

HENTY GEORGE ALFRED

THE DASH FOR
KHARTOUM: A TALE OF
THE NILE EXPEDITION

George Henty

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Tale of the Nile Expedition**

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G. A. Henty

The Dash for Khartoum: A Tale of the Nile Expedition

PREFACE

My dear Lads,

The story of the Nile Expedition is so recent that no word of introduction is necessary to the historical portion of the tale. The moral, such as it is, of the story of the two lads brought up as brothers is—Never act in haste, for repentance is sure to follow. In this case great anxiety and unhappiness were caused through a lad acting as he believed for the best, but without consulting those who had every right to a voice in the matter. That all came right in the end in no way affects this excellent rule, for all might have gone wrong. We are often misled by a generous impulse, more often perhaps than by an evil one, but the consequences may be just as serious in the one case as the other. When in trouble you should always go freely to your best friends and natural advisers, and lay the case fully before them. It may be that, if the trouble has arisen from your own fault, you will have to bear their temporary displeasure, but this is a small thing in comparison with the permanent injury that may arise from acting on your own impulse. In most cases, cowardice lies at the bottom of concealment, and cowardice is of all vices the most contemptible; while the fear of the displeasure of a parent has ruined many a boy's life. Therefore, when you are in serious trouble always go to your best friend, your father, and lay the case frankly and honestly before him; for you may be sure that present displeasure and even punishment are but small things in comparison with the trouble that may arise from trying to get out of the difficulty in other ways.

Yours sincerely,
G. A. HENTY

CHAPTER I

MIXED!

In a room in the married non-commissioned officers' quarters in the cantonments at Agra, a young woman was sitting looking thoughtfully at two infants, who lay sleeping together on the outside of a bed with a shawl thrown lightly over them. Jane Humphreys had been married about a year. She was the daughter of the regimental sergeant-major, and had been a spoilt child. She was good looking, and had, so the wives and daughters of the other non-commissioned officers said, laid herself out to catch one of the young officers of the regiment, and was bitterly disappointed at the failure of her efforts.

The report may have been untrue, for Jane Farran was by no means popular with the other women, taking far too much upon herself, as they considered, upon the strength of her father's rank, and giving herself airs as if she were better than those around her. There were girls in the regiment just as good looking as she was without any of her airs and tempers. Why should she set herself up above the rest?

When, however, Sergeant-major Farran died suddenly of sunstroke after a heavy field-day, whatever plans and hopes his daughter may have entertained came to an end. Her name and that of her mother were put down among the women to be sent, with the next batch of invalids, home to England, and she suddenly accepted the offer of marriage of young Sergeant Humphreys, whose advances she had previously treated with scorn. They were married six weeks later, on the day before her mother was to go down by train with a party of invalids to Calcutta. The universal opinion of the women in the regiment was that the sergeant had got a bad bargain.

"No man of spirit," one of them said, "would have taken up with a girl who only accepted him because she could not do any better. She has got her temper written in her face, and a nice time of it he is likely to have."

It may have been true that Jane Humphreys had during her father's lifetime had her ambitions, but she was a clever woman and adapted herself to her circumstances. If, as the sergeant-major's daughter, she had given herself airs, and had thrown herself in the way of the young officers, and had been light and flighty in her manner, all this was changed as soon as she was married, and even the most censorious were obliged to admit that she made Sergeant Humphreys a better wife than they had expected. His home was admirably kept, the gay dresses that had been somewhat beyond her station were cut up and altered, and she dressed neatly and quietly.

She was handy with her fingers, her things always fitted her well, and she gained the approbation of the officers' wives, who had previously looked upon her with some disfavour as a forward young person. She made every effort to get on good terms with the wives of the other non-commissioned officers, and succeeded at last in overcoming the prejudice which, as Jane Farran, she had excited. There was no doubt that she was a clever woman, and it was equally beyond doubt that she completely managed her husband. She was much his superior in education, and possessing far greater abilities could twist him round her little finger, although she did it so cleverly that he never suspected that he was the victim of such an operation.

A month previous to the opening of the story she had been confined of a boy, and two days later Mrs. Clinton, the wife of the captain of her husband's company, also became a mother. Before the week was over Mrs. Clinton was taken dangerously ill, and as it was impossible for her to nurse her child, the surgeon of the regiment recommended that it should be given into the charge of the sergeant's wife, as she, being a strong and healthy young woman, could very well nurse it as well as her own. It was a month after this that Sergeant Humphreys, returning to his quarters, found his wife sitting by the side of the bed on which the two infants were asleep.

"They are as alike as two peas," he said as he looked at them. "I am sure I wonder, Jane, that you know which is which!"

Mrs. Humphreys' answer did not seem to the point. "Captain Clinton is a rich man, is he not, John?"

"Yes; they say he came into a grand estate two years ago when his father died, and that like enough he will leave the regiment when it goes home next year."

"Then one of those babies will be a rich man, and the other—" and she stopped.

"The other will, I hope, be a non-commissioned officer in the 30th Foot one of these days," the sergeant said. Jane looked up at her husband. There was no touch of envy or discontent in his voice. She was about to speak but checked herself.

"Which is yours, John?" she asked a moment later, returning to his first remark.

