

Stratemeyer Edward

**Dave Porter's Return to School.
Winning the Medal of Honor**



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Dave Porter's Return to School / Winning the Medal of Honor:*

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PREFACE

"Dave Porter's Return to School" is a complete story in itself, but forms the third volume in a line issued under the general title of "Dave Porter Series."

In the initial volume of this series, entitled "Dave Porter at Oak Hall," I took pleasure in introducing to my readers a typical American lad, of strong moral qualities, and told of many of the things which happened to him during a term at an American boarding school of to-day. Such a school is a little world in itself, and Dave made both friends and enemies, and aided one weak and misguided youth to a realization of his better self.

The great cloud over Dave's life was the question of his parentage. His enemies called him "a poorhouse nobody," which hurt him to the quick. At length he made a discovery which led him to begin a search for his missing relatives, and in the second volume of this series, entitled "Dave Porter in the South Seas,"

we followed the lad on a most unusual voyage, in a quarter of our globe but little known. Here Dave met his uncle, and learned something of himself and his father and sister, which pleased him immensely.

In the present volume the scene is shifted back to Oak Hall, where Dave goes to finish his preparation for college. His friends are still with him, and likewise his enemies, and what the various students do I leave for the pages that follow to relate. In all his trials Dave stands up for what is honest and true, and in this his example is well worth following.

Again I thank the many young people who have taken an interest in my efforts to amuse and instruct them. I hope this volume may prove to their liking and do them good.

Edward Stratemeyer.

Washington's Birthday, 1907.

CHAPTER I

AT THE RAILROAD STATION

"Here comes the train, fellows!"

"I hope Dave Porter is on board."

"He will be, and Ben Basswood too. Ben wrote to me that they were coming to-day."

"I wonder if Dave will be glad to get back to Oak Hall, Lazy?"

"Why not?" returned Sam Day, a big, round-faced youth, with a shock of curly hair hanging over his forehead. "Didn't we have fine times when he was here last term?"

"Yes, but – " Maurice Hamilton paused to glance at the train that had rolled into the Oakdale station. "There they are, sure enough! Hurrah!"

The train had come to a stop and a dozen or more passengers alighted. In the crowd were two boys, each carrying a dress-suit case. Both were tall, well-built, and manly-looking. The one in the lead had a face full of merriment and earnest eyes that were rather out of the ordinary.

"Dave!" cried Maurice Hamilton, rushing up and catching the youth addressed by the hand. "You don't know how glad I am to see you!"

"Same here, Shadow," responded Dave Porter, and gave the other boy's hand a squeeze that made the lad wince.

"Whoa, Dave! I want to use that hand again!" cried Shadow, as he was familiarly called. "Not so hard."

"And how are you, Lazy?" went on Dave Porter, turning to the other boy on the platform. "Active as ever?" And he smiled brightly.

"No, it has been dead slow since you and Roger and Phil went away," answered Sam Day. "How are you, Ben?" he added, to the second youth from the train. "I hope you've come back to stir things up."

"Oh, Dave will stir 'em up, don't you worry," replied Ben Basswood. "He feels like a two-year-old colt since – well, you know," he added, in a lower voice.

"Any one would," responded Sam Day, heartily. "My, but what a trip you must have had to the South Seas!" he added, to Dave. "Wish I had been along!"

"Every one of our crowd has been wishing that," said Shadow Hamilton. "When you're settled down, and have time, you must tell us all about it, Dave."

"I certainly will. Have you seen anything of Phil and Roger yet?"

"They are coming to-morrow."

"Good. All the others here?"

"All but Polly Vane and Luke Watson. Polly had to go to his aunt's wedding, and Luke had to go around by way of Albany, on business for his father. But the whole crowd will be on hand by the end of the week."

"And what of Gus Plum and Nat Poole and that crowd?" asked Ben Basswood, with a shade of anxiety in his voice.

"Oh, they are around, as lordly as ever. But say, wasn't Plum taken down when he heard that Dave had found some relatives and was rich! He wouldn't believe it at first; said it was a fake."

"But it is true," cried Ben Basswood, his face glowing. "Dave's folks are rich. I don't know but that Dave is the richest boy at Oak Hall now."

"Oh, come, let us talk about something else," said Dave, blushing in spite of himself. "Where's the carryall?"

"Here you are, gents!" cried a voice from the end of the platform, and Jackson Lemond, the driver from Oak Hall, appeared. He got down on one knee and made a profound bow to Dave. "Hope I see you well, Lord Porter," he went on, humbly.

"Lord Porter?" queried Dave, in bewilderment.

"Hush!" whispered Sam Day, quickly. "Some of the fellows told Horsehair you were a real, live lord now, and he believes it."

"But I am not," cried Dave, and burst out laughing. "Up with you, Horsehair, or you'll get your knee dirty."

"Yes, sir, yes, sir," answered the driver, nervously. "Will – er – will Lord Porter sit on the front seat, or –"

"A lord always drives himself," answered Shadow Hamilton, with a grin. "Horsehair, you'll have to sit on the back spring."

"Yes, sir, but – er –" The driver of the carryall paused. "Any more boys?"

"Look here, fellows," interrupted Dave, throwing his dress-

suit case on the top of the carryall. "I like fun as well as anybody, but making out I'm a lord is – well, it's something I don't like. Even though my folks may have a little money I want to be just as I used to be."

"Ain't you no lord?" gasped the carryall driver.

"Of course not – I'm a plain, everyday American boy."

"Well, I'll be switched! Them young gents told me as how you was a real lord, an' was coming to the school with four colored servants, an' a whole lot more."

"And now Dave has spoiled it all," said Shadow Hamilton, with a ponderous sigh. "Puts me in mind of a story I once heard about a – "

"Yarn No. 1," interrupted Ben. "I thought you'd begin to tell 'em as soon as we arrived. You have 'em bottled up, and unless you pulled the cork now and then I suppose you'd explode."

"Which puts me in mind of another story, about a – "

"Wait till we are on our way to the Hall," cried Sam Day. "All in!" And one after another the schoolboys piled into the big carryall which was to take them to Oak Hall. The turnout was just about to start when there came a cry from the other end of the station, and two youths appeared, each loudly dressed, one somewhat after the manner of a dude and the other in the style of a sport. Each carried a small parcel, showing he had come down to the town to do some shopping.

"Gus Plum and Nat Poole!" whispered Ben, and his face fell. "I hope they don't want to ride with us."

"That is what they are going to do," answered Dave. "I am sorry myself, but it can't be helped."

"Jump in if you are going along," cried the Hall driver.

"Who have you got?" sang out Gus Plum, rather roughly. He came closer with his companion and stared at those in the carryall. "Humph!"

"How do you do, Plum?" said Dave, politely. He knew Gus Plum to be the bully of the school, but he had determined to be perfectly fair to all.

"Humph!" murmured the bully again. "Got back, eh?"

"I have."

"Humph!"

"Going to cut a fearful swath, I presume," said Nat Poole, who was the bully's close crony.

Dave's face flushed. He had anticipated trouble, but had not expected it to come so soon. A sharp answer came to his lips, but he suppressed it and remained silent.

"Don't start in now, Plum!" cried Ben. "If you are going to the Hall say so and get in."

"I'll go to the Hall when I feel like it," growled the bully. It was plain to see that he was in an unusually bad humor.

"Well, we are not going to wait for you to make up your mind," said Shadow Hamilton. As we shall learn later, he had good reasons for counting Gus Plum his enemy. "Are you going, or are you not?"

"See here, Hamilton, you can't boss me!" roared the bully. "I'll

get in when I please."

"The carryall has got to wait for us," added Nat Poole, maliciously. "Dr. Clay said we could come back in it."

"Then come on," said Sam Day.

"We are not through with our errands yet," answered Gus Plum, and winked in secret at his crony.

"That's it – and the carryall has got to wait till we are through," added Nat Poole, quickly.

"How long?" asked Dave, looking sharply at Plum and Poole.

"Oh, about half an hour," answered the bully, carelessly.

"This is a shame," muttered Sam Day. "Horsehair, can't you come back for them?"

"Certainly," answered the driver.

"Then off we go!" cried Shadow Hamilton. "I'd rather ride without them anyway," he whispered.

"Hi! stop!" roared Gus Plum. "If you drive to the Hall you won't be back for an hour and a half or more. You've got to wait for us."

At this bold announcement there was silence all around. The students in the carryall looked at Dave, as he was their natural leader.

"There are four of us who want to get to the Hall without unnecessary delay," said Dave, steadily. "Either you can go along now, or wait till Horsehair comes back."

"That's the talk," came promptly from Dave's chums.

"So you are going to play the master, are you?" blustered Gus

Plum. "Going to rule the roost, eh? and make everybody bow low to you, eh?"

