fond of him (and who sadly encouraged his laziness—letting him have his breakfast in bed when he spent his holidays with her, and excusing his lolling-about languor when he did get up, on the ground that the poor boy—though he looked so much like her own fine boy—had inherited his puny, lack-a-daisical mother's constitution—Tom really was as strong as a young cart-horse); and this old lady had a black cat, with a brass collar, which, next to Tom, she loved. Old women, therefore, and cats —especially if they were black, and more especially if they wore brass collars—always found a champion, even in Lazy Tom. It is not often that they find champions amongst schoolboys (who, I am afraid, are frequently not quite so chivalrous as they make themselves out to have

been when they grow up and write books about themselves), and, therefore, as I have not much good to say of Tom Pine, I am glad to be able to say *this* of him.

You remember the ruined old church with the ivy on it, close to Axleford School? Well, one day when we were poking about in the ruins, looking for birds' nests, and pulling up the grass to get grubs and earthworms for bait, we found a young black cat, not much bigger than a kitten, wandering about there; and, I am ashamed to say, a good many of us began to take cockshies at it with anything we could lay hold of. The poor scared little thing ran up the hairy ivy-stems, and jumped from one heap of rough brick and mortar to another, slipping and almost tumbling to the ground every now and then, while sticks, and stones, and bits of slate and tile flew round it like hail. At last it managed to scramble on to a corner of the tower, where there was hardly room enough for it to

stand; but there it stood mewing most piteously, and wondering how it was ever to get down again.

Whilst we—again I am ashamed to say—were enjoying its perplexity, Lazy Tom lounged up with his hands in his pockets. They soon came out of his pockets when he saw what we were at. He didn't say anything, but he flung out his long arms right and left like flails, and went through the fellows big and little, as the police go through the crowd on Lord Mayor's Day. Then up the tower he climbed, and though the young cat spat and scratched, he managed to lay hold of it, and to bring it down safe in his shirt-bosom. What is more, he took the trouble to find out where it lived, and to carry it home.

Another time he had gone down into the village to buy "parliament." (Tom was very fond of parliament, and used to lie on his back munching it until he gave himself quite a thick yellow moustache and imperial—but he gave a good deal of it away too.) Well, Tom was just coming

out of the shop with his precious parcel of flat gingerbread, when he saw a pack of the village boys, some of them bigger than himself, mobbing a poor bent old woman who went by the name of the Axleford Witch. The young scamps were flinging dung at her, and trying to hustle her into a slimy pond. Grown-up people were looking on; some of them grinning, and none of them interfering. But as soon as Tom saw what was up, down went the parliament, smashing into little bits; and in two minutes half a dozen of the young louts were splashing in the pond (comical figures they looked when they floundered out half-smothered in mud and duckweed), and Tom was squiring the lonely old woman home to her hovel as carefully as if she had been his grandmother.

I don't say that, generally speaking, Lazy Tom was a "respectable character," but there is something to respect in almost everybody's character if you will only take the trouble to look for it;

and now, at any rate, I do thoroughly respect Lazy Tom for not having been ashamed to say openly at school that he loved his grandmother, and for always being ready to stand up for old women and cats, because his grandmother was an old woman, and had a cat that she was very fond of.

VI.

FUNNY PAT.

PAT was called Pat because his name was Wix—Wix M'Carthy. His father had married an Englishwoman, a Miss Wix, and Pat had been christened in honour of his mother's family. But Wix seemed such a stupid name for a funny little fellow that was half an Irishman; and so we called him Pat. Pat was a genuine little Irishman of the novel and play type (in real life Irishmen are often dull and peaceable enough): he seemed to think that the world was made to be funny and to fight in, or rather always to be funny in; fighting, in his

opinion, being one of the best bits of the fun. But I am not going to write about his fights. Fights between schoolboys, I know, sometimes seem almost unavoidable, but I think now that there were a good many *too* many such fights in my schooldays. (I thought so *then*, when I got licked.) I don't know how things are now-a-days. I have heard that they are much better, and have read that, when an Eton boy was asked the reason, he answered, "I suppose we funk each other." I hope, however, that a better reason than that "one 's afraid, an' t'other durstn't" answer could be given. Perhaps instead of "funking," schoolboys *respect* one another more than they did, and themselves to boot. After all, if you think of the causes of schoolboys' fights, there is not, generally speaking, much reason to crow over the giving or getting of a black eye in them. And it is a very great mistake to think that a schoolboy who gets fame as a "bruiser" is necessarily a manly fellow. Some such fellows turn out to be great "sheep,"

as the Australians say, when the great Battle of Life has to be fought.

But you don't like "preaching" when you want to hear a story; and I don't like it either when I am trying to tell one: so now for some of Funny Pat's funny pranks.

There was a trap-door in the roof of the school-house at Axleford. It was generally kept padlocked, but now and then we found it open when we slipped up to the garret-floor to reconnoitre; and, when we did find it open, we always made a point of clambering through it on to the roof. I suppose the chief charm of these clandestine expeditions was that they *were* clandestine—that we ran the risk of being kept in through creeping out. Anyhow, we thought it prime fun to get out upon the roof; and until a fellow had scratched his name upon the leads, he had not won his spurs in school opinion. The leads were covered with names, and initials, and caricatures, and epigrams, and sentimental verses

to our sweethearts; and besides *our* literary and artistic contributions, every workman that had been up to mend the roof seemed to have thought it necessary to prick out the shape of his foot on the leads, with his name running from heel to toe, or a heart with his initials and his young woman's grouped in the middle in a true-lover's knot. The leads in themselves were worth climbing up to see, and then there were I can't remember how many roof-ridges of mossy lichened tiles to scramble over, and grass and wallflowers grew on them; and we could get sparrows' and starlings' and swallows' eggs, and sometimes young sparrows and starlings and swallows, out of the nests in the water-spouts, and the holes in the walls and under the eaves; and we could almost look into the rooks' nests in the elms, that seemed only a jump off the house; and see the country for miles round; and scare the servants by suddenly making faces at them through the skylights and tapping against garret-windows; and

shy little bits of mortar plump down upon the tops of the ushers' hats, and watch them start and look round puzzled, and then walk on again, trying to make themselves believe it was all fancy, until presently some more little bits came rattling down, and the ushers got quite angry, because they could not make out where they came from. Finally, we could tear our clothes, and scratch our hands and faces, and make ourselves generally deliciously limy, and slimy, and grimy on the roof. So what wonder we got out at the trap-door whenever we found it open?

Pat was very fond of roaming on the roof. He could climb like a cat or a monkey, and prided himself on knowing all its ins and outs better than any other fellow. Well, one summer evening the Doctor gave a party. The under-masters and some of the big fellows were invited to it, and the rest of us were left to amuse ourselves as we pleased. Pat, and two or three of his chums, stole up the garret stairs to the trap-door.

In the gloom it seemed to be locked, but, when Pat ran up the steps, he found that, though the padlock was in the hasp, the key had been turned in a hurry, and so the padlock was not fastened.

We were soon clambering over the tiles, and presently we got into an argument about one of the chimneys. There were all kinds of chimneys —high, narrow chimneys; low, broad chimneys; chimneys with pots, and chimneys with cowls; single chimneys, and wall-like stacks of chimneys, sticking up in all kinds of queer places in the roof. This was a low chimney in the middle of the house, with a gaping mouth like a little well; and Pat maintained that it was the chimney of the Doctor's study, whilst the others would have it that the chimney belonged to the sick-room.

"Faith, I'll go down and make ye see you're wrong with my own eyes," said Pat, who was somewhat Irish also in his way of expressing himself, and in a second he was lowering himself

down the jagged shaft as a bear backs down a hollow tree.

He got on pretty well for a yard or two, but then a brick came out in his hand, and down went poor Pat in a shower of sooty mortar. A bend in the chimney brought him up before he was much hurt; and when we called down to him, he shouted up to us to get him a rope.

We ran to the trap-door, but it was fast. One of the servants, I suppose, had noticed how we had left it, and not knowing any one was on the roof, had locked us out.

"Oh, be hanged if you can't get a rope! I'd get one somehow if I was up there! What am I to do at all, at all?" grumbled Pat in comical perplexity. "Sure, I must try to come up the way I came down."

But *facilis descensus Averni*, you know: to get up again *hoc opus, hic labor est.* Pat's foot slipped. We could hear him shouting and sliding down the incline that had first stopped him,

in a rattling avalanche of loose lime and brick. Then we heard a thud as if he had dropped ever so many feet farther down; and then we were so scared that, not minding who heard us, we scrambled to the side of the roof nearest the playground, and shouted with might and main for help. Before we could get any help from that quarter, however, the tall Doctor came up through the trap, like Banquo's ghost in *Macbeth.*

"This way, boys," he said, not half so crossly as we expected; and then he marched us down, not by the back stairs we had come up, but by the front stairs to the open drawing-room door.

"Walk in," he said, when we got there; and in we huddled, feeling very sheepish in our dusty clothes.

"These are the rest of the gang, ladies," said the Doctor: "not very formidable burglars, are they? I think we needn't feel nervous any more."

And then everybody laughed, and we felt more sheepish than ever. But saucy Pat, though he

was twenty times the guy any of us was—ragged, and scratched, and bruised, and as black as a sweep, as he stood in the midst of a muddle on the hearthrug—had the cheek to say,

"Sure, then, I *did* scare ye, sir!"

And then there was another general laugh, and the ladies said,

"Don't punish them, Doctor—it's so fortunate the little fellow has not broken his neck."

Pat had inherited blarney as well as bulls, and when he heard that, he made the ladies a very polite bow and said,

"Faith, I'd be glad to break it to get into your company, ladies."

Then they all laughed again, and we were ordered off to bed; but that was all the punishment we got. All of us had been wrong about the chimney. It was the drawing-room chimney, and when Pat fell the last time, he had tumbled flop into the white-and-gold shavings in the old-fashioned, wide drawing-room fireplace. The

mysterious noises up the chimney that had been heard before had caused some perturbation amongst the Doctor's guests, and when black Pat tumbled into the fire-shavings, all the women had screamed, and all the men and boys had made a rush to seize the supposed robber. When the Doctor pulled Pat out, nobody knew him at first. They all thought he was a burglar's Oliver Twist; but Pat had called out,

"I'm M'Carthy, sir—I thought it was your study, sir."

"And what did you want to do in my study?" asked the Doctor.

"Sure, I didn't expect to find ye in it, sir," answered Pat; and it being notorious that the Doctor trusted to past labour for his lore, and was not often in those days to be found in his study, Pat's answer tallied so completely with his name that the general laughter began which got us off scot-free, and in which the Doctor joined as heartily as anybody.

Pat certainly was one of the cheekiest fellows I ever knew. He was a very good mimic (except that he could not quite get rid of his brogue), and, when he "dressed up," his own mother would scarcely have known him. He was a free-handed little fellow, and so could easily get clothes lent him by the servants and the cottage boys and girls, and all kinds of tricks he used to play in them. Once he made himself up into a wooden-legged old pieman, and stumped into the playground with a trayful of pastry. He met one of the masters, and asked him very respectfully whether "an ould man, as wanted to arn a crust, might have lave to sell some shuparior poys to the young gintlemen;" and when the usher gave him leave, Pat gravely offered him one of the "poys" as an acknowledgment of his kindness, and then Pat took his stand at the school-room door, and drove a roaring trade. He would have cleared off his stock before we had found him out if one of the fellows, who

thought himself very 'cute, had not happened to say, "I don't believe he *is* Irish: go and fetch little Pat, he'll soon find out whether the old chap is a 'counthryman' of his." This was too much for Pat. He shouted out in his natural voice, "Faith, he *is*, Briggs!" and then away he hopped on his wooden leg, with Briggs after him.

It was not often, however, that Pat tried to gammon us, because we got so up to him, after a bit, that we used to suspect every tramp that came near the school of being Pat. But on the farmers' wives and daughters he was always playing tricks. He was tall for his age, and made quite a handsome gipsy-girl, when he had parted his black hair in the middle, and stained his face and hands with walnut-juice. His roguish eyes were gipsy's ready-made, and with a faded red cloak over his girl's clothes, and a low-crowned straw hat on, or a chequered kerchief tied under his chin, Pat looked a first-rate young fortune-teller. And then he knew enough

of the people whose fortunes he told to make them gape with astonishment. Outrageous fortunes he used to tell, and yet the silly people more than half believed them at first. Mind, I am not praising these pranks of Master Pat's, and yet I can't help thinking that his fortune-telling did some good. As drunkards have been cured by soaking everything they ate in brandy, so, perhaps, silly people may be cured by giving them unlimited doses of folly.