"I am sure I could not tell," he said with a laugh. "Babies are mostly pretty much alike, and as these two are just the same age, and just the same size, and have both got gray eyes and light coloured hair—if you can call it hair,—and no noses to speak of, I don't see a pin's point of difference."

A month later a small party were assembled in Captain Clinton's bungalow. Mrs. Humphreys was standing with a baby in each arm. Mrs. Clinton was lying upon a sofa crying bitterly. Captain Clinton was walking up and down the room, hot and angry. The surgeon of the regiment was standing grave and sympathetic by Mrs. Clinton. Sergeant Humphreys was in the attitude of attention by the door, with an anxious troubled expression on his face.

"What in the world is to be done, doctor?" Captain Clinton asked. "I never heard of such a thing, it is a most serious business."

"I can quite see that," the doctor replied. "When Mrs. Humphreys came to me and asked me to break the news to you, I told her at once that it was a terrible business. I own that I do not see that she is altogether to blame, but it is a most unfortunate occurrence. As I have just told you, she had, when she put the children to bed, put your child in one of her baby's night-gowns, as it happened there were none of your child's clean. In the morning she took them out and laid them on a rug on the ground before beginning to wash and dress them. She went out to the canteen to get something for her husband's breakfast, and when she returned she could not remember the order in which she had taken them out of bed and laid them down, and could not distinguish her own child from yours."

"You must remember, Mrs. Humphreys," Captain Clinton broke in; "think it over, woman. You must remember how you laid them down."

"Indeed, I do not, sir; I have been thinking all the morning. I had nursed them two or three times during the night, and of course had changed their position then. I never thought about their having the same night-gowns on. If I had, of course I should have been more careful, for I have said to my husband over and over again that it was only by their clothes that I should know them apart, for if they had been twins they could not be more alike."

"This is downright maddening!" Captain Clinton exclaimed, pacing up and down the room. "And is there no mark nor anything by which they can be recognized? Why, bless me, woman, surely you as a mother ought to know your own child!"

Mrs. Humphreys shook her head. "I have nursed them both, sir, and which is mine and which is yours I could not say to save my life."

"Well, put the children down on that sofa," Captain Clinton said, "and take yourself off for the present; you have done mischief enough for a lifetime. I will let you know what we decide upon later on."

"Well, doctor, what on earth is to be done?" he asked after the door had closed upon the sergeant and his wife. "What do you think had best be done, Lucy?"

But Mrs. Clinton, who was but just recovering from her illness, was too prostrated by this terrible blow to be able to offer any suggestion.

"It is a terrible business indeed, Clinton," the doctor said, "and I feel for you most deeply. Of course the possibility of such a thing never entered my mind when I recommended you to let Mrs. Humphreys act as its foster-mother. It seemed at the time quite a providential circumstance that she too should be just confined, and in a position to take to your baby. The only possible suggestion I can offer is that you should for a time bring up both boys as your own. At present they are certainly wonderfully alike, but it is probable that as they grow up you will see in one or other of them a likeness to yourself or your wife, and that the other will take after its own parents. Of course these likenesses do not always exist, but in nine cases out of ten some resemblance can be traced between a boy and one or other of his parents."

"That certainly seems feasible," Captain Clinton said in a tone of relief. "What do you say, dear? It is only bringing up the two children for a time till we are able to be certain which is our own. The other will have had the advantage of a good education and so on, and of course it will be our business to give him a good start in life."

"It will be awful having the two children, and not knowing which is our own."

"It will be very unpleasant," Captain Clinton said soothingly; "but, you see, in time you will come to care for them both just as if they had been twins."

"That will be almost as bad," Mrs. Clinton cried feebly. "And suppose one gets to love the wrong one best?"

"We won't suppose that, dear; but if we love them both equally, we will, when we find out which is ours, treat the other as an adopted child and complete his education, and start him in life as if he were so. Fortunately the expense will be nothing to us."

"But this woman has a right to one of them."

"She does not deserve to have one," Captain Clinton said angrily; "but of course we must make some arrangement with her. She is bound to do her best to repair the terrible mischief her carelessness has caused. Well, doctor, we will think it over for an hour or two, but certainly your suggestion seems by far the best for us to adopt."

"The hussy!" the doctor said as he walked away to his quarters. "I am more than half inclined to believe that she has done it on purpose. I never liked the jade before she married, though I own that she has turned out better than I expected. But I always thought her a designing and artful young woman, and gave her credit for plenty of brains, and what could suit her purpose better than this change of children? She would see that in the first place she would get her own boy well brought up, and perhaps provided for, with all sorts of chances of making money out of the affair. It may have been an accident, of course, but if so, it was a wonderfully fortunate one for her."

Such was the opinion among the women of the regiment when the news became known, and Jane Humphreys was speedily made aware of the fact by the change in their manner towards her. They had, however, but small opportunity for demonstrating their opinion, for Mrs. Humphreys remained shut up as much as possible in her room, and the one or two women who were inclined to take a favourable view of the matter and so called upon her, reported that she was completely prostrated by the occurrence. Among the officers and their families the greatest commiseration was felt for Captain Clinton and his wife, and the matter was discussed at tiffin that day with great animation.

"Don't you think, doctor, that a woman must know her own child?" a young ensign asked.