"Nothing of the kind, Plum. I merely wish – "

"Oh, I know! You've talked soft to me before, and soft to Nat, too! I suppose you think now you have money you can do anything here. Well, it don't go – not with me anyway, and I want to give you fair warning right now, at the very start. I want you to understand – "

"Plum, don't talk so loud, you are drawing a crowd," whispered Ben. "Dave is all right, and you know it."

"Humph! I want him to understand – "

"Plum, listen to me," said Dave, leaning out of the carryall and facing the bully squarely. "I intended to have a talk with you later, but since you are so insistent we may as well have it out right now. When it was decided that I should come back to Oak Hall I made up my mind to do my best to keep out of trouble and stick closely to my lessons. I also made up my mind to steer clear of you, and Nat Poole, and all the others of your crowd, and I was going to ask you to leave me alone. I want absolutely nothing to do with any of you, and I don't want any of you to go around talking behind my back, as you have been doing in the past. You know I could do some talking on my own account if I wanted to, but I prefer to keep silent. Now then, are you willing to meet me on those terms or not?"

"Humph!"

"That is no answer."

"You can't bully me."

"You are the bully and always have been, and you know it."

"That's the truth," said Sam Day.

"Plum, you've got to take a back seat, and the sooner you do it the better off you'll be," added Shadow.

"Exactly what I say," was Ben's comment.

"All against me, just as you always were!" cried Gus Plum, savagely. "But never mind! Just you wait, that's all!" And he shook his fist as he backed away.

"You're a set of sneaks!" murmured Nat Poole, as he too retreated. But he was careful to speak in such a low tone that nobody in the carryall understood him.

"I don't want to ride with you; I'd rather walk," went on the bully.

"I'll come back for you two," said the driver, as he took up the reins again. "Git up there!" he cried to his team and snapped his whip. "Looks to me like there was trouble in the air," he continued, glancing first at the students left behind and then at those in the carryall.

"I am afraid you are right," answered Dave, soberly.

CHAPTER II

SOMETHING OF THE PAST

Once again Dave Porter was brought face to face with the troubles which he had hoped had been put behind him forever. He had expected to have the best kind of a time on returning to Oak Hall, and here were his old enemies, Gus Plum and Nat Poole, ready to do all in their power to make his schooldays miserable.

To those who have read "Dave Porter at Oak Hall" Dave needs no special introduction. In that volume was related how the boy was found when a little child wandering along the railroad tracks just outside of the village of Crumville, and turned over to the poorhouse authorities. Every effort to establish his identity failed, and when he grew up he was taken in by a broken-down college professor, Caspar Potts, who had turned farmer.

The old professor did what he could for the youth, but his farm was mortgaged to a hard-hearted money lender, Aaron Poole, the father of Nat Poole, just introduced. Aaron Poole would have sold the old man out had not aid come from an unexpected quarter. There was an automobile accident, and Dave succeeded in saving the life of a little girl, Jessie Wadsworth. For this the Wadsworth family were very grateful, and when it was learned that Caspar Potts was one of Mr. Oliver Wadsworth's former

college professors, the rich manufacturer took the old professor to live with him, and also took care of the mortgage. Then, for his bravery, and because Dave reminded him of a dead son, Mr. Wadsworth resolved to send the youth to a boarding school and give him a thorough education.

Oak Hall was the institution selected, an ideal place of learning, located not a great distance from the town of Oakdale, in one of our New England States. The buildings were substantial and surrounded by beautiful grounds sloping down to the Leming River. Stately oaks grew on the grounds and in that vicinity, giving the school its name.

Dave had but one boy friend in Crumville, Ben Basswood, who also went to Oak Hall, but the lad was not slow to make other acquaintances, some of whom became his closest chums. Among the number were Roger Morr, the son of a United States senator; Phil Lawrence, whose father was a ship-owner; Joseph Beggs, usually called Buster because he was so fat; and Sam Day and "Shadow" Hamilton, already introduced.

For a time all went well and the poorhouse boy was happy. But then came trouble with Gus Plum the bully, and with Nat Poole, who also became a student at the Hall. Poole told everybody that Dave was a "poorhouse nobody," and Plum taunted him, with the result that there was a fight, in which Dave came off the victor. But this only angered the bully the more, and he vowed to "get square" sooner or later.

"I'll take it out of the poorhouse whelp," he said to Chip

Macklin, a small youth who was his toady, and laid his plot with care. But the plan miscarried, and when Dave learned the truth he gave Chip Macklin such a talking to that the small boy resolved to have nothing more to do with the bully. Macklin turned over a new leaf, and was now hailed as "a pretty decent sort of chap" by those who had formerly despised him. Then Plum did something which got Shadow Hamilton into serious trouble, stealing a collection of valuable postage stamps belonging to the master of the school, which poor Shadow had hidden when he was sleep-walking. This base action was also brought to light, and the bully came near being expelled from the Hall.

The question of his parentage was ever in Dave's mind, and when he gained what he thought was a clew he followed it up as promptly as possible. An old sailor named Billy Dill declared that he knew Dave or somebody that looked exactly like him, only older. This unknown individual was on an island in the South Seas, and the youth arranged to visit that portion of the globe in one of the ships belonging to Phil Lawrence's father. Phil, and Roger Morr, went with him, and also Billy Dill, the necessary funds for the trip being furnished by Oliver Wadsworth.

As related in the second volume of this series, "Dave Porter in the South Seas," the voyage of the *Stormy Petrel* proved to be a decidedly strange one. Fearful storms were encountered, and a portion of the crew, led by a dishonest supercargo and a mate, tried to run off with the vessel, leaving Dave, his chums, the captain, and some others, on an uninhabited island. But in

the end the vessel was retaken, and Dave reached the place for which he was bound.

A great and happy surprise awaited the youth. He came face to face with a Mr. Dunston Porter, who proved to be the boy's uncle. Mr. Porter was rich and was wandering around the islands of the Pacific looking for a treasure said to have been buried by the natives years before. The uncle told Dave that he was the son of a twin brother, David Breslow Porter. Dave's mother was dead, but there was a sister Laura, one year younger than Dave. Mr. David Porter and his daughter Laura were now in Europe, traveling for the former's health. Dave had been stolen from his parents by a crazy nurse, and because of this Mr. Porter never went anywhere without taking Laura with him. There was a good deal of money in the family, a fair share of which would rightfully fall to Dave when he became of age.

As was but natural, Dave was impatient to meet his father and his sister. He and the others journeyed back to the United States, and various messages were sent, to Mr. David Porter and to friends at Crumville. Then Dave and his uncle journeyed to the Wadsworth home, where they were warmly received.

At first the message forwarded to Dave's father in Europe brought no reply, but at last came back an answer from the keeper of a hotel in Paris where Mr. Porter and Laura had been stopping. This said that the Porters had departed some weeks before for an extended trip to Norway, after which they expected to sail for New York, to which place all mail was to be addressed. Where

the two travelers were at the present time there was no telling.

"Dave, this is hard luck," said the boy's uncle, on receiving the news. "I don't know what to do except to wait."

"Can't we send letters to different cities in Norway?" returned the youth. "I want to meet my father and my sister so much!"

"Yes, we can try that," answered Dunston Porter, and the letters were sent without delay; but so far no answers had been received.

Oak Hall had opened for the fall term, and after some discussion it was decided that Dave should return to that school until some word was received from his father. In the meanwhile Mr. Dunston Porter became the guest of Mr. Wadsworth.

Outside of the fact that he was impatient to meet his father and his sister face to face, Dave was very light-hearted when he and Ben Basswood left Crumville on their journey to Oakdale. Being a "poorhouse nobody" was now a thing of the past, and he felt relieved to think that no one could again taunt him regarding his parentage. More than this, he was now in the care of an uncle who was kind and loving to the last degree, and he was provided with all the money he needed, and it was "his own money," as he told himself with great satisfaction.

He had already met some of his chums since returning from the South Seas – boys who had stopped off at Crumville while on their railroad journey to Oakdale. All had congratulated him on his luck and wished him well.

But Nat Poole had not been happy over Dave's good fortune.

They had met at the local post-office, and Poole had made some undertoned remarks that did not please Dave in the least. As a matter of fact Nat Poole, even though fairly well-to-do himself, envied Dave because of his riches.

"Wait and see how he tries to lord it over us when he comes back," said Nat Poole to Gus Plum, when the two met at Oak Hall. "I suppose he will put on such airs there will be no living with him. And he will do what he can to buy all the other fellows over to him."

"He shan't lord it over me, or buy me over either," answered the bully. His tone was very bitter, because of the fact that his own position in life seemed to be going down. His father had lost money steadily during the past year, and it was now almost a question whether Gus should continue at school or leave and go to work.

"It made me sick to see how Crumville folks bowed and smiled to him," went on Nat Poole. "When he was nobody they wouldn't notice him – now they tumble over each other to shake him by the hand."