The Squire at Axleford Hall was a rich old bachelor—a very nervous old gentleman, who did not hunt, or shoot, or do anything but coddle himself. He scarcely ever showed outside the Hall on week-days, and on Sunday mornings he slipped into his pew at church through a side door as if he was afraid that he would shrivel up like a jelly-fish if anybody looked at him. High curtains hung all round the pew, and it was carpeted and had chairs in it—a faded carpet and heavy old-fashioned chairs like those you can

see at an old inn. It had a fireplace too, and every Sunday morning—no matter how hot it might be—the fire was lighted in it, and the Squire sat close by the fire, in top-boots, and a queer little grey pig-tail sticking out over the collar of his spencer. We could see him from the gallery, where we sat in the front seats below the organ, but he made such a fuss if he fancied that anybody had been looking at him that we could only venture to peep between our fingers. We did not like Squire Leake. He seemed such a namby-pamby old noodle, and, though he was never out himself, his bailiff was always coming, "with the Squire's compliments," to complain of our trespasses in the park. There was somebody else who was always complaining of our trespasses—Miss Smith, a maiden lady, who farmed about eighty acres of land, known in the Squire's deeds and maps, and general parlance, as "Pork End." Miss Smith, I believe, was a pretty good farmer, but she was not a very

wise woman in other respects. She thought herself very "genteel," and tried hard to make her neighbours call her farm "Broad Oaks;" but they wouldn't, because from time immemorial it had been known in Axleford as Pork End. Though she was so very "genteel." Miss Smith was very superstitious, and Pat, dressed up in his gipsy cloak, made her believe that the shy, grumpy Squire was in love with her. Pat (mind again, I say that I don't approve of such fibs) made her believe also that the Squire wished to meet her at six o'clock in the evening at a place to which he or she (Pat) was appointed to guide her. Pat meant to march Miss Smith right through the village, and then let the Leake story leak out. It was very unchivalrous, of course, in Pat to lay such a plot, and very abominable in his chums to chuckle at the thought of seeing it succeed; but then, really, Miss Smith had got us such a lot of Phædrus's Fables to learn by heart, by her fuss about nothing, that we could not help thinking

that she owed us some fun in return. Besides, Pat had tried to "take a rise" out of the Squire too. He had written him a mysterious letter with a skewer, inviting him to meet some one who could tell him a great secret about his property, if he came alone to the Cage on the common. We had very faint hopes of *this* trick answering, but two of us had been told off to hide by the Cage to see if the Squire did come. Some half-dozen of us went to the cottage where Pat borrowed his gipsy clothes. He soon dressed, and was slouching along the cottage garden in them *en route* for Miss Smith's, when we saw that he had hitched up his petticoats so high that his trousers could be plainly seen beneath. We were going to call him back, when whom should we see coming up to the garden gate but the Doctor? Back we ran into the cottage, but Pat slouched on, quite unconscious of the trouser-legs that betrayed him. He made a demure bob to the Doctor (we could see that he looked rather

scared, though), and was passing on, but the Doctor stopped him.

"Oh, you 're the gipsy I 've heard about lately," said the Doctor. "What 's your name, my pretty girl ?"

"Jenny Giles, your honour," answered Pat, making another bob, and trying to get away.

But the Doctor laid his hand on Pat's shoulder, and said,

"Jenny Giles, is it ? Then I must take you into custody on suspicion of stealing a pair of trousers belonging to a pupil of mine of the name of M'Carthy," and he tapped Pat on the legs with his stick.

Then the Doctor saw us, and made us come out and tell him all about it ; and a nice lecture we had when we got back to school, and we were not allowed to go out of bounds for a month afterwards. That did not satisfy Miss Smith, however, when she found how she had been done. She sent a note to the Doctor to tell him he was

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a "disgrace to his sect," for encouraging his young vagabonds in insulting respectable folk that could buy him up twice over—he ought to have half-thrashed the life out of the young black-guards. We *should* have got a licking if the Doctor had not caught us—at least the two told off for the Cage would. The Squire had smelt a rat, and sent his bailiff to the common with a horsewhip, and orders to lay it about the shoulders of any one he found prowling round the Cage. And the bailiff had mounted guard there for three hours and more.

"Faith, then, it's a comfort to think we got some fun out of somebody," said incorrigible Pat, when he heard the news.

VII.

BLUSTERING FRED.

WE always had a whole holiday on the Doctor's birthday, and spent it by the sea at Samphire Marshby. The Doctor hired a 'bus and all kinds of traps at Dulchester, and we had a jolly ride to Marshby, and a jolly day there, and a jolly ride back. A nice row we used to make when we drove through Dulchester and the roadside villages. The people came to their doors to stare, just as if we had been troops on the march. It was almost the only excitement some of the quiet country folk had in the year, to see the "Axleford young gen'lemen out a-plasurin." The Doctor had been kind enough to

get born in the last week in May, when all the leaves are out, but still in the full freshness of their green, and when it is pretty sure to be warm, and yet not too warm. A first-rate time that is, both for a ride through the country and a day by the sea.

Blustering Fred Chapman always came out very strong on the Doctor's birthday. Perhaps Fred wasn't such a bad sort of fellow at bottom, but he was the kind of chap that schoolboys are apt to call "no end of an ass." He went about like a gale of wind or a roaring lion, and did everything with a splutter. According to Fred, no other fellow could do anything half as well as he could, or had things half as good, or friends half as rich, clever, and remarkable in every way as his own. It was no use trying to get in a word against Fred. "He 'd talk a dog's hind-leg off, that young feller would," the disgusted old gardener used to say, when Fred had been laying down the law about cucumbers and car-

nations, and things of that kind. I don't know what his friends made of Fred. He would have done famously for either an Old Bailey lawyer or a Cheap Jack. Fred himself talked as if he could have his choice between being made Prime Minister, or Commander-in-Chief, or Lord Chancellor, or Archbishop of Canterbury. We called him Frederick the Great, and he took the name quite seriously.

One "Doctor's birthday" I sat close by his blustering majesty on the road to Marshby, and had to spend part of the day when we got there with him. If I tell you a little of how he went on then, it will give you a notion of the way he always went on.

When the traps came about six in the morning to Axleford (we had a scrambling kind of breakfast before we started, and then another picnic breakfast when we got to Marshby), Chapman went about looking at the harness, and lifting up the horses' feet, and talking about "points," and

"pasterns," and "barrels," and "Roman noses," as if he was a horse-dealer. The drivers thought at first that he must know something about horses, but they soon found out that he didn't know anything, and then they poked fun at him.

"There 's an old screw," he said, pointing to one horse; "your master ought to be ashamed to send such a thing as that out of his yard."

"Sich a thing as that!" the driver answered. "Why, there ain't a better 'oss in the stables, an' he 's on'y risin' four; an' you don't call *that* hold, do ye, sir? You jist look in his mouth."

Chapman tried to, but he knew just as well how to set about it as a cat knows how to play the fiddle. The horse laid down his ears, and wriggled his head about, and when he did open his mouth, it was to give a grab at Chapman that made him hop back like a parched pea.

"You 're out o' practice, I s'pose, sir, bein' at school so long," the man grinned. "This is the

way you should take 'old on 'em. Now then, you give a look at his teeth."

Chapman tried to look very wise, and then he shouted,

"I knew I was right—that horse is twenty years old, if he 's a day."

"Why didn't you say two 'underd, when you was about it? Much *you* knows about 'osses," was the contemptuous rejoinder.

Chapman began to bluster about the lots of horses his uncle kept, but it had no effect upon the man, except to make him, as we thought, quite witty.

"Ah, yes, I expect all the 'osses you knows about is at *your uncle's*, an' you never takes 'em hout."

Chapman was very savage when he saw us laughing, and wanted to make us believe that it was the man and not himself who knew nothing about horses—only we didn't.

The 'bus started first, with nearly a score of

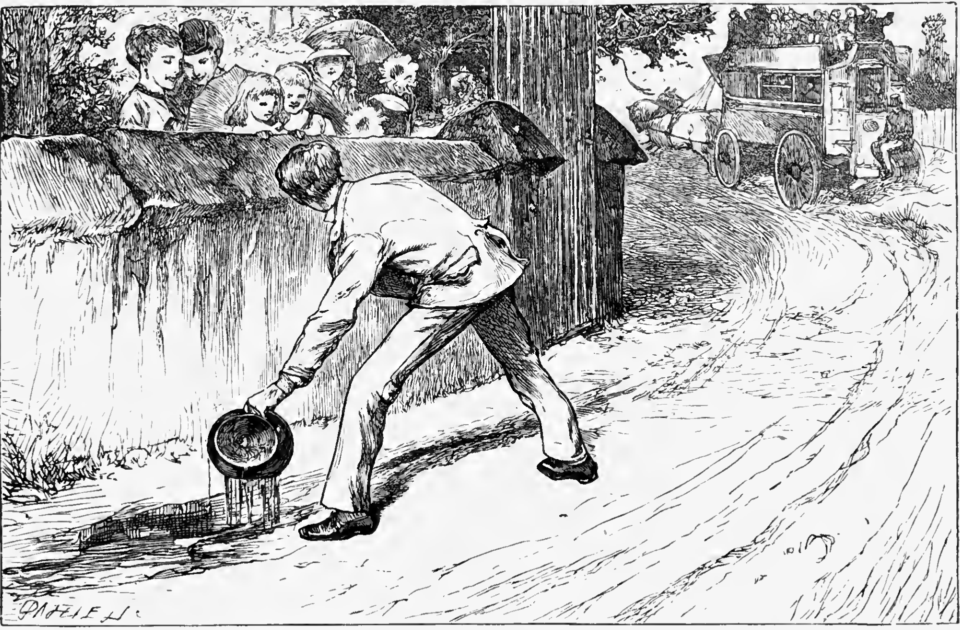
small boys stowed inside, and about a dozen middle-sized fellows outside. Blustering Fred, of course, monopolized the box-seat, and I sat just behind him. It was a beautiful morning; we had all got pea-shooters, and plenty of peas; and we should have been as jolly as the larks that were singing up all round us if it had not been for Chapman's blather.

As soon as we got outside the gates, he wanted to drive—"tool the tits," he called it, being so very "knowing." But the driver had taken Mr. Fred's measure, and wouldn't let him until we were on the other side of Dulchester, and then the man only let Fred touch the reins ("fingering the ribbons," Fred called it) when the road was quite straight, and level, and empty for a long way ahead. Fred was very indignant; but the man was not going to risk his own place, and his horses' knees, and our necks, for such a tip as Chapman was likely to give him. If Frederick the Great, however, often looked very sulky on his

box-seat throne, the rest of us had a very merry ride. We peppered the few cottages we passed on the road to Dulchester, and the women and girls came to the doors to grin, and the small boys ran out into the gardens and returned our fire of peas with pebbles. We peppered the servant-girls that were cleaning the windows, and washing the doorsteps, and shaking the mats, and the men and boys who were taking down shop shutters and sweeping out shops, as we drove through clean, quiet, sunny Dulchester; and the people seemed to think it good fun to be peppered, and knocked off work to chaff and to be chaffed. On the other side of Dulchester, where the road ran once more between straggling, tangled hedges, freshly green, and freshly green hedgerow trees, as yet unclogged with dust, with still more freshly green young corn beyond, and lush grass, and golden buttercups, and tasselled tufts of cowslips, starry ox-eyes, and a dredging, like silvery flour, of daisies and ladies'-smock, "cuck-oo, cuck-oo"

constantly sounded so close to us that we felt half angry, because we could not see where the sound came from. And there were grey-tilted carriers' carts to fire volleys into; and farmers, with brown-red faces like well-done roast-beef, weighing down their gigs on one side, or jogging along on horses as plump as themselves; and the people cheered, though we did pepper them, when we drove through the villages; and in one there was a whole girls' school peeping over their mossy garden wall, and wishing that they were going to the sea-side with us. We wished so, too; for the girls looked very pretty in their sprigged muslins, and without their bonnets. It was "quite a picture" to see them in the half-sunny, half-shady old garden, full of flowering lilacs and laburnums, apple trees and ribes, flags, lavender, lilies of the valley, purple stocks and wallflowers, that we could smell a hundred yards off, and red and white hawthorn, —and red and white roses, too, for everything

was very forward that bright May. *We* were, at any rate. Although we only saw them once a year (they were indoors when we went back in the evening), we carried on a kind of flirtation with the Goose Green girls, and gave them an annual bombardment of pink cocked-hat *billets-doux*, ballasted with comfits, and little dolls, and packets of acidulated drops and all kinds of sweetstuff. We were too gallant to fire peas at *them*. Chapman had tried hard to get the man to let him drive past "The Misses Candlers' Seminary for Young Ladies," but the man wouldn't; so Chapman tried hard to look as if he had only given up the reins for a minute or two, that he might have his hands free to pelt the girls, and take off his hat, and kiss his fingers to them. But Blustering Fred made a mull of his politeness. He snatched a packet of lollies from one of the fellows behind to fling to the girls, and the girls cried out, "Oh, you stingy!" They wouldn't look at him when he was blowing



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them kisses, but they did look at him, and laugh at him too, when he dropped his hat into a puddle, and had to get down to pick it up, and run after the 'bus rubbing the mud off, and shouting, because the driver had started again as soon as Fred was down.

Fred *could* roar, as I have told you, and therefore the man had no excuse; but he pretended not to hear Fred until we got outside the village—on to the common dotted with golden furze, and grey and white geese—which had given Goose Green its name. There the man stopped, and when Chapman came up panting, the saucy fellow said with a sly grin,

"Law, sir, I thought you did it a-purpose, to have a chat with the young ladies that seemed so fond of ye, an' then come on by the next wehicle."

Fred jumped at this salve to his dignity, and talked as if what the man had said was just what he had meant to do, if he had not found that we

were a long way ahead of all the other "wehicles." But we grinned so, when he climbed up into his seat—and the driver grinned so, too—that Fred got quite furious. To smooth down his ruffled feathers, Fred was allowed to drive across the common, though there was a donkey-cart in sight. We came up to it in the middle of the common, where four roads crossed beneath a white finger-post in a little diamond-shaped island of green turf. Just before we got there, one of the donkeys that were dragging their clogs over the common began to bray, and directly afterwards all the rest were braying in chorus, and the donkey in the cart stood stock-still in the middle of the road, and lifted up his head and hee-hawed almost under the noses of our horses. They tried to shy, but they shied opposite ways, and so they only knocked their heads together; they tried to jib, but the 'bus was too heavy for them; and so off they started at full gallop. Fred had no more command over them than a baby, and yet

he would keep hold of the reins when the man tried to snatch them from him. We capsized the donkey-cart, we carried away one of the arms of the finger-post, and yet Blustering Fred was so proud of his driving that he still wouldn't let go of the reins, and made confusion worse confounded. A little way beyond the finger-post the road sloped between high furze-banks into a steep hill, that would have brought the collars almost on to the horses' ears if we had been going down quietly and with the skid on. Down that we rattled at an awful rate. The 'bus rolled like a ship at sea. The youngsters inside squealed like passengers battened down under hatches in a storm. We outsides had to hold on like sailors reefing in the "roaring forties." Our faces as well as our knuckles grew very white. Fred was as scared as any of us, and would have been glad enough to give up the reins then, but he seemed not to know how, until the driver plumped himself down on Fred's knees, and grabbed the reins below

Fred's hands. We were half-way up the hill beyond the hollow at the foot of the common, however, before the horses were pulled up. Fred looked rather crestfallen when he crawled out, crushed and crumpled, from beneath the man who had made a cushion of him; and he had to go back to pick up the whip that he had dropped; but by the time we got to Marshby, he was talking as big as ever, and making out that, if it had not been for him, we should all have broken our necks.