"Not at all, Arbuthnot; that is to say, not if you mean that she would know it by any sort of maternal instinct. There is no such thing. She has no more means of telling her own infant out of a dozen others of similar complexion, age, and appearance, than she would have of picking out her own pocket-handkerchief out of a dozen others of similar pattern if they were all unmarked."

"But a sheep can pick out his own lamb among a hundred, doctor, and I am sure they are alike as so many peas. Surely that must be maternal instinct?"

"Not in the smallest degree, Arbuthnot. The sheep and other animals possess in a very high degree a sense which is comparatively rudimentary in human beings. I mean, of course, the sense of

smell. A sheep knows her lamb, and a cow knows her calf, neither by the sense of hearing or by that of sight. She recognizes it solely and wholly by her sense of smell, just as a dog can track its master's footsteps out of a thousand by the same sense. The two babies are as alike as twins; and I am not surprised that, if they really got mixed, this woman should not be able to detect one from the other."

"It is an awful thing for Clinton," the major said. "Here he has got a splendid estate, and he will never be certain whether his own son or a stranger is going to inherit it after him. It is enough to make a man go out of his mind."

"I don't see that that would be likely to mend matters," the doctor said dryly; "in fact it would lessen the one chance that exists of ever setting the matter straight. As I have told him, though these children are very much alike at present—and indeed most babies are—it is probable that as they grow up there will no longer be any resemblance whatever, and that his own child will develop a likeness either to him or Mrs. Clinton, while the other child will resemble the sergeant or his wife."

"We must hope it will be so," the major said, "though there are lots of fellows who don't resemble in the least either of their parents. But what is Clinton going to do about it?"

"He has not settled yet. His wife was in no condition to discuss the matter, poor lady! My suggestion was that he should bring up both the children as if they were his own, until one or other of them develops this likeness that I was speaking of."

"I suppose that is the best thing they can do, doctor; but it will be an awful business if, as they grow up, no likeness to anybody can be detected in either of them."

"Well, major, although at present it does seem an awful thing, it won't seem so bad at the end, say, of twenty years. They will naturally by that time be as fond of one as the other. The boys, in fact, will be like twins; and I suppose the property can be divided in some such way as it would be were they really in that relation to each other."

"But, you see, doctor," one of the captains said, "Mrs. Humphreys has to be considered to a certain extent too. It is hard on Mrs. Clinton; but if she gets both boys she is certain at any rate that one of them is her son, and Mrs. Humphreys will, by that arrangement, have to lose her child altogether. That seems to me pretty rough on her."

"Well, she brought it on herself," the doctor replied. "The whole thing has arisen from her carelessness."

"Do you think it was carelessness, doctor?" the major asked.

"That is a matter on which I will give no opinion, major. It is one upon which one man can form a judgment as well as another. The thing may very well have happened in the way she describes; and again it may be a very cunningly devised plot on her part. It is evident she had everything to gain by such an accident. She would get her child taken off her hands, educated, and provided for. She would calculate no doubt that she would be their nurse, and would expect, in return for giving up her claim to one or other of them, some very distinct monetary advantages. I do not at all say that the affair was not an accident. Upon the contrary, I admit that it was an accident which might very well happen under the circumstances. What I do say is, nothing could have turned out better for her."

Just as tiffin was finished, Captain Clinton's soldier-servant came into the mess-room with the request that Dr. Parker should go across to his master's bungalow. "Well, doctor," Captain Clinton said as he entered, "in the first place I want you to go up and see my wife, and give her a sedative or something, for she is terribly upset over this affair; and in the next place I want to tell you that we have agreed to take your advice in the matter, and to bring up the two children as our own until we can make out which of the two is our child; then I want your advice as to whether they can be weaned without any damage to their health. My wife is determined upon that point. They shall not be brought up by Mrs. Humphreys. There is no other woman, is there, in the regiment with a young baby?"

The doctor shook his head. "There are one or two with babies, but not with babies young enough for her to take to these. It would certainly be far better that they should have the natural nourishment,

but I do not say that they would necessarily suffer from being weaned. Still, you see, Clinton, there is a question whether this woman will consent to part with both the children."

"I quite see that, doctor, and of course I shall be ready to make any money arrangements that will content her."

"I would see the husband, if I were you," the doctor said. "He is a steady, well-conducted young fellow, and however this matter has come about, I quite acquit him of having any share in it. I think you will find it more easy to deal with him than his wife. Unfortunately, you see, there is always a difficulty with adopted children. A father cannot sell away his rights; he may agree to do so, but if he changes his mind afterwards he can back out of his agreement. However he may bind himself never to interfere with it, the fact remains that he has a legal right to the custody of his child. And though Sergeant Humphreys might keep any agreement he might make, the mother might give you no end of trouble afterwards."

"I see all that, doctor, but of the two evils I think the one we propose is the least. My wife says she could not bear to see this woman about the children, and I have a good deal of the same feeling myself. At any rate in her present state of health I wish to spare her all trouble and anxiety as much as I can, and therefore it is better to buy this woman off for the present, even though we may have to run the risk of trouble with her afterwards. Anyhow, something must be done at once. The children have both been squalling for the last hour, though I believe that they have had some milk or something given to them. So I had better send across for Humphreys, the sooner the matter is got over the better."

The young sergeant presently appeared.