"But has he really got so much money?"

"They say so – but I don't believe it."

"Does he dress any better than he used to?"

"Hardly a bit better. If that uncle of his has the rocks I guess he is miserly about using any."

"Then maybe Dave won't have so very much spending money," said Gus Plum, his face brightening a bit.

"I don't know anything about that. But I do know it makes me sick to think he is coming here to show off in front of all of us."

Gus Plum looked around cautiously. The pair were in their dormitory and nobody else was within hearing.

"Nat, we hung together last term and we had better hang together this term too," he whispered.

"What do you mean – against Porter and his crowd?"

"Yes."

"I'll do that quick enough."

"We must find some way to throw him off his high horse."

"Well, we don't want to get pinched doing it."

"We won't get pinched – if we do the thing right."

"I'm willing to do anything that can be done to make him eat humble pie."

"I owe him a whole lot – and so do you," continued the bully of Oak Hall, bitterly. "Don't you remember how he treated us at the athletic contests, and down at the boathouse? It makes me boil every time I think of it!"

"Yes, and the tricks he and his cronies played on us," returned Nat Poole. "Gus, I'll do anything – so long as we are not caught at it."

"I'd like to fix him so he'd be disgraced before the whole school." Gus Plum's voice sank to a hoarse whisper.

"Can we do it?"

"Maybe we can," was the answer.

And there and then, two days before Dave got back to Oak

Hall, these two unworthies plotted to disgrace him and leave a smirch upon his fair name.

CHAPTER III

DAVE'S RETURN TO OAK HALL

The carryall containing Dave and his friends soon left Oakdale behind and was bowling swiftly along over the smooth highway leading to Oak Hall. The boys were all inside, leaving the driver to manage his team in any way that suited him. Usually they loved to torment Horsehair, as they called him, but now they had other matters on their minds.

"The same old Plum," said Ben, with a sigh. "Doesn't it make one weary to listen to him?"

"Better try to forget him, and Nat Poole too," answered Dave.

"That is easier said than done," said Shadow Hamilton. "Which puts me in mind of a story. There was once – "

"He is bound to tell 'em," came, with a groan, from Sam Day.

"Never mind; go ahead, Shadow," said Dave. "Sam said you could start in after we were on board, and I'd rather hear a story than discuss Plum and Poole."

"You were talking about forgetting Plum. One day a boy got into his mother's pantry and stole some preserved plums. When the plums were found missing the boy's mother caught him and cuffed his ears in good style. Then the boy went outside and his chum told him to stop crying. 'Forget that your mother cuffed you,' said the other boy. 'I ain't thinkin' of that,' answered the

boy who had stolen the plums. 'Then stop crying.' 'I can't.' 'Why not?' asks the other boy. 'Because the plums was hot an' I kin feel 'em all along my throat yit.'" And at this anecdote a smile passed around.

"I suppose football is being talked about," observed Ben, after a brief pause.

"Yes, some of the boys are playing already," answered Sam Day. "I have been waiting for Roger to get back. He was captain of our eleven last season, you'll remember."

"Yes, and you were right tackle."

"Do you suppose we'll get another challenge from the Rockville Military Academy?"

"Sure we will," burst out Shadow. "They'll want to wipe out the defeat of last year."

"Gus Plum has organized a football team of his own," observed Sam. "He has got Poole and a lot of new students in it. They call themselves the Arrows, and one boy told me they were going to have suits with arrows embroidered on them."

"By the way, what of Chip Macklin?" asked Dave.

"He is around and as bright as a button," answered Sam. "It is simply wonderful what a change there is in that chap since he cut away from Plum."

"Oh, look at the apples!" cried out Ben, as the carryall made a turn in the road. He pointed to a tree in a field loaded with the fruit. "Wish I had one."

"You won't get any there," declared Shadow. "That's Mike

Marcy's field and he keeps any number of dogs."

"Well, I never!" burst out Sam, feeling down under the seat. "If you hadn't spoken I should have forgotten them entirely." He brought out a bag containing a dozen big red apples. "I bought them while we were waiting for the train. Here, boys, help yourselves." And he passed them around.

"Thank you, Sam," said Dave, as he bit into one of the apples. "This is fine." And the others said the same.

Each had his story to tell, and Sam and Shadow listened with eager interest while Dave told of his long trip across the Pacific, and his many adventures since he had left the academy.

"Sounds almost like a fairy tale," declared Sam. "I'd like to see something of the world myself."

The carryall made another turn and came in sight of the river, dotted here and there with small craft. Along the shore grew some bushes and a few trees.

"I see some of the fellows are out rowing," observed Dave. "I'd like to go out myself some day, before it gets too cold."

The carryall was passing a point where the road was considerably higher than the surface of the stream. Dave had bitten into a second apple, that proved to be wormy. Now he leaned out of the carryall and sent the fruit spinning down through the bushes toward the river.

"Hi! hi!" came back a voice from the shore below. "Who hit me?"

"Gracious, I must have hit somebody!" exclaimed Dave. "I

didn't mean to do it."

"What's the matter?" demanded the driver, pulling his team in.

"You needn't stop," answered Ben. "Dave threw an apple away, that's all."

"I've got to fix the harness – there's a strap loose," went on Lemond, and leaped to the ground. He was at work when a man appeared, climbing up the river bank through the bushes. It was Job Haskers, one of the assistant teachers at the Hall, the only instructor the students did not like.

"Ha! so some of you played a trick on me, eh?" fumed Job Haskers, as he emerged upon the road and strode toward the carryall. "Nice doings, I must say!"

"Did the apple hit you, Mr. Haskers?" asked Dave, mildly.

"Did it hit me? I should say it did, right on top of the head."

"I am sorry, sir."

"So you threw it, Porter. I am amazed that you would dare do such a thing."

"I didn't know you were down there – in fact, I didn't know anybody was there."

"A likely story," sneered the teacher, who was very often hot-headed and unreasonable.

"I am telling the truth, sir," and Dave's face flushed.

"I cannot go out for a quiet stroll by the river side but somebody must hit me in the head with a hard apple," growled the instructor. "Have you just arrived?"

"Yes, sir."

"You ought to be more careful of what you are doing."

"As I said before, I didn't know anybody was down there."

"I presume you didn't want to see me." The teacher turned to all of the boys. "Where did you get those apples?" he asked, suspiciously.

"I bought them in Oakdale," answered Sam.

"Haven't been stopping at some orchard on the way?"

"You may ask Mr. Cassello, the fruit man, if you don't believe me," and Sam drew himself up.

"Well, be more careful after this, or you'll hear from me!" answered Job Haskers, and strode off down the road in a thoroughly bad humor.

"Phew! but we are catching it all along the line," was Ben's comment. "First Plum and Poole, and now Haskers. Wonder what we'll strike next?"

"I didn't mean to hit anybody," said Dave. "How peppery he is!"

"And he thinks we took the apples from some orchard," added Sam.

"Well, such things have happened," observed Ben, with a grin.

"Which puts me in mind of another story," said Shadow. "There was a little boy, and his mother had been away nearly all day. 'Mamma,' said he when she came home, 'can I have two apples?' 'Won't one do?' she asked. 'No, I want two.' 'Very well,' said his mother. Then she saw him go to the basket and

get one apple. 'I thought you wanted two,' she remarked. 'Oh,' he answered, 'I had the other one this morning!'"

Sam burst out laughing and so did the others. "I see the drift of that," said Sam. "You haven't forgotten when we went to Japlet's orchard after apples – "

"And the bull cornered Sam," said Ben. "Don't forget that, Sam."

"Nevertheless, Haskers is hard on us, and he had no business to call Dave down as he did, just for throwing the apple into the bushes."

"Perhaps he has found out something about that ram and how he got up in his room," whispered Ben, and then a laugh went up, in the midst of which the driver started up the carryall and the journey to Oak Hall was resumed.

Dave was on the watch, to catch his first sight of the school. They were passing through a bit of woodland. Now they made a turn, and rolled out in front of a broad campus lined on either side with a boxwood hedge. At each corner of the campus were clumps of monstrous oaks, the leaves of which had just begun to turn, and at the entrance were more of the same kind of trees.

The school itself was a thoroughly up-to-date structure, of brick and stone, laid out in the shape of a broad cross. The classrooms, the office, and the dining hall and kitchen were on the ground floor and the dormitories and private bedrooms and the bathrooms were above. Off to one side of the campus was the gymnasium, and down by the river were a boathouse and a

row of bathing houses.

"Hurrah! Here we are at last!" cried Dave, and his heart gave a bound.

"Let us give 'em the old song, boys!" cried Sam Day, who was a good singer, and he at once started up the following, to the tune of "Auld Lang Syne":

Oak Hall we never shall forget,
No matter where we roam;
It is the very best of schools,
To us it's just like home.
Then give three cheers, and let them ring
Throughout this world so wide,
To let the people know that we
Elect to here abide!"