We gave Fred as wide a berth as we could at Marshby. When you want to enjoy yourself, you know, it is not pleasant to have a fellow close by who is always trying to make you believe that you have no business to be enjoying yourself, because what you are seeing and doing is not nearly so fine as what he has seen and done somewhere else.

Samphire Marshby certainly is not a very beautiful watering-place. There is a dreary marsh be-

hind it, and the cliffs are only crumbling earth that is always dropping into the sea. Great bits, with corn still upright on them, plump and slide down upon the sands. There is a huge zigzag crack in the sea-wall of the Esplanade too, that makes you think that that, and the Terrace houses on the top of it, will soon be gobbled up by the pea-soupy waters that swallowed the old church and hundreds of acres of good wheat-land, long before Marshby became a watering-place. Still, Marshby has boats and bathing-machines, and donkeys and goat-chaises, and a jetty and a preventive station, and two martello towers, and a lofty landmark with corkscrew stairs up to the top, and an "antediluvian cliff," full of shells all turned the wrong way; and a good beach with sea-weedy groynes to jump and clamber over: so we used to make ourselves very jolly there, though Chapman *was* always saying, "Ah, you 've never been at Tenby" and a score of other places. According to his own

account, he had done wonders in the swimming, fishing, and boating line in the watering-places he went to in the holidays. He *said*, indeed, that he had steered a life-boat that went out from Torquay to rescue the crew of a wrecked West Indiaman. But we did not put much faith in Master Fred's stories. It seemed so strange that he should be such a hero at other watering-places where we couldn't see him, and yet such a muff at Marshby where we could see him. When he bathed there, he never went in much over his waist, and he used to cut ashore as soon as he saw a big, curling, curly wave coming. As for *rowing!* He made all kinds of grand excuses before we could get him into a boat; but, when he did get in, he was always catching crabs, if he took an oar, and *that* was all the *fishing* he did. Nevertheless, he used to go on bragging as loudly as ever about his boating in places where there was "a real sea on—not a muddy ditch like the Samphire Marshby sea."

That day I am telling you about, I was unlucky enough to go out in a sailing-boat which Fred had helped to hire. The boatman let him steer, because he boasted so, but Chapman didn't even know what "port" and "starboard" meant. Whatever the man said, Chapman always put the boat's head just where he oughtn't to have put it. We ran foul of another boat, and we were nearly capsized in a puff of wind because Chapman hauled in the sheet when the man shouted "Let go," and we got almost under the paddles of the *Fire Queen*, from London, as she splashed up alongside the jetty; and then Chapman managed to jam us between two of the blistered, brown-black jetty piles. The boat crunched like a crushed basket, and pop! pop! went the pods of the sea-weed that hung from the piles like dishevelled hair, as we ground against them. The people leaning over the rails of the steamboat and the jetty chaffed Master Fred nicely on his seamanship; and so did we

when we got safe ashore. But when *he* was safe ashore he talked as big as ever. The Marshby people, he said, were only half-and-half sailors, and the steamboat people were mere Cockneys—none of them really understood anything about sailing a boat — he was always right when he went out with South-coast men and West-coast men—they didn't even know the right names of things on the East coast—he had done just what the man had really told him to do, though he did think it was wrong, because he felt bound to obey orders—and so on, and so on.

Fred deserved to get chaffed, didn't he? But then, unfortunately, chaffing him was very much like peppering a hippopotamus with peas.

I didn't see any more of Fred that day until the 'bus was just going to start for Axleford again in the evening dusk. The rest of us took donkeys and tried to get up a steeple-chase over the wooden breakwaters when we landed from the boat; but Fred was "too much of a man" to

ride a donkey. The fact was that he didn't like being sent every now and then over the donkey's head; but since one's "dignity" is the only thing that gets hurt in such a spill on sand, *that* seems to me the best bit of fun in sea-shore donkey-riding.

After our steeple-chase we joined the other fellows, who were clustering for dinner on the beach; but, though Fred's appetite was nearly as big as his talk, he was not fussing about the hampers as usual, as if he was the only one who knew how a sea-side picnic ought to be managed. After dinner we scattered again, with orders to muster for tea before starting at the Porto Bello Inn, where the traps were put up, at about 8 P.M. We had more boating and donkey-racing, and we bathed and lolled on the sunny sands, and made ducks and drakes on the sunny waters with smooth little bits of tile and slate and stone, and we picked up sea-weed and shells on the beach, and got our fingers nipped by trying to

catch little crabs, and borrowed nets from the shrimper-boys and girls, who were plodding along the shore knee-deep, pushing their nets before them; but though we tried to push just as the shrimpers did, we didn't get much besides wet trousers. We wandered down to the marshes, too, and picked samphire to pickle foı our bed-room suppers on the sly; and we chatted with the brown, civil coast-guardmen lounging about their canvas-covered boat, basking in the sun-light, and their brass gun that blazed like half a dozen golden thistles, and cleaning and sharp-ening their cutlasses and pistols in the cool dark bcat-shed; and the grey-haired lieutenant, with a gold band round his cap, came out of his whitewashed little house, and talked to us—and we were very much astonished to find that such a veteran had not fought at Trafalgar and been all over the world, and that he seemed as pleased at getting fresh people, though they were only schoolboys, to talk to, as any old cottage-woman

at Axleford would have been; and the Irish sailor left in charge of the one occupied martello tower let us in when we crossed the plank bridge over the stagnant moat, and took us up to the top of the tower, and showed us where the gun used to stand, and made jokes, and generally proved himself a very pleasant fellow, although we could not help looking severely at him when he, a mere common sailor (an Irish sailor, too), took the unwarrantable liberty of ridiculing the English of boys belonging to far-famed (in Calfinghamshire) Axleford School. We had asked him, very politely, if we might go *over* the tower, and he had answered, very impertinently, "Faith, no, unless ye want to break your necks." And we climbed up to the top of the landmark, and saw the green sea and the green land spread out beneath us like an embossed map. Altogether, the time passed so pleasantly that we never thought of Chapman. We did not think of him at tea-time either, or after tea—until the traps

were pushed and pulled out of the cart-sheds, and the horses came clumping over the thresholds of the stables, and we were told off again for the ride home. Then Chapman was missed, but no one had seen or heard of him since the morning. Notwithstanding — or rather because of — his bluster, however, we felt pretty sure that he had not run into any danger, and so off we went, expecting he would turn up in time to come on in one of the other traps. "We can git over the loss of his hinterestin' serciety," the driver of our 'bus remarked. But when we had got about a quarter of a mile from Marshby, up started something naked from the ditch, and shouted to us to stop. It was poor Fred, with only a wet hat and one waterlogged boot on. He told us a cock-and-bull story about his having stripped to swim out to the rescue of an old gentleman in a Bath chair, whom he had seen overtaken by the tide about a mile from shore, and about his clothes being stolen whilst he was away, and his having

to creep round by the back of the cliff and over the marshes, and hide in the ditch to wait for us, because he was ashamed to walk into the town in buff. All except the last part sounded very mythical, but, of course, that wasn't a time to cross-question Fred. The driver lent him a top-coat, and two horse-cloths, and two nosebags to put his feet into, and he had to ride home inside, muffled up like a mummy, instead of cutting a swell and cracking jokes on the box-seat. We found out afterwards how Fred had lost his clothes. *He* always said that the story was all a lie; but putting what we guessed with what we heard from a coast-guardman who had been on the cliff at the time, together, we could account for Fred's unfledged state without having to tax our imaginations to get up an invalid old gentleman.

Just beyond the landmark at Marshby, where the coast-line turns in towards the backwater that sprawls like a slate-coloured glove spread

out on a green table-cloth, there is a sheltered, long, level bit of beach. Fred had gone to bathe there by himself, because he could go a long way out without getting very deep, and in fine weather the water there was almost as smooth as a mill-pond. He had forgotten, though, that the tide came in very fast over the flat sands; and whilst he was splashing in the lukewarm water, all his clothes, excepting the foundered hat and boot, had gone afloat, and were far beyond his reach when he got back to land. There was nothing really to be ashamed of in all this; but Fred still stuck to the story of the Bath chair. When we want other people to think us wiser, and braver, and in every way greater geniuses and heroes than we are, we *mean* a lot of big lies, and are sadly tempted to *tell* a lot of big lies when we are afraid that our sham is seen through.

VIII.

HONEST NED.

"OLD HONESTY" was the name by which Ned Hargreaves went at Axleford; and though it is sometimes given to donkeys, it was a name to be proud of. Most of us, I hope, were "indifferent honest," in word and deed, at any rate; but Ned was thoroughly honest in thought as well as word and deed. Even fellows who would scorn to tell a downright lie, or to crib anything from a schoolmate, make "mental reservations" sometimes, and have somewhat lax notions of *meum* and *tuum* when other people's—orchards, say—are concerned; but Ned was honest to the back-bone.

He hated everything underhand, however little under the hand it might be. At least that was the opinion we had of him, and we could not help respecting him accordingly.

Except his honesty, there was nothing remarkable about Ned. He was an average kind of boy; neither stronger, nor taller, nor better-looking, nor more daring, nor freer-handed, nor cleverer, nor fonder of work than the ruck of boys of his age. We couldn't help wondering sometimes that we respected him as we did.

The Fifth of November was always a great day with us at Axleford. For a week beforehand we could scarcely do any work for thinking of it. One Fifth, I remember, was an especially jolly day, or rather night. The Doctor had a lot of young ladies staying at his house—grown-up and growing-up. The masters wanted to show off before the grown-up ones, and we were in love, a dozen deep, with the growing-up ones; and therefore we determined to give them a literally

"magnificent display of fireworks." The Doctor always subscribed like a brick, but that year, in honour of his guests, he headed the list with a whacking figure, and we and the under-masters, of course, followed suit to the best of our ability. Rockets, Roman candles, flower-pots, maroons, Jacks-in-the-box, Bengal lights, blue lights, Catherine-wheels, squibs, crackers, serpents, golden fires, &c., &c., were ordered in such quantities that the Dulchester shopkeeper of whom we ordered them thought at first that we were trying to hoax him. Our bonfire was a regular wood-stack. We were not all, as I have contritely confessed, as honest as Ned Hargreaves, and I am afraid that a good many hedges contributed to it without their proprietors' permission. The Guy on the top of the pile, moreover, was propped with timber that looked very suspiciously like the bars of two gates which Farmer Lufkin next morning discovered to be missing. The Guy *was* a guy. He stood about ten feet

high in his wide-mouthed slouched boots, which had been made expressly for him by the village cobbler; and his pockets, his lantern, his hat, and his long-nosed red face were crammed with crackers. The girls had kindly helped us to make his clothes. One of them had sacrificed a muslin scarf to provide Guido Faux with a ruff; and another had re-painted his mask, to make the beard tally exactly with the requirements of "the period."

Axleford School on that Fifth of November night was the centre of attraction for five miles round. A good many people had been invited to see the show, and a good many more came without being invited. The village folks soon got through their few squibs and crackers, and then, reserving their tar-barrel until our bonfire should have burnt low, swarmed up *en masse* to climb our trees, and perch themselves on our walls, and to drop from them inside to make raids on squibs that had fallen near, still fizzing. Even

Farmer Lufkin, who had no objection to a little entertainment, once in a way, which cost him nothing, strolled down to have a look at the fire-works, little dreaming (since he went away be-fore the bonfire was lighted) that he *had* been laid under contribution towards our fun. That *was* a jolly night. The rockets rushed up and broke, and fell in many-coloured stars to a chorus of "Oh—oh—oh—law!" from the yokels.

Boom—fizz—crack—bang—showering sparks —flash--blaze—omnipresent sulphury smoke—dark figures, momentarily illuminated, rushing about and shouting like rollicking revolutionists —it is pleasant to think that one could ever get so excited as all of us were that night. And then we would make sudden dashes into the house, and have brief, sweet chats with our almost equally excited Dulcineas, who liked us the better the grimier our faces and fingers were, and helped us liberally to the cake and wine that were going.

At last our fireworks were exhausted, and the bonfire was lighted. Broader and broader, longer and longer, brighter and brighter, the tongues of flame licked through the wreaths of smoke. They leaped at Guy like dogs trying to pull down a deer, but for a time he stood untouched, now showing every button, and anon blotted from view by the rolling smoke-clouds. Presently, however, his footing gave way; he sank into the blazing mass, and his crackers went off like a fire of musketry. Higher and higher now shot the flames—the furrows of the nearest fields could be seen as clearly as on a summer day, and the windows of the house flashed ruddy gold from every pane. A servant galloped from the Hall with the Squire's compliments, "and if the fire was not put out at once, he should send into Dulchester for the engines." A howl of triumphant derision greeted that presumptuous message; fresh faggots were heaped upon the fire, and the scared groom went back

even faster than he had come—thankful that he had not shared the fate of Guy. Round and round the fire we capered and shouted like black fellows. At length the flames were low enough for us to leap through and over them like black fellows; and, watched as we were from the windows, of course we made, or shammed to make, most heroic jumps. But "all that's bright must fade," and, close on to midnight, even our unprecedented bonfire had died down into smouldering ashes. We lingered round them, burying the potatoes we had provided for a picnic treat before breakfast on the morrow; but, under-masters' "Now, then, off to bed" having been too long disregarded, the Doctor came out and gave the order in a tone that showed he meant it, and then off we scampered to our bed-rooms. All except Old Honesty. His bed was empty when the last of the other fellows in his bed-room fell asleep, and it was empty when the first of them awoke.