"Sit down, sergeant. I want to have a talk with you over this terribly painful business. In one respect I quite understand that it is as painful for you and Mrs. Humphreys as it is for us, but in other respects you are much better off than I am. Not only do I not know which is my child, but I do not know which is heir to my estate; which is, as you will understand, a most serious matter."

"I can quite understand that, sir," the sergeant said quietly.

"The only plan that I can see," Captain Clinton went on, "is that for the present I shall adopt both children, and shall bring them up as my own. Probably in time one of them will grow up with some resemblance to myself or Mrs. Clinton, and the other will show a likeness to you or your wife. In that case I should propose to finish the education of your boy, and then to provide for him by putting him into the army, or such other profession as he may choose; for it would be very unfair after bringing him up and educating him as my own to turn him adrift. Thus, you see, in any case my adoption of him would be greatly to his benefit. I can, of course, thoroughly understand that it will be very hard for you and Mrs. Humphreys to give up your child. Very hard. And I am quite ready to make any pecuniary arrangement with you and her that you may think right. I may say that I do not think that it would be desirable that Mrs. Humphreys should continue as their nurse. I want to consider the boys as my own, and her presence would be constantly bringing up unpleasant remembrances. In the second place I think that it would be better for her that she should not act as their nurse. She would know that one of them is her own, and the separation when it came would be very much more painful than it would be at present. Of course I do not expect an answer from you just at this moment. You will naturally wish to talk it over with her, but I shall be glad if you will let us have an answer as soon as you can, as it is necessary that we should obtain another nurse without loss of time."

"What you say seems to me very fair, Captain Clinton," the sergeant said. "I would give anything, sir, that this shouldn't have happened. I would rather have shot myself first. I can answer for myself, sir, that I accept your offer. Of course, I am sorry to lose the child; but a baby is not much to a man till it gets to know him and begins to talk, and it will be a satisfaction to know that he is in good hands, with a far better look-out than I could have given him. I will see my wife, sir, and let you know in half an hour."

"Do you think that she will consent, Humphreys?"

"I am sure she will," the sergeant said briefly, and then added, "There is nothing else she could do," and saluting he went out of the room.

"He suspects his wife of having done it on purpose," Dr. Parker said, speaking for the first time since the sergeant had entered the room. "I don't say he knows it, but he suspects it. Did you notice how decidedly he said that she would consent? And I fancy up to now she has had her own way in everything."

"Well, what do they say?" Mrs. Humphreys asked as her husband entered the door. He told her shortly the offer that had been made. She laughed scornfully. "A likely thing that! So they are to have both children, and I am not to be allowed even to see them; and they are to pick and choose as to which they like to say is theirs, and we are to be shouldered out of it altogether! It is just as bad for me not to know which is my boy as it is for that woman; but they are to take the whole settlement of things in their hands, my feelings to go for nothing. Of course you told them that you would not let them do such a thing?"

"I did not tell them anything of the sort. I told them that I accepted their proposal, and that I could answer for your accepting it too."

"Then you were never more wrong in your life, John Humphreys!" she said angrily; "I won't consent to anything of the sort. Luck has thrown a good thing in our hands, and I mean to make the most of it. We ought to get enough out of this to make us comfortable for life if we work it well. I did not think that you were such a soft!"

"Soft or not soft, it is going to be done as they propose," her husband said doggedly. "It is burden enough as it is—we have lost our child. Not that I care so very much about that; there will be time enough for more, and children do not add to the comfort of close little quarters like these. But whether we like it or not, we have lost the child. In the next place we shall never hear the end of it in the regiment, and I shall see if I cannot manage to get transferred to another. There will be no standing the talk there will be."

"Let them talk!" his wife said scornfully. "What do we care about their talk!"

"I care a great deal," he said. "And I tell you why, because I know what they will say is true."

"What do you mean?" she asked quickly.

"I mean, Jane, that I know you mixed up those children on purpose."

"How dare you say so!" she exclaimed making a step forward as if she would strike him.

"I will tell you why I say so. Because I went to the drawer this morning before going to parade, and I saw some of Mrs. Clinton's baby's night-gowns in it. Yes, I see they are all in the wash-tub now; but they were there this morning, and when I heard you say you had put the child into one of our baby's night-gowns because it had no clean ones of its own, I knew that you were lying, and that you had done this on purpose."

The woman was silent a moment and then burst out, "You are a greater fool than ever I thought you! I did tell a lie when I gave that reason for putting the child into our baby's gown. When I took the two clean ones out of the drawer I did not notice until I put them on that they were both ours, and then I thought it was not worth while changing again just as the child had got quiet and comfortable. Then when I found what had happened in the morning, I had to make some excuse or other, and that occurred to me as the best. When I came back I did put them all into the wash-tub, clean and dirty, in case any one should come here to see about them. What harm was there in that, I should like to know?"

"You have acknowledged you have told one lie over it; after that you may say what you like, but you need not expect me to believe you."

"Well, why don't you go at once and tell them that you believe that I changed the children on purpose?"

"Because in the first place I cannot prove it, and because in the second case you are my wife, Jane. I took you for better or worse, and whatever you have done it is not for me to round on you."

Anyhow, I will do all I can to set this matter straight, and the only way that I see it can be set straight is by doing as Captain Clinton says—by letting him have the two children until they grow up, and then see which of the two is like them and which is like us. What do you want done? I suppose you don't want to have the care of them both. I suppose you don't want to get paid for letting them keep them both, and to have every man and woman in the regiment asking the question, Who sold their child? What is it you do want?"