They sang with a will, and when they had finished they added the old academy cry:

Baseball!
Football!
Oak Hall
Has the call!
Biff! Boom! Bang! Whoop!"

"Hello! hello!" sang out a dozen voices from the campus.
"Here come some more of the old students!"
"There's Dave Porter and Ben Basswood!"

"Hello, Dave, how do you feel after traveling across the Pacific?"

"Bring any of those South Sea Islanders with you?"

"Mighty glad to see you back, old man!"

So the cries rang on, as Dave and the others left the carryall.

Dave was surrounded, and half a dozen tried to shake hands at once.

"We want you on the football team, Dave," said one.

"I'm glad to know you found your folks," added another.

"You've come back to stay now, haven't you?" asked a third.

Dave shook hands all around. As the school song had it, the place felt just like home. For the time being his heart was lighter than ever, and his return to Oak Hall filled him with more pleasure than words can express.

CHAPTER IV IN THE DORMITORY

It took Dave several days to settle down and during that time he heard but little from Gus Plum and Nat Poole, who prudently kept their distance, awaiting the time when they might do Dave some injury.

During those days Roger Morr and Phil Lawrence arrived, both hale and hearty from their trip with Dave across the Pacific. The senator's son had spent two days in Washington with his father, while Phil had been settling up some affairs with his parent regarding the cargo of the *Stormy Petrel*.

"This is certainly like old times," remarked Roger, as the crowd sat in their dormitory. "I hope we have as much sport as we did last season."

"We will have, don't worry," answered Phil.

"Provided Job Haskers doesn't stop us," said Buster Beggs, who was lying across one of the beds. "Tell you what, boys, he is sharp on this term. Yesterday he caught me writing on the boathouse wall and he made me write 'chirography' five hundred times."

"Well, that's a good way to improve your handwriting," answered Dave, with a smile. "I've done a little of that sort of thing myself."

"He kept me in two hours yesterday, when I wanted to play football," growled Shadow Hamilton. "It was a burning shame."

"But what did you do?" questioned Roger.

"Oh, nothing much. Nat Poole was coming down the aisle and he made a face at me. I happened to stretch out my leg and Poole tripped and went flat. Then old Haskers said it was all my fault."

"And what did Poole say?" asked Sam, with interest.

"Oh, he threatened to punch me good – but he didn't do it. He started to quarrel after school, but Gus Plum called him off."

"Well, that was queer," observed Dave. "Generally Gus is out for a fight."

"Which puts me in mind of a story," came from Shadow. "A little – "

"Narrative No. 206," broke in Sam.

"You shan't keep me from telling it," went on Shadow, calmly. "A little man – "

"How small?" asked Roger, with a wink at the others.

"Oh, that hasn't anything to do with it. A little man once met another man – "

"Was the other man small, too?" questioned Phil, seriously.

"Never mind if he was or not. A little man once met another man who had a big bulldog with him – "

"What was the color of the bulldog?" asked Dave.

"What color? See here, I – "

"When you tell a story, Shadow, give us the details, by all means. Was he white or black, red or yellow? Or maybe he was

cream-color, or sky-pink, or – "

"He was – er – he was a regular bulldog color. Well, this man – "

"Sort of a brownish blue, with a dash of crimson and violet," suggested Phil.

"He was a regular common, everyday bulldog, only he was very big and very savage."

"Muzzled, of course," came from Roger. "Bulldogs always are."

"I saw one once that wasn't," added Buster Beggs.

"Some of 'em wear silver-plated muzzles," observed Sam.

"Do you mean to say this bulldog had a silver-plated muzzle?" demanded Dave, turning to Shadow.

"Who in creation said he had a muzzle?" cried the would-be story-teller. "I said – "

"I know you did, Shadow dear," said Luke Watson, who sat on a low stool with his banjo in his lap, tuning up. "Don't let them sidetrack you, or the bulldog either."

"What I want to know is this," said Phil, impressively. "Were those men white or black? That may have a very important bearing on the moral of the tale."

"See here, if you don't want to hear the story – " began Shadow, half angrily.

"We do! we do!" came from several at once.

"We are dying for you to finish," said Roger. "Now start up again. A small bulldog once came along, leading a big, fierce

man – "

"That's not right," broke in Buster. "A small bulldog once met another bulldog leading a bulldog-colored man who – "

"Great Cæsar! That's as bad as the story of the canner," broke in Sam. "The canner can eat what he can and what he can't he can can, can't he?" And a laugh went up.

"I am going to tell this story if I die for it," cried Shadow. "A small man – remember that – met another man – remember that – with a big, fierce bulldog – remember that. The small man was afraid, but he didn't want to show it, so he said to the man with the bulldog: 'Is that dog a valuable animal?' 'Yes,' says the other man. 'Well, don't let him loose, then.' 'Why not?' 'Because I don't like dogs and I might hurt him.' Now there's the story, and you've got to swallow it whether you want to or not."

"Which puts me in mind of a song," said Luke Watson. "Sam, you know it, and can join in," and he began, accompanying himself on the banjo:

"I love him, I love him,
He's down at the gate;
He's waiting to meet me
No matter how late.
He loves me so truly,
It fills me with joy
To hug him and kiss him —
My poodle dog, Floy!"

The song rang out clearly and sweetly, and when the verse was repeated the others joined in. But then came a knock at the door, and Jim Murphy, the big-hearted monitor, appeared.

"Hush! not so loud," he whispered, warningly. "Haskers is coming upstairs." And then the monitor disappeared again.

"I know what that means," said Luke, and rising he put his banjo away in a closet. "He stopped me before – he shan't have the chance to do it again."

The boys had scarcely settled themselves when Job Haskers appeared and gazed sharply around the dormitory. He found all the boys either writing or studying.

"Who is making that noise up here?" he demanded.

To this there was no reply.

"If I hear any more of it I shall punish everybody in this room," added the assistant teacher, and went out again, closing the door sharply after him.

"He's in an elegant humor to-night," was Phil's comment. "Must have swallowed some tacks, or a cup of vinegar."

"He ought to be taken down a peg," said Shadow, who had not forgotten how he had been kept in. "I wish we could do something like last term when we got Farmer Cadmore's ram up in his room and –"

"That's it," cried Buster. "Only it won't do to try the same joke twice. We'll have to think up something new. Polly, give us an idea."

He turned to Bertram Vane, who sat at a table, trying to write

a composition. Bertram was very girlish in appearance, hence the nickname.

"Please don't bother me now," pleaded Polly. "I want to finish this composition."

"We want some idea to work off on Haskers. Open up your knowledge box, Polly," came from Phil.

"Really I can't," returned the girlish student. "I am writing a composition on Bats, and I want –"

"Baseball bats?" questioned Roger.

"No, no, living bats. Their habits are very interesting, and –"

"Polly has solved the question for us!" exclaimed Dave, and began to grin. "Just the thing! Polly, have you written much yet?"

"No, I hadn't the chance, with so much talking going on."

"Then you had better change your subject, for I don't think Mr. Haskers will want to read a composition on Bats to-morrow – not if the plan goes through."

"What is the plan?" came eagerly from several of the others.

"I just happened to remember that one of the boys over at Lapham's farm has a cage full of bats that he caught last week. He said he would sell them for fifty cents. Perhaps Mr. Haskers would be pleased to have them presented to him."

"Whoop! We'll get those bats!" shouted Phil.

"And put them in his room," added Shadow.

"And as we are modest we won't say where the gift came from," remarked Sam.

The plan was approved by everybody, even Polly Vane smiling

faintly.

"Bats are very curious creatures," he observed. "They fly in people's hair, and they can make one very uncomfortable."

The crowd talked the matter over, and it was decided to get the bats at once, if it could be done. As Dave knew the boy who had the creatures he was commissioned to go after them, taking Shadow and Roger along.

It was still early, so the three lads had no difficulty in getting out of the academy building. They did not, however, dare to ask for permission to leave the grounds, and so stole across the campus to the gymnasium building, back of which they vaulted the boxwood hedge. Close at hand was a road leading through a patch of woods to the Lapham farm, whither they were bound.

"We have got to watch out, when we are coming back," said the senator's son, as they trudged along. "We don't want to get caught by Haskers, or Dr. Clay either."

"When we return one of us can go ahead and see if the coast is clear," answered Dave. "It will be all right unless somebody has been playing the spy on us."

"I didn't see anybody."

"Neither did I, but I believe they are going to enforce the rules more strictly than ever this season."

It was a cool, clear night, with hundreds of stars twinkling in the sky. They knew the road well, having traveled it many times before. They left the woods behind, and then came out on a small hill, below which was the farm for which they were bound.

"Perhaps the Laphams are in bed," said Shadow. "Some farmers go to bed mighty early."