As the morning went on we began to wonder

over Ned Hargreaves's mysterious disappearance; and when breakfast and play-time after it were over, and we had been rung in for forenoon school, and Honest Ned was still *non inventus*, our speculations became so anxious that we began to fear that we should be obliged to call official attention to his absence. "Telling tales," however, is such unpleasant work to schoolboys, that we held our tongues, waiting for the master to miss him when his class was called up. Of course he was soon missed then. When the consequent inquiries were made, nobody could remember having seen anything of Hargreaves since a little after tea-time on the previous evening. The Doctor looked quite troubled when he heard that Ned could not be found.

"I never knew Hargreaves do anything that he had reason to be ashamed of," said the Doctor, as he took down his hat to go to make outside inquiries after Ned. "Something serious must have happened to him."

"No, sir, nothing serious; and I *am* ashamed of myself," was the unexpected answer, as the school-door swung open, and Old Honesty entered, looking as if he *had* reason to be ashamed of himself. His clothes were like a muddy scarecrow's, and he had a puffed purple-black eye, whose involuntary wink was comically out of keeping with the rest of his downcast countenance.

"Why, Hargreaves!" cried the Doctor in disgusted astonishment.

And then, out before us all, Old Honesty told his story. He had started the evening before to pull down the finger-post on the common, as an addition to the bonfire.

"The fellows had been chaffing me because, they said, I wasn't game enough to get any wood; and I thought I'd show them I was game enough to do what they wouldn't do, when there was no harm in it. I didn't think it was stealing to pull up that lying old thing, sir. It's only

got 'To A——' on it (the rest of the board's broken off), and if *that* was any guide, it's got slewed round and points to nowhere particular, except the pond. But a Rural came up, and collared me when I was lugging away at the rotten old post. I got away from him, but a lot of the yokels came after me, and pulled me about till the policeman caught hold of me again—and I've been all night in the Cage, sir!"

The Doctor tried to look stern, but his mouth twitched, and at last he could not help joining as heartily as any of us in the burst of laughter which Ned's forlorn condition and frank confession provoked between them.

And yet even Old Honesty was suspected, for a time, of being a sneaking thief.

From lockers and boxes our "portable property" vanished in a most mysterious fashion. If a fellow had anything that he was particularly proud of, he was pretty sure not to have it long. Even our bird-seed in the stable was walked into

extensively, and bags of marbles laid down for a minute or two in the playground had disappeared when their owners went back to pick them up. We were sorely puzzled. The thief must be everywhere—who could it be? It was almost impossible to believe that the good-natured women-servants would prig things out of our boxes, and, even if they did, what could they want with blood-alleys and hemp-seed? The man-servant and the boy had access to the stable and the playground and the school-room, but, though "Old Growler" had amply earned his name, it was ridiculous to think that he would rob his growlees; and the lad who cleaned the boots and knives was never up in the bed-rooms. We were obliged to believe that either some invisible "Boy Jones" came down the chimneys, or else that it was one of our own boys that stole the things.

Well, one night Francis Major went as usual to his box, to take out a pistol he was very proud

of—he used to polish it till it was as smooth and bright as glass, and take aim at the masters' backs and snap caps at them almost before they were out of the door. That night, though he had found the box locked, the pistol was gone.

"I tell you what it is," cried Francis, "I'm certain now that it's some fellow belonging to the school that prigs the things—the paltry sneak! It isn't half an hour ago that that pistol was all right in my box. I took it out and put it in again when I came up to get my line out of the box, and none of the servants can have been up since then. Why, the little chaps were coming up when I ran down. It must be one of them. Don't say anything about it. We'll rout their boxes out to-morrow."

Great was the consternation amongst the little chaps when they found that they were suspected. They gave up their keys willingly enough, however, next day, and Francis and ever so many more fellows went up to the little chaps' bed-

room to overhaul their boxes. The pistol wasn't in any of them.

"I don't see why you should suspect the little chaps any more than the big fellows, Francis," said Ned Hargreaves. "Let's all have our boxes searched."

"Stuff!" cried Peter Robinson, who slept in Francis and Hargreaves's room. "As if any of us would do a thing like that!"

But when the others agreed to have their boxes searched, Robinson said he was quite agreeable.

"I must go and get my keys, though—I left them in my locker."

The other fellows waited in the little chaps' bed-room until Robinson came back, and then they went up to No. 1 bed-room.

"There, search my box first," cried Robinson, as soon as they got inside the door.

Nothing was found in it that didn't belong to him. Nothing that didn't belong to the owner was found in any of the boxes until they came

to Hargreaves's; but there, just under a rumpled newspaper, lay not only Francis's pistol, but ever so many more things that had "gone a-missing." Hargreaves was dumbfoundered; most of the other boys looked as if they couldn't believe their eyes; but Robinson sneered,

"It's convenient to be called Old Honesty, ain't it? 'The demure sow sucks the cow.'"

I will tell you a little more about Master Peter Robinson in my next chapter.

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IX.

PALTRY PETER.

DID you ever spend the holidays at school? It sounds dreary, but the fact is not nearly so dismal as the phrase. At any rate, if I had had a pleasanter companion, the Midsummer holidays I once spent at Axleford would have been some of the pleasantest I remember. And it was not until the last week that I found out what kind of fellow my companion was. My pitying classmates had congratulated me on having such a senior as Peter Robinson to share what they considered my exile in Siberia—or Cayenne, I ought rather to say, considering the weather. "He 's a little bit too much of a carney," I had been told, "but he

isn't a bad fellow, and you may be sure he won't cock over you."

The house and grounds seemed strangely silent and solitary on the evening of the still more bustling day that succeeded blithe Speech Day. Boys, masters, and even most of the servants, had started for their vacation. The good-tempered matron and two housemaids were the only women left in the house until the "cleaning" began, and Old Growler was the only man upon the premises. It *was* rather doleful then to ramble about in the school-room, littered with the rubbish of turned-out lockers, and the playground, littered with torn-up exercise and copy-books, and to think of the home welcomes the rest of the fellows had got, or were hurrying to, whilst we were "left lamenting." It was a relief when the yokel-boys presumed to make an incursion into our deserted precincts. Although we chased them out again with vigorous indignation—not succeeding in expelling them, however, until Old Growler came

to our aid with a horsewhip—we hoped, for the sake of change, that the saucy rustics would soon return. We could not help feeling rather low-spirited at our first lonely meal—taken at the end of a long room, to which the long forms laid on their backs upon the long, clothless tables gave quite an unfamiliar look; and when we went to bed, in the midst of a far-stretching wilderness of stripped mattresses—whose recent incumbents, scattered like the drops of a trundled mop, would turn-in dozens and scores of miles away—the hush of the dim, big old house, and the audible tick of the far-off clock upon the stairs, were certainly rather oppressive. We woke jolly enough the next morning. The world was all before us where to choose. We were, in fact, our own masters, so far as the way in which we liked to amuse ourselves was concerned.

"I trust to your honour, boys, not to get into mischief," the Doctor had said when he went away; and *that*, though some mean boys do take

advantage of it, and sillily chuckle over their own knowingness and the spooniness of their truster, when they do so—that, I say, seems to me the best way of keeping boys who have any sense of honour in them—and most boys have, I hope—out of serious scrapes. The very fact of our being nominally at school made us enjoy our almost unlimited liberty all the more. The matron and the other women-folk did not interfere with us in any way—except to give us specially nice things to eat and drink, in compassionate consideration of our temporary homelessness at holiday-time. When we were guilty of the ordinary schoolboy tricks, which neither of us thought prohibited by the Doctor's parting caution, Old Growler fully availed himself of his power of growling at us; but his power of restraint was small, and of that, even such as it was, being a good old bear at bottom, he was *not* disposed to avail himself to its full extent. He was always threatening—"Ah, you see if I don't let the master know

when he comes back;" but it was a long cry to the Doctor, who was up the Rhine then, and when he did come back, our offences against Old Growler's sense of propriety had so accumulated that he was puzzled to select "a leading case." Being, as I have said before, not a bad old bear at bottom, he compromised matters by winking at all our not very iniquitous iniquities (so far as he knew); letting us understand, however, that he considered us, so to speak, bound under personal recognizances to appear for sentence on past crimes, whenever we offended him next half. Peter Robinson had a way of smoothing the old man down that half-flattered and half-angered him.

"Ah, you can talk, *you* can, as if butter wouldn't melt in your mouth, 'cos you're afeard I should split, Mr. Robinson," Old Growler would say; "I'd believe ye sooner if you was sarcy like the young 'un there—though he *is* a himpident young limb, as I should like to give a good hidin' to,

for tramplin' down my beddin'-out plarnts. Beddin'-out plarnts, with sich as *you* to have the run o' the garding! The master may be a wise man, for what I know, with his Greek an' that; but he can't know much about boys, though he be a schoolmaster, to let you two have the run o' the place."

After the first two or three days, Robinson left me to amuse myself. He went his way, and I went mine, only meeting in the bed-room and at meal-times. Although he was older than I, I had been a good deal longer at Axleford than he had. The reason he was staying during the holidays was because he had only come to school a few weeks before the end of the last half. (Private schools did not talk about "terms" in those days.) We did not know much about him, therefore, but the character my classmates had given him seemed just enough to me at first. He did not cock over me, and at first he seemed inclined to make me quite a crony—asking me everything about every-

body belonging to the place. The only thing I did not like about him was a way he had of looking out of the corners of his eyes when he had said anything that sounded "queer"—just as if he was trying dangerous ice, and wanted to see how far he could go with safety. But when he saw that I did not like what he was saying, he chaffed me so for taking him at his word that I was quite puzzled to make out whether he had been tempting me to join him in something we had no business to do, or trying to spy out whether I had been doing anything of the kind by myself. Altogether, although it was not until the last week of the holidays that I had any substantial reason for thinking him a Paltry Peter, I was not sorry when Robinson left me to my own devices.

That was a jolly time, although I had no chum to roam about with. I could get up when I liked, go to bed when I liked, wander where I liked, and stay out as long as I liked. When inclined

for a day out, the motherly old matron would supply me with stores—supplemented with multitudinous motherly cautions against breaking my bones, or getting drowned, shot, trapped, and a long &c. of serious contingencies; and if too late for dinner, I had only to go into the kitchen to get a better meal than I should have had if I had been true to time. Old Growler used, of course, when he was in the way, to protest vigorously against these kitchen indulgences. "A boy's belly should tell him when it 's time for dinner," was his elegant phrase; "an' if it don't, he don't want none, or don't ought to have none—that 's what *I* says." But old Growler, as well as myself, was dependent on the kitchen for creature-comforts, and had to retreat growling like a distantly rumbling thunderstorm before the "You ought to be ashamed of yourself" and "*You* like to have enough, you greedy, grumpy old pig," &c., &c. of the good-natured dispensers of mine. The country was basking in the lazy pomp of full-

blown, glorious summer. In the early morning it was like dipping one's head into iced millefleur to open a bed-room window. All day long the air was luscious with the scent of limes. Week after week passed by without a drop of rain, except a freshening, dust-laying night-shower now and then, and once, when the cracks in the clay lands seemed gasping for breath, a grand tempest that would have seemed a dream next sunny morning, had it not been for the rain-drops trembling on the hedge-sprays, the rain-pools in the lanes, the sodden flower-petals lying, earth-splashed, on the garden-beds, and the revivified look of the whole country round. The shorn meadows, although they had taken a start for an aftermath, soon turned yellow again. Streaks and patches of gold grew more and more plentiful in the rustling green corn-fields. The spiny green globes of the chestnut trees seemed to swell before one's eyes. Summer fruit might be had for the plucking, and the school and the farm and the cottage gardens

were rich in promise of green and brown pears and rosy-cheeked and russet apples. Here and there on the hedges an already purple pimple might be picked off the granulated beehives of the plenteous show of blackberries. Lacelike hemlock-blossom, towering stinging-nettles, honeyed white nettles, and glossy dock-leaves choked the ditches. The flowerless primroses sprawled drooping, crinkled leaves, as big as lettuce-leaves, over the hedge-banks, and the hedges were white with a mat of bell-bind, and purple with hanging clusters of nightshade. The woods were darkening, but green was still the dominant tone of their sun-gilt tufted fur-like clumps and roundly rising inclined planes—green that gleamed out like a bridesmaid standing beside a widower when a young plane-tree stood beside a copper beech. And around the trees, though bare just at their base, the elsewhere shrivelled grass grew lush damascened with blue and pink and yellow wild flowers, and spired with rusty sorrel. The birds

were growing lazy, but larks still sang all day long, and nightingales all night long, and fitfully by day. Now and then, too, a blackbird would say grace for the fruit on which he had been gorging himself, in a brief snatch of the cooling music he had fluted out far more generously before the fruit was ripe for his greedy golden bill—ever and anon crisping the sweetness of his song with a roughness like that of the sweet-sour, cooling black currant. The farmers winked at my popping away at the rabbits with the old gun I had borrowed in the village, and winked very good-humouredly too, when the Squire's gamekeeper was not likely to turn-up, though rabbits *were* reserved with game in their leases; for the swarming vermin had nibbled some of the fields bare for a couple of "stetches" and more from the hedges that bordered the green woodland lanes.