"I want to go as their nurse."

"Well, then, you cannot do it. It is evident that Mrs. Clinton hates the sight of you, and no wonder; and she won't have you at any price. You had best be contented with what you have got."

"What have I got?" she asked sullenly.

"Well, you have got the trouble of the child off your hands, you have got the knowledge that it will be well taken care of and provided for and made a gentleman of. That ought to be a satisfaction to you anyhow."

"What is that when we might make a nice little fortune out of it?"

"I can see no way of making a fortune," he said, "unless you do know which is which, and offer to tell them if they will pay you for it. In which case, instead of making a fortune you would be likely to find yourself inside a prison for years—and serve you right."

The woman was silent for some time, then she said, "Very well, then, I will agree to their terms; but mind you, I will make money out of it yet." And so Sergeant Humphreys went across to Captain Clinton's bungalow and told him that his wife agreed to give up both children.

"It is by far the best thing for the little chap whichever he may be, and you will be able to do a deal more for him than I ever could. My wife did not quite see the matter at first, but she has come round to my way of thinking. No, sir, we do not want to be paid," as Captain Clinton was about to speak; "as long as I am fit for service we want nothing. Some day, perhaps, when I get past service I may ask you to give me a job as a lodge-keeper or some such post, where I can earn my living."

And so the matter was settled. One of the other officers' wives had already lent her ayah to take care of the children until one could be found for them.

The ready manner in which Sergeant Humphreys had done the only thing in his power to obviate the effects of his wife's carelessness restored him at once to the good opinion of his fellow sergeants and the men, as it was generally allowed that he had done the right thing, and that no one could do more. Opinion, however, was less favourable as to his wife. It was soon evident to all who lived in the non-commissioned officers' quarters that things were not going on well between Sergeant Humphreys and his wife. There were frequent and violent quarrels. The sergeant was often down at the canteen drinking more than was good for him.

One day Captain Clinton sent for him. "Sergeant, I am sorry to say that I hear from the sergeant-major that you were drunk last night, and that you have several times been the worse for liquor. It is not a formal complaint, but I thought it better to talk to you. You have always been a very steady man, and I should be sorry in the extreme if any thing should happen which would cause you to be brought before the colonel. I have no doubt this affair has troubled you greatly, and that it is entirely owing to that that you have become unsettled. Try to pull yourself round, man. You know that nobody attributes the slightest shadow of blame to you in the matter."

"Thank you, sir. I was coming to see you if you hadn't sent for me, to say that I wished to give up my stripes and return to the ranks. I know I shall be degraded if I don't do it of my own free-will, and I would rather go down than be sent down."

"But what will your wife do? It would be a great change to her, Humphreys."

"My wife has made up her mind to go home, sir, and I think it is the best thing she can do. She will never be comfortable in the regiment, and to say the truth we are not comfortable together. She says that she has friends in England she will go and stay with, and I think it is best to let her go. I would rather cut my hand off than ask for any thing for myself, but as I am sure that it is for the best

that she should go, and as I don't hear of any invalids or women going home at present, I should be very much obliged if you would lend me twenty pounds. I have got thirty laid by, and fifty will be enough to send her across by rail to Bombay, pay her passage home, and leave her twenty pounds in hand when she gets there. I will pay it off so much a month."

"You are welcome to twenty pounds without any talk of repayment, Humphreys. But I wouldn't take any hasty step if I were you. If your wife and you have had a quarrel she may change her mind in a day or two, and think better of it."

"No, sir; I think we are pretty well agreed on the point that she had best go home. People make mistakes sometimes, and I think we both made a mistake when we got married. Anyhow, we have both agreed that it is best to part for a time."

Accordingly three or four days later Mrs. Humphreys left Agra for Bombay, and was seen no more in the regiment. Sergeant Humphreys gave up his stripes and returned to the ranks, and for two years remained there. After his wife had left him he gradually gave up the habit into which he had fallen, and at the end of the two years again became a non-commissioned officer. He was never heard to speak of his wife after she left him, nor so far as his comrades knew did he ever receive a letter from her. Soon after he had again got his stripes the regiment returned to England, and a month later Captain Clinton sent in his papers and retired from the service.

CHAPTER II. AT CHELTENHAM

"Everything packed and ready, boys?"

"Yes, father, I think so."

"The dog-cart will be at the door at eleven. Be sure and be ready in time. It won't do to miss your train, you know. Well, you have had a pleasant holiday this time, haven't you?"

"Very," both boys replied together.

"It has been awfully jolly," one went on, "and that trip in Brittany was certainly the best thing we have done, though we have always enjoyed our holidays. It is ever so much nicer going to out-of-the-way sort of places, and stopping at jolly little inns without any crowd and fuss, than being in those great Swiss hotels as we were last year, where every one was English, and one had to be in at regular times and almost fight to get something to eat. I hope next year you will be able to take us to Norway, as you were saying yesterday. I should think it would be just the same sort of thing as Brittany, only, of course, different sort of scenery, and different language and different people. Madge, you will have to set to and get up Norse to act as our interpreter."