"I know it, especially when the days are short," answered Dave. "Well, if the boy's asleep we'll have to wake him up. I guess he'll be glad enough to sell the bats. He said his mother didn't want him to have them around."

"I see a light in the house," said Roger, as they drew closer. "Have they a dog?"

"No."

"Then we can go right up to the door and knock."

The three students entered the lane leading up to the farmhouse. They saw a light flash up in one lower room and then appear in the next. While they were gazing it suddenly disappeared, leaving the farmhouse in total darkness.

"Evidently they are just going to bed," said Dave. "Hurry up, before they get upstairs."

He broke into a swift walk and the others did the same. They were close to the front porch of the house when they heard a shrill cry from within:

"John! John! Wake up! There is somebody in the house!"

CHAPTER V

SOMETHING OF A MYSTERY

"Did you hear that?" asked the senator's son, as he and his companions came to a halt on the porch of the farmhouse.

"I did, and there must be something wrong," answered Dave.

"Perhaps there are burglars around," said Shadow. "I must say, I don't like this," he continued, nervously.

"There was a burglary in Oakdale night before last," said Dave. "I heard Swingly the janitor telling about it."

All three now heard a commotion in the farmhouse. There was the slamming of a back door, and then somebody came leaping down the inside stairs.

"Where is he, Jane?" they heard in a man's voice.

"I don't know, but I heard the back door shut," answered a woman's voice. "And I saw a light."

"I don't see anybody," went on the man of the house, and lit a match. Soon he had a lamp in his hand, with which he went to the back door.

"Did you leave the wash-shed window open?" he called out.

"No," returned Mrs. Lapham. "I shut it tight."

"It's open wide, – and the back door is unlocked," went on her husband.

"Any thieves around, pop?" came in a boyish voice.

"Better git the gun," advised another boy, Bob Lapham, who had the bats for sale.

The man went out in the yard, lamp in hand. As he did this, the three students walked around to meet him.

"Hello, what do you want?" demanded John Lapham, halting and staring at his unexpected visitors. "Were you in my house?" he continued, suspiciously.

"No, sir, we just came up," answered Dave. "We want to buy those bats your son has for sale."

"Did you see anybody around here – I mean going out just now?"

"No."

"We saw a light, in the parlor and the sitting room," said Roger. "It went out just as we came up."

"Then my wife must be right. Somebody has been in the house. I must take a look around."

The two Lapham boys now came out, and the whole crowd looked around the farmhouse and the stable near by. Not a soul was in sight anywhere.

"Whoever he was, he has gotten away," said the farmer, soberly. "I hope he didn't steal anything."

He and his sons were but partly dressed and they went in the house again, followed by the students, who were curious to learn if anything had been taken.

"I brought home a lot of stuff from my aunt's house yesterday," explained John Lapham. "She is breaking up

housekeeping and gave us her silverware and such. I had it all in the box yonder."

He set down the lamp and threw aside the cover of the box he had pointed out. One look inside and he gave a groan.

"The silverware is gone!"

"All of it?" queried one of his sons.

"Yes, and the cut glass fruit dish is gone too!"

By this time Mrs. Lapham had dressed and now she came down. At the news she burst into tears.

"Oh, John, you must get after those burglars!"

"Can there have been more than one?" asked Dave.

"I think I heard two men moving around, but I am not sure," said the woman.

Another search was made by the students, while the farmer and his sons hastily donned the rest of their clothing. Then John Lapham brought forth a shotgun.

"I'm going to get that stuff back," said he, determinedly. "You say the burglars didn't go out by the front road?"

"We didn't see anybody," answered Roger.

"Then they must have taken to the lane that leads down to the river."

"Let us go down and see, pop," said Bob Lapham, eagerly.

So it was agreed, and after a few words Dave and his chums went along. For the time being the bats were forgotten.

"This may get us into a mess at the Hall," whispered Shadow, as they hurried along. "In telling the news Mr. Lapham will be

sure to mention us."

"Well, that can't be helped, and we'll have to get out of it the best we can," answered Dave. "It's our duty to help capture those burglars, if it can be done."

The whole party walked down the lane leading to the river, which, at this point, overflowed a portion of the Lapham meadow. The farmer had brought along his barn lantern.

"I see something!" cried Dave, as a bright object caught his eye. But it was only a battered tin can, which caused everybody to utter a short laugh.

It did not take long to reach the water's edge. Here they saw where a rowboat had been hauled up on the bank. In the mud and grass they made out the footsteps of two men, but that was all.

"Have you had a boat up here in the last few days?" asked Dave of the farmer.

"Ain't had a boat here in a month."

"Then this must have been the burglars' boat."

"I think so." John Lapham gave something of a sigh. "They got a good start."

"Yes, and we don't know which way they went," added one of his sons.

"Have you any idea what the stuff that was stolen was worth?" asked the senator's son.

"Fifty or sixty dollars, maybe more."

"I shouldn't think any professional burglars would bother to take such a small amount," was Shadow's comment. "Maybe they

are worthless characters from around here."

"Like as not," answered the farmer. "Maybe the same rascals that robbed Jerry Logan's house at Oakdale. They got about fifty dollars' worth there too."

They looked out upon the river as best they could, but not a craft of any kind was in sight, nor could they hear any sound of rowing. The farmer drew a long sigh.

"I'm stumped," he declared.

"You'd better notify the authorities," suggested Roger.

"Won't do a bit o' good. The constable ain't worth his salt, and the justice ain't no good either. If I want to find those burglars I've got to do it myself."

"Have you a boat?"

"No, but I can get one in the morning, and I'll get some of the neighbors to help me."

There seemed nothing more to do just then, and the whole party returned to the farmhouse. Then Dave explained what he had come for to Bob Lapham.

"All right, you can have the bats," said the farm boy. "They are in the barn. But what do you want of them?"

"Oh, we were going to use them for something – but perhaps we won't now," said Dave, and handed over the amount to be paid. Soon the bats were brought forth, in a battered mocking-bird cage. They were a round dozen in number.

"See here, Bob, don't say anything to anybody about our coming here," whispered Roger, slipping an extra quarter into

the farm boy's hand. "We are not supposed to be away from the Hall, you know."

"All right, I won't say anything."

"And keep your brother and your father quiet too, – if you can."

"I'll do my best. I don't know your names anyway."

"None of them?"

"No."

"Good enough. Now we are off. Good-night."

The boys were about to turn from the farmhouse when John Lapham called them back.

"What do you want?" asked Dave, and a sudden strange sensation took possession of him.

"I've been thinking that things look rather queer," went on the farmer, pointedly.

"In what way?" demanded Shadow.

"How was it that you didn't knock on the front door when you first came here?"

"We heard a noise and we listened to find out what it meant," answered the senator's son.

"It seems mighty queer to me," said the farmer, doggedly.

"What do you mean, Mr. Lapham?" demanded Dave, his face beginning to burn.

"It's queer you should come here this time of night just to get some bats that ain't any good to nobody."

"Well, that is what we came for and nothing else."

"You're sure you don't know anything about that robbery?"

"Mr. Lapham, do you take us for thieves?" cried the senator's son, hotly.

"I didn't say that; I said it was queer."

"You know we haven't the stolen stuff."

"And you are sure you don't know anything about those other chaps?" mused the farmer.

"Not a thing," answered Dave. "All we saw was the light just before it went out, and heard the noise."

"It is preposterous to think we would come here to take your silverware," went on Roger, warmly.

"Oh, pop, they are all right," said Bob Lapham. "All the students at Oak Hall are honest fellows."

"I don't know about that," was the grim answer. "They don't seem to be honest when it comes to getting in our orchards."

"I have never been in your orchard," said Dave.

"Nor I," added Shadow.

"Nor I," affirmed the senator's son.

"Last season I had about half of my fruit stolen."

"Well, some of it was taken by the boys from the military academy, you must remember," said Bob Lapham, who evidently wanted to help the Oak Hall students all he could.

"Yes, I know that."

"We are totally innocent," asserted Shadow. "I don't see how you can suspect us."

"What is your name?" demanded the farmer.

Shadow hesitated and then straightened up.

"I am not ashamed to tell you. It is Maurice Hamilton."

"And what is yours, young man?" went on John Lapham, turning to Dave.

"David Porter."

"And yours?"

"Roger Morr."

"Morr, eh? Do you belong around here?"

"No, sir, I come from near Hemson."

"Oh! Then you ain't related to Mr. Samuel Morr, of Bainridge?"

"I am. He is my uncle."

"Are you Senator Morr's son?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh!" The farmer's face changed slightly. "Well, that makes a difference. I know Mr. Samuel Morr quite well," he continued, but did not add that Roger's uncle held his note for two hundred dollars, and he wished the same renewed for three months. "Of course, if you are Senator Morr's son it is all right, and I am sure you didn't have anything to do with the robbery."