"*You* mustn't shoot at them rabbuts, ye know, young master," Farmer Walton said to me one

day with a grin. "Squire 'll have ye took up for poachin', though ye are a Latin scholard as ought to know better. I guess though, *yow* don't hit many, s' long as ye aim at 'em. Theer, I 'll give ye leave to fire off that gun o' yourn, an' scare 'em. Theer 's no law agin that, as I knows on. It 's cruel, it is, the way them nasty beasts eats down my carn and turmets. Tain't as if th' old Squire went shootin' hisself, or made it up to ye somehow; but he lets his shootin', he do, though he is sich a old county gen'leman, to a Lunnon chap as keeps a gin-shop, I 've heard—anyhow, he 's summut in the spirit line. *He* comes down, an' he blazes away—him an' his mates, they does. That 's all fair enough when the gin feller pays for his fun, an' I don't expect he gits much out of it, for thim cockneys ain't much o' shots, an' the Squire 's a precious screw, *he* be. I wouldn't grumble if 't was made up to me somehow, though it *be* uncommon aggrawatin' to see fields that you 've paid money for to be ploughed, an'

sowed, an' harrered, an' rolled, as bare as your chin, a'most, young master, when the years ought to be up over yer yead. The Squire, *he* never makes it up, he don't. If I was to grumble, he 'd say, 'Your lease is out next Michaelmas, an' you can walk, you can.' The gin feller 's generouser than the Squire, though he be a Lunnoner. He sends me a dozen or two o' wine, or a cask o' stout, or that like; but what 's that to the vally o' my crops thim brutes has spoiled? The rabbuts is the wust. The hares is bad, but I wouldn't growl about them, an' I wouldn't say a word about the pa'tridges, if it wasn't for *them* [condemned] warmin. The Lunnoner gives me a brace or two o' birds, he do. He ain't over free-handed, but he 's better than Squire. He wants to git the vally o' his money, though he don't, an' that 's all right enough. But I pay money to Squire 's well as he, an' I should like to git the vally on it too. Well, anyhow, *yow* 've scared 'em," Farmer Walton added, when, thus

encouraged, I had pulled the trigger. "But, law bless ye, they'll be back agin, thick 's flies —thick 's fleas—in two minnuts. I'm goin' home'ards; if *yow* like to come up, an' have a glass o' beer, *yow* can."

Besides the rabbit-haunted fields to wander over, there was the little river to bathe, and boat, and fish in. I could take my pick of the miller's boats for a smaller price than I should have had to pay for his leakiest old tub during the half. When the miller's wife, indeed, chanced to be the letter, she let me have the boat for nothing. "It's a shame, that it is," she would say, "whoever your father, or your mother, or your aunts or uncles is, that they should leave a child o' theirn at school when the rest is a-enjyin' theirselves at home. Theer—you go an' enjy yourself; I'm not a-going to take your money, don't you think it—*you*, as don't seem to have a home as anybody 'll arsk you to. I am a mother myself, *I* am. Theer—if you'll promise not to

be up to any o' your tricks, you shall give my Jemimar Ann a pull, you shall."

Jemima Ann was a very pretty little damsel, with a crop of golden-brown curls that hung down like tumbled spaniel's ears, and big, dark- and long-lashed eyes, as liquidly and lucently blue as the July sky overhead. She was just my own age, and therefore, of course, considered herself about fifteen years my elder; making *de haut en bas* remarks on my rowing, age, stature, strength, and character generally, which rendered her company a somewhat marmaladish sweet. On rare occasions, however, Jemima Ann would come down from her lofty perch of assumed seniority and condescend to treat me as a contemporary. It was heavenly then to glide along the narrow, winding, insect-dimpled reaches, with the golden dust-like gnat swarms humming over the reeds, and the kingfisher, and the swallows, and the dragon-flies zigzagging backwards and forwards, and here and there a grave old cow standing

under the willows, up to her knees in weeds and water, lashing her sides with her tufted tail, and watching Jemima Ann with an "I 've-a-great-mind-to-tell-your-mother-miss" expression. What the cows saw to make them look in that way, you must not expect me to inform you. Those are fools who kiss and tell.

That summer, too, the fish bit as if they were weary of their existence. My green and white float began to bob as soon as the line was thrown in. Gudgeons, and perch, and popes, bullheads, and loach, and roach, I pulled up as if all the fish in the little river wanted to get out of its lukewarm water. One day, when I hadn't my rod with me, I saw quite a whopping carp close in by the bank. Well, he waited for me to bend a pin, and tie it on to a top-string, and then he let me lower it, with a bit of currant dumpling on for bait, right down before his nose; and then he quietly opened his mouth and took the hook, and in two seconds I had him flapping on the

bank. I caught shy Dr. Tench, too, who goes about curing the other fish when they are ill, or when they have got a hook sticking in them, according to the country people.

I was able to get on very well, although Robinson did leave me to myself, you see. Meantime he pottered about by himself, not often going outside the grounds, so far as I could make out. And now for what made me suspect him to be a sneak.

One evening, when the place was being got into order for the boys' coming back, I ran into the school-room that had just been scrubbed, to get something out of my locker. From the door to one desk, on both sides of it, and back again, there was a chain of marks on the damp floor. At first I thought they were a dog's footprints, but when I looked at them more closely, I saw that they had been made by somebody who wore boots or shoes, walking on tiptoe. There was yellow clay sticking here and there

in these toe-marks, and a little heap of it was lying under the school-room scraper. There wasn't much in that. Of course, I guessed that Robinson had gone into the school-room before me, and had taken more pains not to dirty the clean floor than I had done in my hurry. At the same time I could not make out why he should have been pottering about those lockers, when *his* was quite on the other side of the school-room. When I went into the house to supper, Robinson was lying, with his boots off, on a form.

"Have you been in the school-room?" I asked.

"No," he answered, yawning, "I haven't. I've just come back from Dulchester, and I'm as tired as a dog. Good night—I'm off to bed."

And off he went, leaving his boots behind him. I took them up, and though they had been scraped, the same kind of clay that I had seen in the school-room was sticking to the soles. I took them across to the school-room, and the

toes just fitted into the marks. Robinson had plainly told me a lie, but what could be his motive? What harm was there in going into the school-room? Though the lockers he had gone to were a good way from his own, he couldn't think that I should fancy he had been prigging anything; for all the lockers were empty. They had all been left unlocked, and one of my amusements had been to make a cannonade in the echoing school-room by banging the lids up and down. I put my hand on one to repeat the performance, but found to my astonishment that it was locked. I was still more astonished when next day I found that it was unlocked again. When I told Robinson about it, he gave me a queer look, and said, "Oh, you must have jammed it in your banging it about, and then you gave a good pull and got it loose again."

This explanation did not satisfy me, however. I could not help suspecting that there was something queer in Master Peter besides his looks.

Well, the next half came, and we lost our things right and left, as I told you in my last chapter. What I had noticed during the holidays made me half fancy now and then that Robinson might know something about the way in which they went; but still I could not believe that any of our fellows would be paltry enough to be a common prig, and so I held my tongue. When Ned Hargreaves, however, got to be suspected, and Robinson crowed over him, I felt sure that Robinson must be the thief, and told some of the big fellows what I had noticed. They thought it looked suspicious, too, and though they could not bring anything home to Robinson, they grew shy of his company, and at the same time watched him sharply. After the discovery of the *cache* of stolen goods in Ned Hargreaves's box, nothing else was stolen. A few fellows joined with Robinson in saying that the thief had been found out at last; but most said Yes, he *had*, they thought,—in a very different

sense. "Don't you mind, Ned—the sneak that could take the things out of our boxes could put them into yours," was the consolation very generally given to Hargreaves; but Honest Ned could not be happy so long as the slightest ground of suspicion remained against him, and the *primâ facie* look of the affair was certainly "nasty" enough to necessitate some charity on the part of his defenders. If the things had been found in anybody else's box, *he* would certainly have been suspected of stealing them; but it seemed so preposterous to think that Hargreaves could be a prig that most of us pooh-poohed the evidence against him.

Honest Ned had to thank the Doctor's monkey for the vindication of his character, and Paltry Peter had to thank it for his detection. One day in the playground Jacko came leaping and jabbering towards a knot of us, with Robinson rushing after him—looking pale with fright. Jacko was jangling something in his paws. It was a

huge bunch of keys which Robinson had pulled out of his pocket with his handkerchief. Robinson tried hard to be the first to grab the keys, but Francis Major got them.

"They 're mine," shouted Robinson.

"What a lot of boxes you must have—where do you keep them?" sneered Francis. "Why this key, I do believe, would fit my box—I 'll go and try."

And up into the bed-rooms he ran, with ever so many of us after him. There were not many boxes that one or other of Robinson's keys would not fit, we found, and ditto as to the lockers.

"I—I—I—never used 'em—they ain't mine—I picked 'em up five minutes ago," stammered Paltry Peter, when we surrounded him after our trial of his keys. Of course, we should not have believed him if he had gone on stammering for a twelvemonth; but, curiously enough, just then an old man pulled up his pony-cart in the lane, and came hobbling into the playground.

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"Where's the young gen'leman as has the fancy for old keys?" said the old man.—"Ah, there he be," he went on, limping up to Robinson. "I was tellin' a neighbour o' mine how I'd let ye have my old keys to pick from, an', says he, 'You'll get into trouble—what does the young gen'leman *want 'em for?*' So, as I was a-passin' in my cart, I thought I'd jist drop in to make sure as all was square."

The old man was a Dulchester dealer in marine stores, of whom Robinson had bought his bunch during the holidays, availing himself of the opportunity which they afforded to fit almost every empty locker and school-box with a key. Robinson, however, flatly denied that he had ever seen the old man before, and still maintained that he had picked up the keys that very morning.

"Why don't you suspect Camden?" he asked. "It's him the old man must mean. He stayed the holidays as well as me, and he was always sneaking about the place like a cat."

"That's a lie, Mr. Robinson, and you knows it," said Old Growler, who had come up to see what the hubbub was about. "The young 'un's a mischeevious young limb, but it's *you* as was allus sneakin' about. I wish I'd known what you was *arter*. Anyhow, the master shall know your goins on now."

Old Growler made his report to the Doctor, and the issue of the whole matter was that Paltry Peter was expelled.

X.

JOLLY JIM.

JAMES CRISP does not sound a very jolly name—rather the other thing; but James Crisp was such a jolly fellow that everybody at Axleford liked him. I do not know that there is any particular merit in being jolly. Jolly folks seem to me to be *born* jolly, but it is a very jolly thing to *be* born jolly.

Jolly Jim, as I have said, was a favourite with everybody—masters, and servants, and village people, as well as boys, although, so far as I remember, he did not trouble himself much to win their favour. He was ready enough to do kind things, but not more so than a good many

fellows who were not half such favourites as he was. But Jim had always a merry look and a merry word for everybody, and so everybody had a kind look and word for him. He was not a remarkably witty fellow, and yet, whatever *he* said, people were sure to laugh. Even Old Growler had a grin for Jolly Jim, and the women folk made such a pet of him that we should have been very jealous, if we had not made such a pet of him too. He was a very useful pet, because, whenever we happened to put the Doctor out a little, Jolly Jim could always talk and laugh him round again.

But at last another king arose in Axleford, who was a bear to all of us, but made himself a special beast to Jolly Jim. The Doctor was taken ill, and had to go away to the south of France for nearly the whole of a half; and whilst he was away, a Mr. Buntingford reigned in his stead. Some naughty people say that when ministers take a holiday, they always engage the

greatest sticks that they can find to preach for them during their absence, in order that their congregations may make all the more of them when they come back. Of course I don't believe that, or suppose that the Doctor had any such motive; but, if he had, he could not have picked out a better beast than Buntingford to make us long to see *him* at his desk again. Buntingford was almost the exact opposite of the Doctor in everything. He couldn't do anything with his hands, and mathematics was the only thing he really knew anything about. We soon found out that he had a lot of keys for exercises, and cribs. Before he called up a Latin or Greek class, we could see him with his head down under his desk-lid, trying to make out the construing—and a nice boggle he made of it after all. After a bit, we used to try off the wildest translations on him—almost as bad as the famous one that every schoolboy has heard of: *Semiramis condidit Babyloniam coctilibus muris*—"Semiramis built

Babylon with cocktailed mice." And yet he was so conceited that he sneered at the under-masters when we gave the quite correct construings that *they* had given us. Of course, we could not help seeing that he did understand mathematics—a good deal too well for our liking. For one thing we did not relish being for ever dosed with mathematics, and, for another, we grudged having to own that Buntingford knew anything about anything. He was as fond of cutting our play-time short as the Doctor had been of stretching it out. He never played with us, or joked with us, or took any interest, except a spitefully spying tyrant's, in anything we did out of school.

I have said that he could not do anything with his hands, but I should have added that it was literally "a caution," as the Yankees say, to see (and still more to feel) him flog a fellow or box a fellow's ears. We wanted to be able to think Buntingford a milksop, because he never did anything that we thought manly; but we could not

exactly manage that. He was such a sturdy, broad-shouldered little beast, and he did not seem a bit afraid of the hatred with which he was daily more and more regarded by everybody at Axleford, except the writing-master. At first, the drill-sergeant also had a faint liking for Buntingford—he received so willingly and responded so eagerly to the sergeant's reports for punishment. But one day the sergeant saw Buntingford knock the head of a little boy who had been reported backwards and forwards with clenched fists, and then the sergeant looked very much inclined to knock down the knocker.

Until the Doctor returned, the sergeant never gave in another report. He seemed to be almost as anxious for the Doctor's return as we were, although he was good enough to say—after the little incident referred to—

"Well, gentlemen, ye ain't nigh so troublesome as ye used to be. If ye 'd always behave like this, I wouldn't report ye to nobody, let alone that—"

The sergeant's sense of discipline prevented him from finishing his sentence, but we thoroughly understood how he wished to characterize Buntingford; and even the grumpy sergeant was thenceforward quoted at a premium in Axleford.

Buntingford was tolerably impartial in letting us see that he hated us all to a very considerable extent; but his concentrated hatred was reserved for Jolly Jim. Buntingford's excuse was that Jim, although a big fellow, was not yet out of the first book of Euclid. He had tilted at "the windmill," and had been foiled. When put back to the First Proposition, he had vaguely remembered *that*, chiefly in consequence of the intersecting circles' resemblance to patten-marks, but everything beyond had seemed virgin ground to him, and again and again he had slid back ignominiously on the hither side of the *Pons Asinorum.*

"I could understand it somehow with the Doctor," Jim used to say. "If I couldn't say it

all, I could make it out when he was showing me what I ought to have said, though I couldn't remember anything about it five minutes afterwards. But Grisly gets into such a rage if you haven't got all those spider's-web things at your finger's ends that he'd drive it out of your head if you did know it. What's the odds, though, so long as you're happy?"

Jolly Jim's marked inaptitude for geometrical demonstration, no doubt, had something to do with the marked dislike with which Grisly regarded him; but Jim's sunny disposition, and the favour which it won for him from every one except Grisly, had more. At school-time, at meal-times, in the bed-rooms, in the playground, and even in church, Buntingford was always trying to make Jolly Jim look small. That *he* was an idiotic dunce, and that we were very little better for thinking so much of him, was the opinion which Buntingford seemed to want to drive into us all.