"You are very lazy boys. I had to do all the talking in Brittany. You are supposed to have learnt French longer than I have."

"Oh, yes; supposed. Nobody cares about their French lessons. They make no difference in your place in the school, and so no one takes the trouble to grind at them. Well, come along, let us take a turn round the place for an hour before we start." And the two boys and Madge, who was a year their junior, went out through the French window into the garden.

Captain Clinton walked to the window and looked after them. They were lads any father might be proud of, straight, well-built, handsome English lads of about sixteen. Rupert was somewhat taller than Edgar, while the latter had slightly the advantage in breadth of shoulders. Beyond the fact that both had brown hair and gray eyes there was no marked likeness between them, and their school-fellows often wondered that there should not be more similarity between twins. Both had pleasant open faces, and they were equally popular among their school-fellows. As to which was the cleverest, there were no means of ascertaining; for although both were at Cheltenham together, one was on the modern and the other on the classical side, Captain Clinton having made this arrangement purposely in order that there should be no rivalry between them, and the unpleasantness that sometimes arises when two brothers are at the same school, and one is more clever than the other, was thereby obviated. Rupert was the more lively of the two, and generally did the largest share of talking when they were together; but Edgar, although he talked less, had the more lively sense of humour, and the laughter that broke out in the garden was caused by some quiet remark of his. Captain Clinton turned sharply round upon hearing a sigh from his wife.

"Well, Lucy, I know what you are thinking: another holiday over, and we are no nearer to the truth. I own that our plan has failed so far, for I can't see in either of the boys a shadow of resemblance either to you or myself. Some people profess to see likenesses. Mr. Tomline remarked yesterday that he should have known Rupert anywhere as my son, but then Colonel Wilson said the day before that Edgar had got just your expression. I don't see a scrap of likeness either way, and I begin to think, dear, that I don't want to see it."

"No, I don't want to see it either, Percy; I love one as well as the other. Still I should like to know which is our own."

"I used to think so too, Lucy; but I have been doubting for some time about it, and now I am quite sure that I don't want to know. They are both fine lads, and, as you say, we love one just as well as the other. Parental instinct, you see, goes for nothing. I should like to know that one of them was

my son, but on the other hand I should be very sorry to know that the other wasn't. I think, dear, that it is much better as it is. We have got two sons instead of one; and after all, the idea that there would be a great satisfaction in the real one inheriting all our landed property has very little in it. There is plenty for them both, and each of them will be just as happy on three thousand a year as he would on six.

"As matters stand now, I have divided the property as nearly as possible equally between them. Madge, of course, will have her share; and I have left it in my will that they shall draw lots which shall have the part with the house and park on it, while the other is to have a sum of money sufficient to build an equally good house on his share of the estate. We can only hope that chance will be wiser than we, and will give the old house to the right boy. However, whether our son or our adopted son, whichever be which, gets it, does not concern me greatly. There is enough for our son to hold a good position and be comfortable and happy. Beyond this I do not trouble. At any rate the grievance, if there is a grievance, is a sentimental one; while it would be a matter of real grief to me should either of them, after having always looked upon us as his parents, come to know that he does not belong to us, and that he has been all along in a false position, and has been in fact but an interloper here. That would be terribly hard for him—so hard that I have ceased to wish that the matter should ever be cleared up, and to dread rather than hope that I should discover an unmistakable likeness to either of us in one or other of them."

"You are right, Percy; and henceforth I will worry no more about it. It would be hard, dreadfully hard, on either of them to know that he was not our son; and henceforth I will, like you, try to give up wishing that I could tell which is which. I hope they will never get to know that there is any doubt about it."

"I am afraid we can hardly hope that," Captain Clinton said. "There are too many people who know the story. Of course it was talked about at every station in India at the time, and I know that even about here it is generally known. No, it will be better some day or other to tell it them ourselves, making, of course, light of the matter, and letting them see that we regard them equally as our sons, and love and care for them alike, and that even if we now knew the truth it could make no difference in our feelings towards them. It is much better they should learn it from us than from anyone else."

At eleven o'clock the dog-cart came to the door. The boys were ready. Captain Clinton drove them to the station four miles away, and in two hours after leaving home they arrived at Cheltenham with a large number of their school-fellows, some of whom had been in the train when they entered it, while others had joined them at Gloucester. At Cheltenham there was a scramble for vehicles, and they were soon at the boarding-house of Mr. River-Smith, which had the reputation of being the most comfortable of the Cheltenham boarding-houses.

There was a din of voices through the house, and in the pleasure of meeting again and of exchanging accounts of how the holidays had been spent, the few lingering regrets that school-time had come round again completely vanished. Then there was a discussion as to the football prospects and who would get their house colours in place of those who had gone, and whether River-Smith's was likely to retain the position it had won by its victories over other houses in the previous season; and the general opinion was that their chances were not good.