CHAPTER VI

JOB HASKERS'S BAD NIGHT

After that the farmer questioned the boys further concerning their visit to his home and at last drew from the students their whole story. When they acknowledged that they wanted to play a joke on Job Haskers he smiled broadly.

"I know that man," he said. "He wanted to buy some apples and potatoes here once, to ship to some of his folks, and he was so close and mean about it, I wouldn't sell him anything. Go ahead and play your joke on him, and I won't say anything about it."

"And you won't say anything about our visit here?" questioned Roger, eagerly.

"Not a thing – unless, of course, it becomes absolutely necessary to do so."

"You're a brick, Mr. Lapham," cried Dave, much relieved. "We'll do all we can to help you catch those burglars."

"That we will," added Shadow.

"I am afraid we'll never catch them, boys. The constable here is no good, and I don't know where to look for them," responded the farmer.

A few minutes later found the students on the return to Oak Hall, Dave carrying the cage full of bats.

"That was a narrow escape," was Shadow's comment, as they

hurried along to make up for lost time. "I thought sure he'd report the matter to Dr. Clay."

"To think we should run into a burglary!" declared the senator's son.

"I wonder if the same fellows robbed Mr. Lapham who committed the robbery at Oakdale?"

"It is more than likely. I hope they catch the fellows."

It did not take the three youths long to reach the academy grounds. Roger slipped in ahead and was gone five minutes.

"Hurry up – the coast is clear!" he whispered, on coming back. "The side door is open and nobody on the stairs, so far as I could see."

They ran across the campus, Dave with the cage full of bats still in his hand. They had almost reached the door when they heard it slam shut. Then the key was turned and the bolt shot into place.

"We're locked out!" whispered Shadow, in consternation.

"Let us try the other doors," suggested Dave.

They did this, making the entire round of the school building. Every door was shut and locked, even that to the kitchen addition being tight.

"Now we are in a pickle and no mistake," groaned the senator's son.

"I suppose the other fellows have gotten tired of waiting for us and gone to bed," said Shadow. "We've been away an hour and a half longer than we expected."

"One thing is certain, we must get into the Hall somehow," said Dave. "We can't stay out here all night."

"Let us go around under one of our windows," said Roger.

They were soon under a window of Dormitory No. 12. It was open from the top to admit the fresh air. All was dark in the school building and they had only the starlight to guide them.

Gathering up a handful of pebbles, Dave threw them at the window and Roger and Shadow followed suit. At first nobody paid attention to this. Then the window was raised from the bottom and the head of Phil appeared.

"Hello you!" he called softly. "Thought you were going to make a night of it."

"We were delayed," answered Dave. "All the doors are locked. Can't you open one for us?"

"I'll see."

Phil's head disappeared, and then Sam Day and Buster Beggs showed themselves.

"Got the bats?" asked Sam.

"Yes."

"Where are they?"

"Here, in this cage."

"Good enough!"

The boys below waited fully five minutes after that. Then Phil appeared once more.

"It's pretty risky to open a door," he announced. "Mr. Dale is below, and so are Pop Swingly and one or two others. I think

they are watching for somebody."

"I hope they are not watching for us," returned Shadow, with a shiver.

"No, I think they are looking for some other fellows who went out."

"Here's a fishing line," said Sam. "You can send up the bats on that, if you like. Then if you are caught, they won't find out what you were after."

"A good idea," answered Dave, and tied the cage to the end of the line. Soon the bats were hauled up to the dormitory and stowed away in a safe place.

"I wish we could go up on the line too," said Shadow, wistfully.

"We can get a ladder from the barn and go up, if you say so," suggested Roger. "Only, what will we do with the ladder afterwards?"

"The ladder would expose us," said Dave. "I've got a plan. Take the bed sheets and make a rope of them, and we'll haul ourselves up somehow."

The charm of this idea took instantly, and those in the dormitory set to work to knot together five or six sheets without delay. Then one end was held fast while the other was dropped to the ground.

"Will it hold?" questioned Roger. "We don't want to break our necks."

"I'll try it," said Dave, and began to mount the improvised rope hand over hand, bracing his feet against the brick and stone

building as he did so. As the youth was a pretty good athlete he had small trouble in gaining the top and hopping into the dormitory. Then Shadow came up, followed by the senator's son, and the bed sheets were hauled back and separated. The sheets were somewhat mussed from the strange usage, but that was all.

The other boys wanted to know what had kept Dave and his companions so long, but it was too late to relate the whole story.

"We can tell it in the morning," said the senator's son. "Just now let us see how the land lies for getting the bats into old Haskers's room."

He and Dave tiptoed their way out into the hallway, which was dark saving for a faint light near a bathroom door. Not a person was in sight, but a faint murmur of voices came from a room below.

"I am afraid he will have his door locked," said Dave. "He learned his lesson when he had the trouble with the ram."

But to their satisfaction they found the door to the assistant teacher's bedroom unlocked. They listened and heard Job Haskers breathing heavily.

"He is sound asleep," whispered Roger.

"Let us put the key on the outside first," answered Dave.

This was done, and then the two boys went back for the cage of bats. The other students in the dormitory wanted to see the fun, and half a dozen went out into the hallway. In order that they might not be seen and recognized, the light was extinguished.

"I am going to loosen the bottom of the cage and then throw

the whole thing on Haskers's bed," said Dave. "Stand ready, somebody, to lock the door."

"I'll do that," answered Phil.

With caution the door was opened for a little over a foot. Then Dave loosened the bottom of the cage and shook the bats up. As they fluttered around he threw cage and all directly on the teacher's bed. Then the door was quickly closed and locked and the key thrown down into the lower hallway.

For a moment there was silence. Then from Job Haskers's room there arose a frightful shriek.

"Help! Get away! What is this? Oh, my eye! Get away, I say! Oh! oh! Save me! I shall be killed! Get away!" And there followed a series of yells and thumps and the overturning of a chair and a table.

"He is enjoying himself – I don't think!" cried Roger, with a chuckle. "Oh, say, listen to that!"

"Back to the room, or we'll be discovered," warned Phil, and back they ran with all speed.

But the strange commotion had aroused the whole Hall, and dormitory doors were opened on all sides and students rushed out to see what was the matter. Then Dr. Clay appeared, garbed in a dressing gown. Andrew Dale, the first assistant teacher, ran up from below.

"What is the meaning of this unseemly noise?" thundered the good doctor. "Make a light, somebody."

Several lights were lit. In the meantime the noise in Job

Haskers's room continued. The second assistant was having a hot fight with the bats. The creatures banged him in the face, whizzed past his ears, caught in his rather long hair, and practically scared him out of his wits. He made wild passes at them with his hands, dancing around in the meanwhile, and in his bewilderment brought down a steel engraving covered with glass with a tremendous crash.

"Mr. Haskers must be going crazy!"

"Perhaps there is a burglar in his room!"

"Look out that you don't get shot!"

"I know what's the matter!" cried one fun-loving student. "He must have the hydrophobia. He said a dog tried to bite him a couple of days ago."

"Oh, if he has gone mad I don't want him to bite me!" shrieked one of the younger students.

"Better chain him up and pour water on him!"

"Mr. Haskers!" thundered the doctor, rattling the doorknob.

"Mr. Haskers! What is the matter? Open the door."

But the noise was so fearful that no attention was paid to the request. Then came another crash, as the assistant teacher picked up a book, let it fly at the bats, and sent a big pane of glass in the window into a hundred pieces.

This was too much for Dr. Clay. Satisfied that something dreadful was going on, he put his shoulder to the door and burst it open. As he did this, something whizzed past his ear and made him dodge.

"Stop! Don't throw anything at me!" he called. "What in the world does this mean?"

"I don't know what it means!" roared Job Haskers, who was so bewildered he scarcely knew what he was saying. "Get out of here! Oh, my eye! That's the third time I've been hit!" And he made another sweep at his invisible enemy. Then, as Dr. Clay backed into the hallway, the teacher followed him and ran down the corridor like one gone crazy.

By this time somebody was bringing a lantern, and Andrew Dale had armed himself with a club. The doorway to Job Haskers's room had been left wide open and the sounds within had suddenly ceased. With caution Andrew Dale peered inside.

"I do not see anything out of the ordinary," he announced, looking around with caution.

"Maybe the bats have cleared out!" whispered Roger to Dave.

"I hope they have. See, the window is open from the top, and the bottom glass is broken out."

One after another, teachers and students crowded into the room. Phil spied the battered bird cage resting near the foot of the bed, and, in secret, passed it to Dave, who handed it to Sam. The latter was close to the window, and threw the object out as far as he could. In the meantime the excitement continued.

"I don't see anything."

"Better look for robbers!"

"Maybe somebody is in the closet."

The closet was searched, but nothing out of the ordinary was

discovered. The students in the secret looked for bats, but every one of the creatures had taken its departure for parts unknown.