He did not succeed. We liked Jim the better for the persecution he underwent. He was so everlastingly kept in, that at last the under-masters used to scowl openly, and bang down their desk-lids, when he got a fresh imposition; and the housekeeper used to come over to comfort him, and did not scruple to declare, in Buntingford's hearing, that "it was a shame, that it was, and she'd write to the master and the missis. She wasn't a-going to see a fine young gentleman have his health took away like that." The servants all snarled and snapped at Buntingford, and the village boys shouted "Grisly" after him, when he happened to be out after dusk.

If the other masters had backed Buntingford, I think there would have been a mutiny; but, as we could see that they hated Buntingford almost as much as we did, the half's work somehow jolted on. We paid the under-masters, indeed, exceptional deference, to make Buntingford savage. And more and more savage he grew.

His cane was always going like a flail. How we did long for the Doctor to come back! Almost the only sweet-tempered person that still slept under the roof of the school-house was Jolly Jim. "What's the odds so long as you're happy?" he still kept on asking, until we got almost angry even with him. It seemed mean in him somehow to be happy—badgered as he was. Buntingford used to look at Jim as if he would uncommonly like to lay the cane about *his* shoulders; but, barring the incapacity for mathematics, there was really no scholastic charge to bring against Jim, and Buntingford, in spite of his sturdy swagger, was, like most tyrants, a bit of a coward at heart, and therefore chary of flogging the big fellows.

He discovered, however, that amongst the little fellows there was one whom Jolly Jim "knew at home," and had promised to take care of at school. "Shrimp," as we called this urchin, was an ailing little fellow, who did neither harm nor

good. Scarcely any one, except Jim and the housekeeper, took any notice of him, until Buntingford found him out and began to bully him abominably. As long as the bullying was confined to "jawings," "impositions," and "keepings-in," Jolly Jim contented himself with trying to comfort his little *protégé* with his "What 's the odds?" formula, adding, "It 's a jolly shame, but Christmas is coming, and Grisly won't be here next half." As Shrimp was *not* happy, *he* found considerable odds between his previous blissful obscurity and the disagreeable notoriety into which Buntingford had brought him. He did his best, however, to look comforted, and even enjoyed after a fashion the extra petting which the persecuted patron, for whose sake *he* was persecuted, gave him.

But one afternoon, in the beginning of December, Grisly was in a towering rage. The servants had been saucy to him, and the woman at the post-office had given him what she called

a "comfortable bit of her mind." He came back from the village, and had us at once rung into school, although there was still at least a quarter of an hour of play due to us. He took out his cane and rapped his desk with it *in terrorem*, and called up Shrimp's class. He was going to examine it, he said—*he* kept *his* boys up to the mark, and he would see that the other masters did not neglect *their* duty. I forget what it was he examined the class in, but I remember distinctly that, for something some other boy had said, he told Shrimp to hold out his hand.

"Don't!" shouted Jolly Jim, starting up, and looking very unlike his jolly self.

"Crisp, sit down," said the master nearest him. "You can do no good—you'll only make it worse," the usher added, in a kindly whisper.

But poor little Shrimp *had* held out his hand, and was howling under the savage cut he had got from Grisly's cane.

"Hold your hand out again," growled Grisly,

and Shrimp, fearing both to obey and to disobey, was dodging his poor little rawly-puffed, bleeding palm backwards and forwards, when Jolly Jim rushed in to the rescue.

"Mr. Buntingford," he said, "I can't make out why you don't like me, but if you want to take it out of me, take it out of *me!* and not of a poor sick little chap like that, you coward!"

As he spoke, Grisly cut at him. Jolly Jim was not as patient as his words might have seemed to promise, when he felt the cane. He rushed at Grisly, and for a minute or two there was a rough-and-tumble fight. Grisly got Jim down, and lashed him like a slave-driver, but we had the satisfaction of seeing that previously Grisly's face had received very undignified damage. It had all happened so suddenly that there had not been time for any one to interfere on the one side or the other. The under-masters, of course, were scandalized at such a flagrant breach of discipline, and glanced anxiously at

the forms that were heaving like waves tossing themselves up into a storm; and yet they did not look at all vexed to see Grisly trembling like a leaf, as pale as a sheet, and dabbing his sodden-red pocket-handkerchief on his still-pouring nose.

"Mr. Valpy," he said, as soon as he could gasp out any words, to the head usher, "take my desk till I come back. Mr. Scott-Liddell," to the second usher, "take Crisp to the Green Room, and lock him in until he is expelled."

"What's the odds so long as you're happy?" said Jolly Jim, as he followed half-sympathetic, half-nervous Mr. Scott-Liddell, meanwhile glancing with great satisfaction at the shirt-front of his castigator, which seemed to be suffering from a severe attack of measles.

"Don't be afraid, Shrimp," shouted Jim, as he went out at the swing-door. "He won't hit you again for nothing."

If Shrimp had been hit again for *something*,

he would have found plenty of champions when Grisly came back in a clean shirt and swollen nose. But Shrimp was not hit for anything. Grisly tried hard to look as if nothing had happened. Not succeeding, he let us out of school about half an hour before our time.

The key of the Green Room was duly turned on Jolly Jim, still repeating his favourite formula; but it was soon—must I say *un*duly?—turned again by the housekeeper. Jolly Jim started on foot for Dulchester, and thence prematurely took coach for home. We had no breaking-up party that half. As soon as the examination was over, Grisly vanished with his beastly problem-papers, and we saw him no more. Next half brought back our dear old Doctor; and it also brought back Jolly Jim. Of course the Doctor lectured him, but, as Jolly Jim observed, "What's the odds, Shrimp, so long as you're happy?"

XI.

TRUANT JACK.

ALL the time I was at Axleford not more than two boys, I think, ran away from school. One of these runaways was little Jack Sprat, as we used to call him—a nice little fellow, but he could not bear anything like confinement, and he was mad to go to sea.

Jack's notion was that all sailors were jolly fellows, who led very jolly lives. They might have dangers to encounter, but if they *were* wrecked, they were almost sure to get back to England somehow, or, if they didn't, to have beautiful desert islands waiting for them, which was even better. And then their life was so un-

like school—so free and easy. There were such *chances* in it, too. You might begin as cabin-boy in a merchantman (hadn't Captain Cook, and Sir Cloudesly Shovel, and ever so many of the famous fellows, been cabin-boys either in the merchant service or the navy?), but then you might be the first of a crew of twenty gallant British tars to board a pirate, and haul down the black flag with its death's head and cross-bones, the said pirate being manned by three hundred bearded ruffians, black, brown, and renegade-white, and carrying thirty long brass guns, which *your* ship had fought for five hours, muzzle to muzzle, with a rusty little bit of an iron cannon, suddenly remembered and dragged out from under the long-boat; and then, before you could say "Jack Robinson," you might find yourself cadet,—midshipman,—first lieutenant,—captain of a dashing frigate, sink or capture two French first-rates and half a dozen corvettes in single combat, and take no end of American clippers.

How the Portsmouth bells would ring when it was known that the "flying, fighting *Arethusa*" had anchored at Spithead with a kite-tail of fresh prizes under her stern! The mayor and corporation would come down to welcome her heroic young captain, when he landed, for the first time during his brief but eventful life at sea, upon his native soil. Mamma would not be sorry *then* that he had run away from school; and wouldn't "the girls"—sisters, and cousins, and all the rest of them that you used to lark with under the mistletoe—envy the one that had hold of your sound arm (one arm, of course, would be in a sling, but sure to get quite well the week after next), when you walked to church the first Sunday after you got home, in your cocked hat, and blue coat, and white trousers, and with your gold epaulettes, and sword (hacked like a saw), and a baker's dozen of medals on?

Jack was a great chum of mine, and he gravely assured me that having to sit still in a school-

room made the blood rush to his head. Accordingly, to secure liberty, the sagacious Jack made up his mind to turn cabin-boy.

He told me all his adventures afterwards, and so I can tell them to you just as if I had run away with him.

The eventful morning came at length, and Jack woke early in the autumn moonlight. All the other fellows in the long dormitory were sound asleep. He felt rather scared, but as he was, he said his prayers before he crept out of the room. Perhaps he hurried them over rather, and perhaps he did not feel quite sure that boys who were running away had any business to say prayers; but still he *did* say them, partly from habit, and partly because he felt that people who were going to sea could not make sure for a moment what would happen to them. Then he went out of the room on tiptoe, carrying the shoes which he had smuggled up to bed the night before, instead of pushing them into his pigeon-

hole in the shoe-rack to be cleaned; and stole almost as silently as a shadow down the stairs. Boards *would* creak, though, when he was passing the bed-room doors he dreaded most; and he had to make a rush past the tall old clock on the last landing. "Tick-tick, tick-tick," it said; "*I*'m awake—I 've been awake all night. *I* know what 's going on, if every one else is asleep."

In the hall Jack put on his shoes, and prepared to tackle the front door. There were two bolts to shoot back, and a bar to take down, and a chain to unsnack, and then a huge key to turn. Jack almost tumbled off the tottering scaffolding of hall-chairs, &c. he constructed to reach the top bolt; but all the obstacles except the lock were overcome at last. The key for a time would only give a grating creak that made Jack shiver—it obstinately refused to turn. With a wrench that almost put his wrists out of joint, Jack twisted it round. A moment afterwards he had lifted the latch, and was running down to the great

gates, leaping over the shadows of the trees that stretched out gaunt black arms, as if they wanted to trip him up or catch him by the ankle. Jack had expected that he would have to clamber over the great gates, but—hooray!—the little door in one of them had been left unlocked, and was idly swinging backwards and forwards in the breeze. Jack had time to turn round and shake his fist at the rusty old bell that wouldn't ring *him* up to work before breakfast; and then he plunged into the outside moonlight, and felt *free*, although he still ran on.

Jack did not go into Dulchester, but struck across country into the London road. For some time he had been saving up his pocket-money, and selling off his property, in a way that seemed very mysterious to me, as I did not know the reason. Perhaps he had just about money enough to pay his fare to London by coach, but he did not venture to ask any of the coachmen who passed him to take him, thinking that when they

got him to London they would lock him up, and then bring him back next day, bound hand and foot, to Axleford. Part of the way to London he walked, and part he rode in farmers' waggons and carriers' carts, and fish-machines. Sometimes he had to stand pots of beer in return for his rides. Whilst he was tramping, a brickdust-faced young woman-tramp who met him collared him, and helped herself to a considerable percentage of his cash, laughing most disrespectfully when she found the table-knife which Jack had slipped up his jacket-sleeve—dagger-wise—for his protection against robbers, and helping herself to that, too. He was obliged to buy something to eat and drink upon the road, and, accordingly, had very little left in his pocket when he was put down in Mile End early in the morning after that on which he had left Axleford. Jack thought, however, that all he had to do was to get to "the Docks," but it was a good while before he could find his way to the Docks. When

he asked his way to them, people said, "*What* docks, you young silly?" and others told him to go to such-a-street, and turn down such-another-street, and anybody would tell him there; but Jack didn't know where such-a-street and such-another-street were, any more than he knew where the Docks were.

When he reached Ratcliff Highway at last, and threaded his way through the throng of greasy, ragged, unshaven labourers still waiting to be hired outside the gates, the London Docks were in full swing of business. The bustle pleased Jack at first. Men were hewing sugar-hogsheads open with great axes, white coopers were hammering away at casks, blue custom-house officers were gauging casks, men were trundling casks, casks in thousands stood along the quays. Dangling from top floors of the tall warehouses, and over the mine-like holds of the ships, boxes, barrels, crates, bales, hogsheads, and huge bundles of hides and sheepskins, and skeins of jangling

iron bars, were everywhere going up or down. Tea-chests were being shot into lighters, like boys sliding down a hill. There was a smell, too, here of sugar, there of tobacco, and yonder of vinegar, or drugs, or brandy—and everywhere of tar—that somehow sharpened Jack's desire to be a sailor. But he soon felt half disappointed; nobody in the Docks looked jolly. The men who were crying "Heave—heave—heave altogether!" as they strained at the winches, looked far more like depressed dustmen than dashing mariners. Even the real sailors had nothing rollicking about them. They hadn't broad turn-over collars to their shirts, low-waisted breeches, and long-quartered pumps. Some of them had their trousers braced up almost to their armpits, and—worse still—instead of hailing him with a "What cheer, messmate?" some of them gave Jack a shove, and swore at him, if he happened to stumble against them, as he caught his foot in the great iron mooring-rings, or groped his way

under and over the gangways, chains, and hawsers that everywhere blocked the path. Some of the mates, to be sure, had gilt bands round their caps, and gilt buttons on their blue coats, but the greasy, white-seamed uniforms had a very shabby-genteel look, and Jack did not like to see sailors quill-driving at the little tables at which the cargoes were being checked off.

However, there were the ships, at any rate, some of them with bunting flying, or a loose sail bellying out, or sailors' clothes hung up to dry—real big ships from all parts of the world. When Jack thought of the pure sea to which they were accustomed, he wondered that they did not fidget in the stagnant, muddy-green dock-water. But some of the ships did not smell very sweet; unpleasant whiffs came from them of bilge-water, perspiring sheepskins, and putrid horns and hides.

"But I needn't go in a ship that carries nasty things like those," thought Jack; "I 've plenty to pick from."

He made up his mind, for one thing, that he wouldn't go in a steamer, or in a blistered, rusty, old-fashioned sailing tub, with a bow as broad as its stern, and its grey, ragged rigging all in a tangle. At last he found a craft just to his taste, with a clipper bow, and raking masts, and gilt stars on the catheads, and bright brass belaying pins, and deck as white as milk, and ropes coiled down on it like Catherine-wheels. A placard lashed on to her shrouds announced that she was bound for Hong Kong, and "the East" was just where Jack wanted to go to. So he went up to some men who were swinging on a stage, painting the clipper's sides, and said, as knowingly as he could,

"Can you tell me if this ship is in want of a hand?"