"You see," Skinner, the captain of the team, said to a party gathered in the senior boys' study, "Harrison and White will be better than last year, but Wade will of course be a great loss; his weight and strength told tremendously in a scrimmage. Hart was a capital half-back too, and there was no better goal-keeper in the college than Wilson. We have not got any one to take their places, and there are four other vacancies in the team, and in each case those who have left were a lot bigger and stronger than any of the young ones we have got to choose from. I don't know who they will be yet, and must wait for the trial matches before we decide; but I think there is plenty of good material to choose from, and we shall be nearly all up to last year's mark, except in point of weight—there is a terrible falling off there, and we have no one who can fill the place of Wade. He was as strong as a bull; yes, he is an awful loss to us! There was not a fellow in the college who could go through a grease as he

could. You remember last year how he rolled those fellows of Bishop's over and carried the ball right through them, and then kicked the deciding goal? That was grand! Why don't some of you fellows grow up like him?" And he looked round reproachfully at his listeners. "Over thirteen stone Wade was, and there is not one of you above eleven and a half—anyhow, not more than a few pounds."

"Why don't you set us an example?" Edgar Clinton asked; and there was a laugh, for the captain of the team was all wire and muscle and could not turn ten stone.

"I am not one of that kind," he said; "but there is Wordsworth, who is pretty near six feet in length, and who, if he gave his mind to it and would but eat his food quietly instead of bolting it, might put some flesh on those spindle-shanks of his and fill himself out till he got pretty near to Wade's weight. A fellow ought to do something for his house, and I call it a mere waste of bone when a fellow doesn't put some flesh on him."

"I can run," Wordsworth said apologetically.

"Yes, you can run when you get the ball," Skinner said in a tone of disgust; "but if a fellow half your height runs up against you, over you go. You must lay yourself out for pudding, Wordsworth. With that, and eating your food more slowly, you really might get to be of some use to the house."

Wordsworth grumbled something about his having done his share last year.

"It all depends what you think your share is," Skinner said severely. "You did your best, I have no doubt, and you certainly got a good many goals, but that arose largely from the fact that there was nothing tangible in you. You see, you were something like a jointed walking-stick, and, naturally, it puzzled fellows. You have grown wider a bit since then, and must therefore try to make yourself useful in some other line. What we want is weight, and the sooner you put weight on the better. I see Easton has not come yet."

"He never comes until the evening train," another said. "He always declares it has something to do with cross lines not fitting in."

"It takes him so long," Skinner growled, "to fold up his things without a crease, to scent his pocket-handkerchief, and to get his hair to his satisfaction, that you may be quite sure he cannot make an early start. As he is not here, and all the rest that are left out of last year's team are, it is a good opportunity to talk him over. I did not like having him in the team last year, though he certainly did better than some. What do you think? Ought we to have him this year or not? I have been thinking a lot about it."

"I don't care for him," Scudamore said, "but I am bound to say he does put off all that finicking nonsense when he gets his football jersey on, and plays a good, hard game, and does not seem to mind in the least how muddy or dirty he gets. I should certainly put him in again, Skinner, if I were you."

There was a murmur of assent from three or four of the others.

"Well, I suppose he ought to play," Skinner said; "but it does rile me to see him come sauntering up as if it was quite an accident that he was there, and talk in that drawling, affected sort of way."

"It is riling," another said; "but besides that I do not think there is much to complain about him, and his making an ass of himself at other times does not affect us so long as he plays well in the team."

"No, I do not know that it does, but all the same it is a nuisance when one fellow keeps himself to himself and never seems to go in for anything. I do not suppose Easton means to give himself airs, but there is nothing sociable about him."

"I think he is a kind-hearted fellow," Edgar Clinton said, speaking, however, with less decision than usual, as became one who was not yet in the first form. "When young Jackson twisted his ankle so badly last term at the junior high jump, I know he used to go up and sit with him, and read with him for an hour at a time pretty near every day. I used often to wish I could manage to get up to him, but somehow I never could spare time; but Easton did, though he was in the college four and was working pretty hard too. I have known two or three other things he has done on the quiet. I don't care for his way of dressing nor for his drawling way of talking, in fact, I don't care for him at all personally; but he is a good-natured fellow in spite of his nonsense."

"Well, then, we must try him again," Skinner said, "and see how he does in the trial matches. There is no certainty about him, that is what I hate; one day he plays up and does uncommonly well, then the next day he does not seem to take a bit of interest in the game."

"I have noticed several times," Scudamore said, "that Easton's play depends very much on the state of the game: if we are getting the best of it he seems to think that there is no occasion to exert himself, but if the game is going against us he pulls himself together and goes into it with all his might."

"He does that," Skinner agreed; "that is what riles me in the fellow. He can play a ripping good game when he likes, but then he does not always like. However, as I said, we will give him another trial."

Half an hour later the subject of the conversation arrived. He was in the first form on the classical side, and was going up at the next examination for Sandhurst. Easton was one of the monitors, but seldom asserted his authority or put himself out in any way to perform the duties of the office. He was dressed with scrupulous care, and no one from his appearance would have said that he had just come off a railway journey. He nodded all round in a careless way as he came in, and there was none of the boisterous friendliness that had marked the meeting of most of the others.

"Affected ass!" Skinner growled to Rupert who was next to him.

"You are a prejudiced beggar, Skinner," Rupert laughed. "You know very well he is not an ass, and I am not at all sure he is affected. I suppose it is the way he has been brought up. There is no saying what you might have been yourself if you had had nurses and people about you who always insisted on your turning out spick-and-span. Well, Easton, what have you been doing with yourself since we saw you last?"

"I have been on the Continent most of the time," Easton said, in the quiet, deliberate tone that was so annoying to Skinner. "Spent most of the time in Germany: had a week at Munich, and the same time in Dresden doing the picture-gallery."