CHAPTER VII

A CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

"Mr. Haskers, I would like to have you explain this affair," said Dr. Clay, after the excitement had died down.

"Have you – have you got them?" faltered the assistant teacher, who was still much bewildered.

"Got what?"

"Why, – er – the – the things that were in my room."

"I can find nothing in your room, and neither can Mr. Dale."

"No – nothing? absolutely nothing, sir?"

"Not a thing out of the ordinary. Did you have a nightmare?" And the worthy master of the Hall looked sternly at his assistant.

"I – er – I don't think I did. I woke up suddenly, sir, and something flew by my head. Then something hit me in the face and got caught in my hair, and after that I – er – I was hit half a dozen times."

"Ahem! This is certainly extraordinary. You are sure you weren't dreaming?"

"I don't think I was, sir."

"Was your window open when you went to bed?"

"Yes, from the top."

"Perhaps a night bird flew in."

"There must have been half a dozen of them."

"Well, whatever it was, it is gone now. You had better go back to bed. You can push the chiffonier against the broken-out window if you wish, to keep out the cold air. Boys, I want you all to retire. We'll have the window and the broken lock mended in the morning."

The doctor turned and waved the students away, and one after another they departed for their dormitories. Then he followed Job Haskers into the latter's bedroom. The door was closed and what was said was not heard by the others.

"Well, that was certainly one on Job Haskers," chuckled Roger, as he followed Dave to bed.

"And I doubt if he ever learns what was the real trouble," answered Dave.

"By the way, I didn't see Gus Plum and Nat Poole," said Phil. "It is queer they didn't come out of their room."

"Maybe they weren't in the building!" cried Sam. "Mr. Dale was watching downstairs for somebody."

"I am not going to bother my head about it," announced the senator's son, as he began to get ready to jump into bed, having disrobed in part before playing the joke on the teacher. "The walk made me tired."

"I am tired, too, and sleepy," said Shadow.

"Ditto here," announced Dave.

All of the students had gone to their dormitories, and once more quiet settled over the Hall. The light that had been lit was extinguished, and one after another the boys hopped into bed and

tucked the covers in around them.

"Great hambones! What's this!" came, an instant later, from Phil, and he began to wiggle from head to foot.

"Adam's tombstone, but this is fierce!" cried the senator's son and sat bolt upright.

"I should say it was!" declared Dave, as he also thrashed around. "I can't stand this. Who put something in my bed?"

"I didn't!" declared Buster.

"Nor I!" declared one after another of the occupants of the dormitory.

Once more the boys got up, and the light was again lit. It was soon discovered that a mass of burdock burs had been placed in the beds of Phil, Roger, and Dave. None of the other beds had been touched.

"This is an itchy joke and no mistake," said Dave, with a sickly grin.

"Puts me in mind of a story," began Shadow. "At a school –"

"No stories just now!" cried Dave. "I want to know who did this?"

"I saw some burdock burs yesterday," said Polly Vane. "Little Sammy Bilderman had them."

"Yes, and he gave them to Nat Poole," declared Chip Macklin. "I saw him do it."

"That explains it!" cried Dave.

"Explains what?" asked several of the others.

"Why Poole and Plum didn't show themselves while the racket

was going on in Haskers's room. They came in here and fixed us up."

"It must be so," said Phil, "for I know my bed was all right before."

Dave leaped noiselessly to the door and threw it open. Nobody was outside, but he heard a door at a distance close softly.

"Somebody was out there. He just ran off," he declared.

"Come on," said Roger, and tiptoed his way into the semi-dark hall, followed by Dave and Phil. They made their way to the door of the dormitory in which Poole and Plum belonged. They heard a rustle and the faint creaking of two beds.

"We've found them all right," whispered the senator's son. "The question is, what shall we do in return?"

"Wait," advised Dave. "We've had enough for one night. Let us get to bed."

The others were willing, and so they returned to their own room. The burs were cleared away, and in a few minutes more all of the lads were in the land of dreams.

In the morning, on entering the classroom, the students found Job Haskers heavy-eyed and in anything but a pleasant humor. He called one class after another to order in a sharp, jerky voice, and gave the pupils demerit marks upon the slightest provocation. As a result Dave, Phil, and eight other students suffered in their general average.

"How I wish Dr. Clay would get rid of him," sighed Phil.

"And get another teacher like Mr. Dale to take his place," said

Dave. All the boys loved Andrew Dale, who was as pleasant as he was capable.

It was not until two days later that Roger met Bob Lapham. The farm boy said his father had heard nothing more of the burglars and the stolen silverware, and had come to the conclusion that little could be done in the matter.

"It is too bad," said the senator's son. "I do hope he gets his stuff back some day."

Although Dave was out for fun and sport, it must not be thought that he neglected his studies. As my old readers know, he was a youth who put his whole heart and soul into whatever he was doing, and this applied to his lessons as well as to everything else. In the past he had kept close to the top of his class, and he was resolved to retain that position or do still better.

"I came to learn something," he said, more than once. "I am not going to neglect my lessons, no matter what is in the air."

"But you'll join our football team, won't you?" asked the senator's son, who was looked upon as the leader in that sport by nearly all the old football players.

"I will if you want me to, Roger. But you know I am not an extra good player. Baseball is my game, not football."

"But we want you to play the position you took last year, when you made that victorious run."

"Very well. What of the other fellows?"

"Ben will be quarter-back as before, and Phil a half-back, and Sam right tackle. I haven't made up my mind about the others yet,

although I think I'll try Shadow for center and Buster for guard."

"What do you think of the team Gus Plum has organized?"

"Well, to tell the truth, Dave, I think some of his fellows play pretty good football," answered Roger, in a low voice, so that no outsider might hear him.

"Just what I think. Henshaw is a dandy quarter-back, and Babcock makes a good, heavy tackle. We ought to have them on our team – if we are to play Rockville."

"Well, I would ask them to join us, only if I do that, Plum will say I am trying to steal his men from him."

The next morning came a surprise. Roger received a challenge from the Arrows to play a game of football the very next Saturday afternoon. Nat Poole delivered the paper, and his face had a superior smile on it as he did so.

"Why, Poole, we are not in trim to play yet," said Roger. "We need more practice."

"Afraid to play us, eh?" sneered the aristocratic youth. "I thought so."

"I am not afraid. Make it three weeks from now and I'll accept."

"No, you must play this week or not at all. If you won't play we'll challenge the Rockville fellows."

With this declaration Nat Poole hurried away, leaving the senator's son much worried. As Roger had said, his team needed practice. They were all good players individually, but team work is what counts in a modern game of football. He went to consult

his friends.

"We can't do it," said Sam, shaking his head. "Why, some of us scarcely know the new rules yet, much less our signals."

"We need at least two weeks of good, snappy practice," put in another of the players. "None of us are hard enough yet."

"This is a plan to get us into a hole," declared Dave. "If we back out Plum will challenge the Rockville boys and make out that his eleven is the representative one from this school. It's just like one of his dirty tricks."

The boys talked the matter over a good hour, and finally a vote was taken.

"I say play," declared Dave. "Let us practise all we possibly can. If we are beaten we can immediately send a challenge for another game on the Saturday following."

So it was at last decided, although Roger, Phil, and Sam were still doubtful. They declared it was taking a big risk and that if they lost they would never hear the end of it.

In the meantime Gus Plum was laughing in his sleeve, as the popular saying goes, feeling certain that Roger's eleven would not accept the challenge. Three of the players who had formerly played on the team of the senator's son had left Oak Hall, and that meant the substitution of green hands from whom it was not known what to expect.

"They'll crawl out of it," declared Nat Poole, as he and the bully of the Hall and a student named Jasniff talked it over. Jasniff was a newcomer at Oak Hall, a fellow with a squint in one

eye and a manner that few of the boys cared to tolerate, although, strange to say, it pleased Plum and Poole. Jasniff smoked, and played pool when he got the chance, and so did they, and, in addition, the new student was fond of drinking and horse races, – a poor sort of a companion for any youth who wanted to make a man of himself.

"You've got them dead to rights," said Nick Jasniff. "They'll crawl, see if they don't."

"I'll give them until Thursday to accept," said Gus Plum. "If they don't, I'll send a challenge to Rockville on Friday."

"Will Rockville play us?" asked Poole. "They may put up some sort of a kick."

"I'll let them know how matters stand," answered the bully of the Hall, with a suggestive wink. "If Morr's crowd won't play us, then we are the representative team of the Hall, aren't we?"

As the bully ceased speaking, Dave and Roger walked up to the three other boys.

"Here's our answer to that challenge, Plum," said the senator's son, and held out a paper.

"I presume you decline to play us," sneered the bully, as he took the note.

"On the contrary we take pleasure in accepting the challenge," said Dave.