"Can't say, sir," answered one of the men with a grin; "better ask the mate. There he stands by the gangway."

"If you please, sir, I want to go to sea," said Jack to the mate, very respectfully.

"*Do* you? Go back home, you little fool."

Ship after ship he tried with no better success, and what *that* mate said was quite polite compared with the answers Jack got from some of the mates and captains. Where there were men on board, too, they made fun of him; told him that they had got a monkey already, and disagreeable things of that kind; and one sulky old black cook dabbed a dirty dishclout into his face, and threatened to send a bucket of water over him, if he didn't make tracks tarnation slick out of *his* galley. Jack did not try an American ship again after that.

Presently, however, a red-faced man came reeling down to a boat that was waiting to pull him to a ship which was being warped out of dock. He overheard Jack speaking to a captain, and sang out,

"Want to go to sea, eh? Come along wi' me; I want a boy, an' one 's as good as another."

Jack did not much like the look of the man,

but he was ashamed to hold back. He scrambled down into the boat, and presently was scrambling up the side of the *Onyx*, 960 tons, bound for Port Natal. The *Onyx* was *not* A 1, and she *didn't* carry "a cow and an experienced surgeon." As soon as the captain got on board, he tumbled into his cabin to sleep off his drink. Jack enjoyed the bustle of the river as they were being towed down to Gravesend, but felt rather uncomfortable because no one gave him anything to do.

"If you please, sir, I've come on board to work," he said to the second mate.

"Oh, have you? Where did *you* sign articles? I thought you was the skipper's kid. Don't distress yourself, *he*'ll find you plenty to do; we've none too many hands on board. Make yourself happy whilst you can; it's a poor soul that never rejoices."

This was the nearest approach to his idea of sailors' talk which Jack had heard, and his heart warmed accordingly to Mr. Croggan. When the

Onyx brought up for the night at Gravesend, he asked Mr. Croggan where he was to turn in — Jack was just going to say "go to bed," but remembered the proper phrase in time.

"Why, where did you put your chest?" asked Mr. Croggan. And when he learnt how Jack had come to sea, he gave a long whistle, and said, "You—poor—little—devil; why, what a born idiot you must be!"

Jack slept that night on the floor of the deck-house, which the second mate and the carpenter shared, and thought himself very lucky to get such shelter, for the rain thumped down on the roof like marbles. The next morning the *Onyx* took her pilot, weighed anchor, and beat out to sea. Captain Mitchell came on deck in the vile temper which was "his usual," as the Scotch say, unless when stupefied by drink.

"Why didn't you bring me my coffee?" he growled to Jack, and then he boxed Jack's ears with his clenched fists. The first mate, Mr.

Munnens, was not much better tempered than the skipper. The carpenter and two or three of the foremast-men were hearty fellows, but the rest of the crew were blackguards.

Off Margate the pilot insisted on bringing up, although the skipper wanted to crack on. When Jack looked at the Margate lamps twinkling through the rushing rain, and over the wild black waters, he almost wished himself back at Axleford. *How* he longed to be at *home!* The watch were clustered round the galley, out of which the howling wind blew a long line of red sparks; the rest of the men were under cover in the forecastle; Mr. Croggan, swathed in oilskins, was tramping to and fro on the poop; but Jack, wet to the skin, was shivering, waiting for orders, outside the door of the cabin, in which the skipper, and the first mate, and the pilot were taking their grog. Every now and then a damp sheep dangling on the gallows came thump against Jack's face, and loneliness had so taken the pluck out

of him, that he felt half inclined to cry. There was nothing dignified in his distresses. He had found out that he was nobody on board; that if he had a moment to spare from the captain's work, he was at the beck and call of everybody, and would be expected to do all the dirtiest jobs. As he thought of what he had already done, he grew sick again; and because he was hanging over the side, instead of waiting to receive the captain's orders to fetch some more hot water from the galley, he got another hiding. Poor Jack did not feel much like the gallant captain of the "flying, fighting *Arethusa*," when he crept into the dog-kennel of a bunk that had been assigned him, together with a few rough slop-clothes that had been thrown at his head as a bare bone might be pitched to a mangy, stray, mongrel cur. The next morning the cable parted, the remnant fragment thumping against the bows with a dull thud, distinguishable even in the roaring of the storm. The ship swung

round and floundered broadside towards the land. Sea-sick Jack almost hoped that she might drive ashore. Sea-sick as he was, he could not help seeing and wondering at the same hope in the half-drunken skipper's eyes. But the pilot, and the mates, and the men rushed forward like race-horses; another cable was paid out, and the *Onyx* was brought up in water just deep enough to float her.

"What are you skulking for there, you young lubber?" was Captain Mitchell's *Te Deum*, and Jack received his thank-offering in a rope's-ending. The skipper swore fiercely at the luggers that swooped down on and skimmed round the *Onyx* like a flock of dark-winged sea-birds; but he was obliged to go ashore in one of them to buy a new anchor and cable; and when the anchor had been fished, the skipper relieved his feelings by giving Jack a drubbing, for which he did not take the trouble to invent a reason.

"Run up and shake out the main-royal, you

lazy young whelp !" the skipper bellowed to Jack in the fair weather that followed the foul, as the *Onyx* stood down Channel. Jack, whose sea-sickness had passed, was delighted at the chance of getting something sailor-like to do, but he had the vaguest idea of where and what the main-royal was; and because he hesitated, the skipper was going to lick him again. The pilot, however, interposed, and gave Jack a dim notion of what he was expected to do. He did not run up the rigging very nimbly—especially when he had no rattlins to help him ; he turned giddy every now and then, and clutched the shrouds as if he could not "run" or "shin" up another foot : he fumbled sadly with the unfamiliar sail—fancying every moment that he was going to be shaken off the yard like a rotten pear; but still, as the pilot said, when Jack came down (beginning at last to recover his old opinion of his special aptitude for a sailor's life), his performance was "very fair for a beginning." Jack had expected louder laud

than that; he had thought that even the skipper would clap him on the back. The skipper *did* clap him on the back—in a very unpleasant manner—the next time he ran foul of Jack when the pilot was not by.

The pilot was a very trifling check on the skipper's bad temper, but still Jack looked ruefully on the boat that carried the pilot ashore.

When Eddystone's star had faded from the sky, Jack began to think that he had been brought on board the *Onyx* simply to be tormented. With the rowdy portion of the crew, Jack was sharp enough to see, the skipper wanted to curry favour. The first mate, too, he seemed to want to win over—and to be puzzled because Mr. Munnens did not respond more cordially to his advances. Mr. Croggan and the carpenter he snubbed, and the jolly fellows in the forecastle, who were far and away the best seamen in it, he was so fond of "bully-ragging," that even Mr. Munnens, well as he liked to hear any one blown up, when he

had not the chance of blowing anybody up himself, used to put in his oar on the other side, simply out of the sympathy which every good seaman feels with another good seaman when his seamanship is unjustly impugned.

You must not suppose that Jack was always miserable; no boy can be, however badly he is treated. Jack soon got his sea-legs, and grew proud of being able to go aloft without feeling at all funky.

When Mr. Croggan, as was often the case, had the sole command during the captain's watch, and the drunken captain was snoring in his berth, Jack was safe. Mr. Croggan was as kind to him as he could be, and the good fellows, who happened to be all in the captain's watch, wouldn't let the other men treat Jack as a football. Besides, the savagest people cannot keep on being savage for ever. They will let you alone sometimes, because they cannot get any fun out of plaguing you—especially if they see

that you are beginning not to mind—and that was how Jack began to feel after a bit.

And then he saw Madeira—a silver mist rising out of a golden sea; and porpoises were harpooned, and dolphins grained, and bonito hooked, and flapping sharks hauled on board with a lump of pork down their horrid horseshoe mouths, and flying-fish fell on deck; and Jack managed to get a taste of them all; and as he ate, he thought what a much more heroic personage he was (though he *was* kicked about like a dog) than the tame-spirited stay-at-homes, who were being rung in to dinner at Axleford.

Jack did not much relish crossing the Line, however. He was the only person on board the *Onyx* who had not crossed it before, and the savage fellows made up for their lack of other fun by "taking it out of" Jack extensively, and even the jolly fellows thought that he was fair game then. Jack was lathered with unmentionable soap, the huge shaving-brush was dabbed

into his mouth, the skin was rasped off his cheeks and chin with a jagged bit of rusty iron hoop, and then—up flew his heels, and he was floundering in a tub of filthy water. And when he had scrambled out, in spite of the many hands that tried to keep his head under, and was gasping for breath as if he must shake to pieces, bucketful after bucketful of water was shot into his face to drive the breath out of him again.

But Jack recovered his breath, and the lumbering, leaky old *Onyx* waddled on with him into the South Atlantic. He saw the Southern Cross and the Magellan Clouds, and whales sending up silvery jets, and routing about in the waves like monstrously magnified pigs in a monstrously magnified strawyard. He pitched biscuit to the huge grey and white albatrosses when they leisurely folded their wide double-jointed wings in a calm, and swam up to the side like tame ducks.

But dirty weather soon set in, and the pumping—which had been throughout the voyage a

cause of grumbling—became more fagging than ever; as Jack, whose hands were skinned by the ropes and his back stiff with the bending, had good reason to know. The men no longer chanted—

> "They say, old man, your horse will die—
> They *say* so—and they *think* so—"

as the beam was jerked up and down. Mutinous growls were the chorus now. The way the skipper behaved in bad weather puzzled the men. He would scarcely take a stitch of canvas off the ship when she was lying over so that her yards nearly dipped into the water.

"It 's my belief," Jack heard one of his friends say to another, "that the old man 's either mad, or else he 's bribed to sink the ship, and gets so drunk he forgets he 'll go down in her. If Mr. Munnens would put the skipper in irons, I 'd stand by him."

The rowdies, however — although they did grumble at the pumping—were on the skipper's

side. He raved at *them*, too, sometimes, but he maintained no discipline. He made very little fuss even when the mate told him that the cargo had been broached, and a barrelful of spirit-bottles stolen.

The skipper was carrying on as usual one day, although black, ragged clouds, like dusty cobwebs, were fast mounting from all sides of the horizon. The distant sea was bristled by the hurricane that was rushing towards the ship.

As Mr. Croggan shouted, "Stand by the royal halyards!" the royals flew in rags from the bolt-ropes, and the royal masts snapped like twigs. The skipper, drunk as usual, came reeling from his cabin, but Mr. Munnens rushed before him.

"All hands on deck!" the mate bellowed, and his watch came tumbling up half drunk. Down came the hail in lumps like jagged pebbles. Down, too, through the night-black sky shot a great *lump* of lightning, and sank like a seething mass of molten metal into the black sea. Blue

and pink and yellow zigzags constantly scarred the sky, and peal after peal came the awful, overlapping thunder. Tacks and sheets doubled like whip-lashes; the fiercely flapping canvas made a thunder of its own; the thick mainyard was snapped in the slings as you might break a lath across your knee. The *Onyx* lay over so that it seemed impossible she could ever come up again. When Jack went up the weather-rigging—tauter than harp-strings—behind two of his old friends, to give a hand in shortening sail, his heart was in his mouth; and though he expected to be whirled off like a withered leaf, yet he had just time for one thought, that stabbed him like a knife, about his mother and his sisters from whom he had run away.

But the *Onyx* did right herself when they got the canvas off her, and was still afloat next morning, when the sky was bright again, and the zebra-striped Cape pigeons were flitting blithely over the subsiding sea. Masses of seaweed, too, were

floating on the waves. The captain, however, obstinately refused to follow the mate's advice to bear up for Table Bay, and ordered out the boats.

"You 're robbing your owners, if you desert her, Captain Mitchell," said Mr. Munnens. "I 'll stake my life we can take her into Cape Town."

"Obey orders, if you break owners, sir," growled the skipper.

"*Obey orders, and break underwriters*, Captain Mitchell—that 's it, isn't it?" answered the mate. "I won't leave her while she 'll float—who 'll stay with me?"

Most of the men went over the side with the captain, but Mr. Croggan, and the carpenter, and Jack, and three or four of the men, stopped with Mr. Munnens; and after a very anxious day, Table Mountain stood up clearly dark against the sky, and the *Onyx* floundered past Robben Island, and let go her anchor in Table Bay.

The underwriters made a handsome present to

the mates and the men who had stuck to the *Onyx*, when they got to hear of what had happened, since she had been insured shamefully above her value. Perhaps the underwriters might have had something unpleasant to say to Captain Mitchell; but he and the men who went with him never turned up again.

A very different skipper from Captain Mitchell took Jack home out of charity; but though he had been kindly treated, Jack respectfully declined the captain's offer to take him as an apprentice when they got back to England. A brown, shabby little urchin was Jack when he reached home. He was considerably ashamed of himself as well as his shabbiness, when his mother and sisters rushed out to meet him; but they seemed so proud of his brownness that Jack grew proud of it too.

He soon began to brag of his adventures at home, and he went on bragging about them when the Doctor allowed him to come back to

Axleford; but although he always gave himself great airs when nautical matters were discussed amongst us, on account of his extensive maritime experience, he had given up talking about being a sailor. His voyage to the Cape had quite cured him of his tendency to determination of blood to the head in school-time.

XII.

SCIENTIFIC STEPHEN.

STEPHEN MONCKTON we called the Philosopher, because he was always "trying experiments" of one kind or another. He had views of his own on education, and therefore did not pay much attention to his "regular work." The Axleford system of instruction was behind the age, he said—which was an ingenious excuse for shirking his lessons. When he ought to have been learning his Latin and Greek, very often he was furtively reading Parkes's *Chemical Catechism* or Joyce's *Scientific Dialogues,* or something of that kind, under the lid of his locker. He seldom played, generally spending the intervals between

school-hours in experimenting—which seemed to consist chiefly in making bad smells. When his cash and chemicals ran low, and he had nothing but the saltcellars and his unfailing bottle of sulphuric acid to fall back upon, he would pass a whole half-holiday in dropping the acid on the salt. He seemed to like the white suffocating fumes that steamed up from his saucers. The rest of us *didn't* like them, and were compelled occasionally to Lynch the Philosopher. Our ignorant brutality moved him to indignation and contemptuous pity.

"You dolts!" he would shout, as we pitched his saucers out of window, "what you call a stink is—muriatic acid!"

But because he could give it that fine name, it was not any pleasanter to breathe, you see, although the Philosopher appeared to think so. Stephen was not a nice fellow to sit next to at meal-times. He had a taste for physiology as well as chemistry, and smelt like a druggist's

shop with a rat-catcher's kitchen behind it. He was a long, lean, pale-faced boy, who thought it "unscientific" to use bear's-grease or to brush his hair; his finger-nails and fingers were curiously dyed with many unfragrant colours; and his jacket-sleeves and trouser-legs were curiously dappled with rotten little circles caused by the dropping of acids.

On the whole, however, Stephen was not unpopular. He laboured hard in many ways to improve our minds, and, at any rate, often succeeded in amusing us. It was Stephen who started the *Axleford Spectator.* He was its sole proprietor, publisher, editor, reporter, compositor, printer's devil, reader, machineman, manager, clerk, and advertisement collector. He wrote all the correspondents' letters likewise. It took about a month to set up and print the *Spectator.* The press was of the kind still to be seen in toy-shops, and when an inch had been set up the type was exhausted, and had to be struck off, and distri-

buted, in order that another inch might be printed. The types were not very clearly cut, to begin with; they would not stand upright, however Stephen might try to make them; and he was not very expert at sorting his "pie." Under these circumstances the *Spectator* could scarcely be considered a triumph of typography. Its inch strata dipped away from one another, and ran into one another, and some of its paragraphs looked far more like cheap dominoes than reading matter. Nevertheless, the *Spectator* was unquestionably cheap. A generation before the *Echo* came out, Stephen Monckton had published a halfpenny paper! So far as circulation went, the *Spectator* was a great success. Everybody in any way connected with the school took in its organ. Advertisements also poured in freely, payment being received in marbles and other "kind" when cash disbursements would have been inconvenient. But Stephen and his appliances caved in under the Herculean task he had

taken in hand. The *Spectator* expired when only two copies and seven-eighths of the third had appeared. Even the last paragraph of that incomplete No. 3 had to be written. Thus it ran:

"THE PUBLISHER'S APOLOGY.—All my capitals are clogged up—my small a's and i's have gone a-missing—my press-handle is broken—I know not what to do. PLUTARCH."

I possess a perfect file of the *Axleford Spectator.* Carefully turning over its pages, which look now very much like dusters partially converted into tinder, I make out with difficulty, amongst the advertisements, the following:—"long bobus ix an Ass;" "Stubbs miner will give grimes tho He is so proud, of his runnind-up to the 3rd elm &c beat him then before he gets to the great Gates?" "Their ■ill be this evening■a——t——y——c——■all members are redpectfulty reques■ed to qe prcxcut■

I cannot read the "leaders" now; but I remember their subjects, and that they did not in-

terest us much. The first was on Oxygen, the second on Hydrogen, and the third on Nitrogen. As Stephen adopted the catechetical mode of communicating information employed by his scientific text-books before mentioned, and since he merely echoed what he found there, in language as nearly identical as condensation and an ambition to show originality would permit, he might, perhaps, have given us fuller, more accurate, and far more legible scientific lore by merely referring to his authorities.

Stephen's correspondence was a good deal spicier than his leaders. He wrote, as I have said, all the letters, and yet he did not "hold himself responsible for the opinions of his correspondents"! In his first number he published a letter from "A Subscriber from the Beginning," highly laudatory of "your ably conducted journal." The correspondence in the *Spectator* was really very interesting. Although Stephen chiefly occupied his leisure in making nasty smells, he

had a knack of writing about the things we cared about, just as if he cared about them. The second number of the *Spectator* contained a very spirited (though now utterly illegible) controversy between "Publicola" and "Miles's Boy" on a hotly contested game at "little ring." It is so long since I played at marbles that I can pass no opinion on the intrinsic merits of the dispute. The moot point was either the right to, or the way in which to, drop a marble, with one eye closed, on a "taw" or "commoner"—I forget which—that had happened to stop in its rolling just on the ring. Stephen was quite witty on both sides of this controversy. He talked about the ring of Saturn and the one-eyed Polyphemus. He evolved from the depths of his consciousness an imaginary rival paper, which "Publicola" caustically characterized as "your co-trumpery," because it was supposed to advocate the view of "Miles's Boy;" "Miles's Boy" still more caustically replying, "If the *Axleford Examiner* is your

co-*trumpery*, Sir, you, Sir, must be *trumpery;* but I scorn to stoop to ribald punning;" the editor adding gravely, "This correspondence must now cease—both 'Publicola' and 'Miles's Boy' have lost their tempers." In order that the public might not lose a single point, Stephen, as I have intimated, published the whole of this correspondence, together with the editorial note, in one impression.

The *Spectator* was dated on the 1st of the month; it came out about the 30th. Stephen could not afford to delete anything that had once been printed, and yet he wanted to preserve a freshness of tone. All his news was "recent"—something that happened "yesterday," "this morning," or, "whilst we are going to (or through) the press." In a chronological point of view, therefore, the *Spectator* was a confusing informant; but Scientific Stephen proudly boasted that it *focused* the events of the month. The only attempt at harmonizing his paragraphs

which he made was when one would otherwise have flatly contradicted another just above it. In that case he would preface the lower paragraph with something of this kind:

"Since the above was set up, stating that so-and-so happened, we have been informed that so-and-so did not happen. We subjoin more accurate particulars."

After all, our boys' paper only did, in one impression, what men's papers of to-day do to their own impressions of yesterday; and to state what is false, and retract it in the same number of a newspaper, everybody must acknowledge, is more honest than to sell a fib to-day, and then wait until to-morrow and sell the contradiction.

Altogether, the *Axleford Spectator* would have been a great success, we said, if Stephen had only had plant and pluck enough to make it succeed.

We were very indignant when he threw it up; but none of us offered to help him. Capital might, no doubt, have been subscribed to subsidize the

paper; but nobody offered to give up play in order to give Stephen literary and mechanical aid in bringing out his venture.

We were very proud to hear that the rector had said that the *Spectator* "really reflects great credit on your boys, Doctor;" but, though we liked credit that nobody but Stephen had earned, we were too intellectually lazy, and too physically active, to take the trouble to earn for ourselves honest credit as journalists.

Next half, the indomitable Stephen started the "Axleford Literary and Scientific Institution." The "literary" part of the business he did not care for much, and he only allowed it to come first in the title of his institution as a sop to the public opinion of the school. The youngest usher consented to deliver a literary lecture on "Verbs ending in *μι*;" our top-boy gave one on "The Sublime and Beautiful;" but the rest of the course was purely scientific, and Stephen delivered the whole of it. He was, besides, the pre-

sident, secretary, treasurer, curator, and janitor of the institution—all of them honorary offices. The subscriptions which he received could not have half paid him for what he spent on specimens and experiments. The Doctor let him have the dining-hall for his lecture-room, and before Stephen took his stand as lecturer behind the cross-table at the top of the room, he collected tickets at the door. He would not let any one in without one, but since non-subscribers could get them as easily as subscribers, the revenues of the institution were not plethorically swollen by Stephen's scientific eloquence.

He opened the course with a scientific lecture, attended by the Doctor and a troop of lady-friends, all the under-masters, all the boys, old Growler, Jim the knife-cleaner and shoeblack, and fitfully, by the matron and the women-servants. The last-named rushed into the hall when they heard a bang, and stayed till they heard another, if Stephen's explanation of the last

did not exhaust their patience. Stephen's subject was wide—"The Advantages of an Acquaintance with Science." So far as I remember the lecture — written in a small-hand copybook, in characters which Stephen could not always decipher—the advantages of the said acquaintance were illustrated as follows:—Stephen, in spite of the thick towel which he had wrapped round the red cabbage pickle-bottle he called a "receiver," got his wrist cut by the broken glass sent flying through his explosion of a mixture of two gases in the pickle-bottle. There were sundry other explosions, the particulars of which I do not recollect. A mouse danced itself into hysterics in a jar of oxygen gas, and then ought to have been killed by being plunged into a jar of carbonic acid gas; but the excited mouse made prudent use of its excitement, and jumped out of the carbonic acid, causing great commotion amongst the ladies, as it scuttled along the floor. A bladder balloon, supposed to be filled

with hydrogen gas, ought to have gone up to the ceiling, but there was a hole in the bladder, and so it would not go up. Candles were put out by having apparently empty tumblers tilted over them. This experiment did not always succeed; and when it did, the smoke of the candle was not pleasant. Stephen's specialty was nasty smells, and he made a good many of them, which I am not scientific enough to characterize, that night. His lecture was abruptly brought to a close by one of these malodours. His pneumatic trough was of his own construction, and whilst he was making sulphuretted hydrogen, bubble after bubble of it escaped into the air. The consequence was a wild stampede from the lecture-room; but Stephen threw up the windows, and stuck to his post. When the atmosphere was a little purified, the Doctor and a few of Stephen's audience—*not* including the ladies—came back out of compassion to listen to the lecturer's precipitated peroration. I cannot be sure as to the

exact words; but, so far as my memory serves, it ran thus—Stephen coughing, and then trying to find his place again, after every half-dozen words:

"Ladies and gentlemen—We have thus seen how in every department of life science ministers to our wants and promotes our comfort. Feeble as my attempts to prove these truths in words may have been, the experiments I have performed must have shown you, that if we hearken to the voice of Nature, interpreted by science, they prove themselves. I have now, ladies and gentlemen, only to thank you for the patient attention with which you have listened to my humble effort to demonstrate that, without a practical acquaintance with science, life would be robbed of all its charms."

The Doctor cried "hear, hear!" and proposed a vote of thanks to the lecturer, which was seconded by the youngest usher; both the proposer and the seconder being compelled, like the

lecturer, to stop to cough every now and then. The Doctor's friends, however, did not come to any more of Stephen's lectures. The last—on "The Domestic Architecture of the Mole"—was attended, I think, by only three fellows besides myself. Stephen had prepared elaborate diagrams of the internal structure of mole-hills, and he had secured, at considerable expense, a live mole from the Axleford mole-catcher. Everything the lecturer said, and everything the mole did—not much that we could see, since he performed *his* experiments in a washing-tub full of earth—we greeted with loud applause; but four people clapping their hands in a room that would hold a couple of hundred can hardly be considered a stimulating audience. Stephen conscientiously read his last lecture out to the last word; but the institution's first course of lectures was its only one.

One bit of science, however, Stephen did succeed in popularizing in Axleford. He sent us

electrotyping-mad. There was scarcely a fellow who did not invest in jam-pots, zinc, copper wire, and blue vitriol. We cut out the seal of every letter we got (adhesive envelopes were not then in fashion); we begged and borrowed seal impressions right and left, and smudged ourselves up to the eyebrows in blackleading them, as if we had been blackleading grates.

But this craze soon died out. Stephen got handsome seals which he mounted very neatly, and polished up until they shone like gold; but most of us had to content ourselves with deposits of brown dust like that in the hollow core of a maggotty apple.

Stephen explained very learnedly how it was this happened, but we were too stupid to learn how to keep it from happening; and electrotyping went out of fashion at Axleford almost as rapidly as it had come into fashion.

One of Stephen's electrotype seals had Minerva's Owl on it. He was very proud of this

seal, considering it emblematic of his own character. He wore it on all high days and holidays. He had it on at a breaking-up party, at which Stephen *did* look like an owl—but not a very wise one.

One of the grown-up people the Doctor had invited was a funny fellow, who was very fond of teasing Stephen. There was a great talk about mesmerism then—just as there is now-a-days about spirit-rapping—and in the course of the evening, this Mr. Johnson began to tell some most wonderful stories about what he had seen at mesmeric *séances* in London. He knew that it made Stephen wild to hear about mesmerism, and so he finished off with—

"There, Monckton, what do you say to animal magnetism now?"

"Those who do the things are knaves, and those who believe in them are fools," was Scientific Stephen's sententious but not very civil answer.

"Well, will you let me try to mesmerize you?"

"I defy you, if you try for half a year."

"But you'll do just what I tell you to give me a chance?"

Stephen consented, and Mr. Johnson placed two chairs in the middle of the room, and seated Stephen on one of them. Then he went out, coming back in a little time with two cups, full of water, on two plates.

"Now, remember," said Mr. Johnson, as he seated himself on the empty chair, "you must never take your eyes off me—till I make you close them—and imitate everything I do."

Then he handed Stephen one of the cups on one of the plates, and began what he called the "passes." Ladies and girls, masters and boys, crowded round in a circle. At first there was an awe-hushed stillness, but in a minute—*why* you will hear directly—we all of us had hard work to keep our countenances. Ever and anon Mr. Johnson dipped the tips of his fingers into the

water, rubbed them on the bottom of his plate, and then drew them over his nose, round his eyes, and down and across his forehead and his face.

Stephen scrupulously imitated every movement, conscientiously anxious to give the "science falsely so called" a fair chance, but wearing a supercilious look of scientific incredulity that every moment grew more comical. Presently Mr. Johnson wetted the palm of his hand, rubbed it on the bottom of his plate as if he were scouring the platter, and then rubbed his hand all over his face as if he were soaping it. Stephen followed his example as conscientiously and superciliously as ever.

"Don't you feel sleepy *now?*" asked Mr. Johnson.

"Not a bit of it," answered Stephen. "I said it was all humbug, and I 've proved it."

"Surely you must feel something," Mr. Johnson persisted. "Doesn't he look strange, poor fellow? Bring him a looking-glass."

We waited until the astounded Stephen had seen himself in it, and then let loose the peal after peal of laughter we had found it so hard to keep in.

Stephen's plate had been held over the smoke of a candle before it was given him, and he was as black in the face as a sweep.

THE END.

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