CHAPTER VIII

THE RIVALS OF OAK HALL

For the moment after Dave made his announcement there was a dead silence. The faces of Gus Plum and his associates showed their disappointment.

"Going to play us, eh?" said the bully, slowly.

"You'll be beaten out of your boots," said Nat Poole, with a sneer.

"That remains to be seen," answered Roger. "We accept the challenge and we are here to arrange all the details of the game."

A talk lasting nearly a quarter of an hour followed, in which they went over such details as seemed necessary. Plainly Plum was ill at ease. He wanted to chose an umpire, referee, and linesmen from outside of Oak Hall, but the senator's son would not consent to this.

"I am satisfied to have Mr. Dale for umpire," he said. "And three of our head students can act as referee and linesmen." And so at last it was decided, but not without a great deal of grumbling.

"You won't win this time, Porter," remarked Nick Jasniff, as Dave and Roger were leaving. "After this game you'll never be heard of again in this school."

"He laughs best who laughs last," quoted Dave, and walked

away, arm in arm with Roger. Jasniff stared after him and so did Plum and Poole.

"They really mean to play after all," muttered Poole. "I was dead sure they'd decline."

"You never can tell what Porter will do," growled Gus Plum. "I'll wager he got Morr to accept."

"Well, we've got to wax 'em good and hard," remarked Nick Jasniff. "And we ought to be able to do that easily enough – with Henshaw and Babcock on our side. Those two fellows play as if they belonged to some college eleven."

"Yes, I hope great things from Henshaw and Babcock," answered the bully of Oak Hall.

When Roger and Dave returned to the members of their own eleven they were asked how Plum and his crowd had taken the acceptance of the challenge. Then the coming game was discussed from every possible point of view.

"Do you know, I'd almost rather beat Plum than some outside team," remarked Phil. "He deserves to be taken down."

"I don't like Nick Jasniff at all," said Dave, slowly. "In one way I think he is a worse fellow than either Plum or Poole."

"He has a bad eye," said Sam. "It's an eye I don't trust."

"Which puts me in mind of a story," added Shadow. "Now don't stop me, for this is brand-new – "

"Warranted?" queried Dave.

"Yes, warranted. Two Irishmen and a Dutchman got into an argument and when they separated all three were in bad humor.

The next day one of the Irishmen met the other Irishman. 'Sure, Pat,' says he. 'I don't loike that Dootchmon at all, at all.' 'Nayther do I,' answered the other Irishman. 'He has a bad eye, so he has,' went on the first Irishman. 'That's roight, he has – an' I gave him that same this very marnin'!' says the other Irishman."

"Three cheers for the new joke!" cried Roger, and a general laugh arose.

"Well, I suppose all we can do is to start practice and keep it up until the day for the match comes," said Dave, after the laughter had subsided.

"That's it," answered the senator's son. "We'll do what we can this very afternoon."

The boys went to their classroom with their heads full of the coming football contest. Roger had already made up his eleven, largely from the material of the season previous. But the boys who had gone from Oak Hall left weak spots in the line which it was next to impossible to fill.

Then came another set-back, which made Dave and the others gloomy enough, and caused Gus Plum and his associates to smile grimly to themselves. Instead of remaining clear, a cold, dismal rain set in that very afternoon and kept up for two days. To practise on the football field was out of the question, and all Roger's eleven could do was to exercise in the gymnasium. Here there was always some one of Plum's crowd to look on and see whatever was being tried in the way of a trick or a new movement.

"I hope it rains Saturday, too," grumbled Phil. "We won't be

able to make any kind of a showing at this rate."

"It will be just our luck to have good weather Saturday," sighed Shadow.

Even Dave was disheartened, but he did not show it. Instead he did all the practising he could in the gymnasium and helped Roger whip the eleven into shape. As he had said, he did not care for football as much as baseball, but he was resolved to do his best.

On Saturday morning all the boys were up early, to see what sort of weather they were going to have. The sun was under a cloud, but by nine o'clock it cleared up and a fine, warm wind from the south sprang up.

"That settles it, we have got to play," said Buster Beggs.

"Let us go out and practise as soon as we can," said the senator's son, and called the eleven without delay.

Of course the match had been talked over throughout the school and even outside. As a consequence, when the time came to play, a goodly crowd had assembled on the football field. There was cheering for both sides and the waving of a good many Oak Hall banners. In the small stand that had been put up sat Dr. Clay and about twenty visitors.

"I don't see anything of Henshaw and Babcock," said Dave, looking over the field. "They must be going to play."

"There they are, over in the corner, talking to Plum and Poole," answered Roger, pointing with his hand.

"They must be planning some new move," said Phil. "We'll

have to watch out for them."

Presently Babcock, a fine, sturdy player, came forward, followed by Henshaw. Both were frowning, and when Babcock said something to his companion Henshaw nodded vigorously. Plum and Poole came behind, and neither appeared particularly happy.

The game was to be played under the rules of that year, with two halves of thirty minutes each. When it came to the practice Roger's team did what it could. The players were full of energy, but the team work was not at all what it might have been.

"Want to tune up!" sang out one looker-on, to Roger. "Get together!"

"We are trying to," answered the senator's son.

Plum's eleven did much better in practice, working in perfect harmony. Only Poole made fumbles, for which the bully of the Hall upbraided him roundly.

"Oh, don't howl at me," growled Poole. "I am doing as well as you are."

At length the game was called and the two elevens lined up. They were pretty well matched, although Henshaw and Babcock stood out above the others.

"Wish that pair were on our side," sighed Roger. "Each of them has weight, wind, and cleverness – just the things a good football player ought to possess."

There was no time to say more. The toss-up gave Plum's eleven the ball and a few minutes later it was put into play

and sent twenty yards into our friends' territory. Then came a scrimmage and the leather went back and forth rapidly. The play was ragged, for neither side had as yet settled down to hard work. There was no brilliant play, and when the ball was carried over the line by Henshaw the applause was rather tame.

"An easy touchdown!"

"Now make it a goal."

This was not so easy, for the wind had freshened. The ball sailed outside of the posts, so that the Arrows received but five points.

Again the ball was put into play and now the work on both sides became more earnest. Several of Gus Plum's players became rough and Plum himself tried to "spike" Dave with his shoe. Dave gave the bully a shove that sent him headlong.

"A foul! Time!" was the cry.

"He tried to spike me!" cried Dave, hotly.

"I didn't!" roared the bully.

"He did – I saw it!" put in Roger.

"Have you spikes in your shoes?" demanded the umpire.

"No," muttered Gus Plum, but his face grew red.

The umpire made him show the bottoms of his shoes. Each had a small spike in it – something quite contrary to the rules, as all football players know.

"Change your shoes at once, or get out of the game," was the decision rendered, and Gus Plum ran off the field with a redder face than ever.

The first half of the game closed with the score 12 to 0 in favor of Gus Plum's eleven. A safety for Roger's team had been made by Dave, who saw it was the only thing to do when crowded by Babcock, Henshaw, and two others. The second touchdown made by the Arrows came through Babcock aided by several others.

"We could whip them if it wasn't for Babcock and Henshaw," said Luke Watson. "Those two chaps are dandy players and no mistake."

During the intermission it was seen that Gus Plum was having another lively interview with Babcock and Henshaw. But the two expert players would not listen to the bully of Oak Hall.

"Something is wrong in their camp, that's certain," was Phil's comment.

"Look here, if you say anything, I'll put you off the team!" cried Gus Plum, to Babcock and Henshaw, so loudly that many standing around could hear him.

"All right, put me off if you wish," answered Babcock sharply.

"I'll never play with you again anyway!" added Henshaw. "I've done my best to-day, but this ends it, if I never play again as long as I stay at Oak Hall."

"You're out of it, both of you!" roared Gus Plum, in a sudden rage. "Dawson, take Henshaw's place, and Potter, you take Babcock's place. I'll show you that I can run a team to suit myself."

"Very well," said Babcock, and turning on his heel he left the

field. Henshaw, without saying a word, followed his friend.

All who witnessed the scene were curious to know what it meant, but none of the other Arrow players would explain. Soon it was time for the second half of the game. Two of Roger's players had been slightly hurt, and their places were filled by two substitutes, which weakened the eleven still more.

"Henshaw and Babcock are out of it!" cried Phil, to Roger and Dave.

"That gives us a better chance to win," said the senator's son.

"If it isn't too late," returned Sam Day; "12 to 0 is a pretty hard lead to overcome."

"We'll do our best," said Dave. "Let every man go in for all he is worth!"

The play was fast and furious from the very start, and inside of two minutes Roger's players had the leather close to the Arrows' goal line. But then Nick Jasniff with extreme roughness hurled Sam Day to the ground. Jasniff was off-side at the time and his movements were consequently contrary to the rules.

"You may retire from the field," said the referee, after he and the umpire had talked the matter over.

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