"That must have been a treat," Skinner said sarcastically.

"Yes, it was very pleasant. The worst of it is, standing about so long makes one's feet ache."

"I wonder you did not have a bath-chair, Easton; delicate people go about in them, you know."

"It would be a very pleasant way, Skinner, only I don't think I could bring myself to it."

There was a laugh at his taking Skinner's suggestion seriously.

"What have you been doing, Skinner?"

"I have been up in Scotland climbing hills, and getting myself in good condition for football," Skinner replied shortly.

"Ah, football? Yes, I suppose we shall be playing football this term."

There was another laugh, excited principally by the angry growl with which Skinner greeted this indifference to what was to him the principal feature of the year.

"I shouldn't mind football," Easton went on, after looking round as if unable to understand what the others were laughing at, "if it wasn't for the dirt. Of course it is annoying to be kicked in the shins and to be squeezed horribly in the greases, but it is the dirt I object to most. If one could but get one's flannels and jerseys properly washed every time it would not matter so much, but it is disgusting to have to put on things that look as if they had been rolled in mud."

"I wonder you play at all, Easton," Skinner said angrily.

"Well, I wonder myself sometimes," Easton said placidly. "I suppose it is a relic of our original savage nature, when men did not mind dirt, and lived by hunting and fighting and that sort of thing."

"And had never learned the nuisance of stiff shirts and collars, and never heard of such a thing as a tailor, and did not part their hair in the middle, Easton, and had never used soap," Skinner broke in.

"No; it must have been beastly," Easton said gravely. "I am very glad that I did not live in those days."

"Ah, you would have suffered horribly if you had, wouldn't you?"

"Well, I don't know, Skinner; I suppose I should have done as other people did. If one does not know the comfort of a wash and a clean shirt, one would not miss it, you see. I have sometimes thought—"

"Oh, never mind what you thought," Skinner broke in out of all patience. "Come, let us go for a walk; it is no use stopping here all this fine afternoon. Let us take a good long spin. I can see half you fellows are out of condition altogether, and the sooner we begin work the better. Will you come, Easton? After lolling about looking at pictures a twelve-mile spin will do you good."

"Thank you, Skinner; I don't know that I want any good done to me. I should not mind a walk, if it is to be a walk; but a walk with you generally means rushing across ploughed fields and jumping into ditches, and getting one's self hot and uncomfortable, and splashing one's self from head to foot. It is bad enough in flannels, but it is downright misery in one's ordinary clothes. But I don't mind a game at rackets, if anyone is disposed for it."

"I will play you," Mossop said. "I want to get my hand in before the racket matches come off."

So they went and put on their flannels and racket shoes, while the rest of the party started for a long walk with Skinner.

"I am glad he has not come," the football captain said as they started; "he drives me out of all patience."

"I don't think you have much to drive out of you, Skinner," Rupert Clinton laughed. "I believe Easton puts about half of it on, on purpose to excite you. I am sure just now I saw a little amusement in his face when he was talking so gravely."

"He will find he has got in the wrong box," Skinner said angrily, "if he tries to chaff me."

A quiet smile was exchanged among the others, for Easton was tall and well built and had the reputation of being the best boxer in the school; and although Skinner was tough and wiry, he would have stood no chance in an encounter with him.

"Well, how did you get on, Mossop?" Scudamore asked as they sat down to tea.

"Easton beat me every game. I had no idea that he was so good. He says he does not intend to play for the racket, but if he did he would have a first-rate chance. I was in the last ties last year and I ought to have a good chance this, but either I am altogether out of practice or he is wonderfully good. I was asking him, and he said in his lazy way that they had got a decent racket-court at his place, and that he had been knocking the balls about a bit since he came home."

"If he is good enough to win," Pinkerton, the captain of the house, said, "he ought to play for the honour of the house. He has never played in any matches here before. I did not know he played at all."

"That is the way with Easton," Edgar Clinton said; "he is good all round, only he never takes trouble to show it. He could have been in the college cricket eleven last year if he liked, only he said he could not spare the time. Though Skinner doesn't think so, I believe he is one of the best in our football team; when he chooses to exert himself he is out and out the best chess player in the house; and I suppose he is safe to pass in high for Sandhurst."

"He is a queer fellow," Pinkerton said, "one never knows what he can do and what he can't. At the last exam Glover said that the papers he sent in were far and away the best, but that he had only done the difficult questions and hadn't sent in any answers at all to the easy ones, so that instead of coming in first he was five or six down the list. I believe myself he did not want to beat me, because if he had he would have been head of the house, and that would have been altogether too much trouble for him. Glover wanted him to go up for the last Indian Civil, and told him he was sure that he could get in if he tried, but Easton said he wasn't fond of heat and had no fancy for India."

"I suppose he was afraid to take the starch out of his collars," Edgar laughed. "Ah! here he is; late as usual."

Easton strolled quietly in and took his place, looking annoyingly fresh and clean by the side of those who had accompanied Skinner on his walk, and who, in spite of vigorous use of clothes brushes, showed signs of cross-country running.

"Have you had a pleasant walk?" he asked calmly.

"Very pleasant," Skinner said, in a tone that defied contradiction. "A delightful walk; just the thing for getting a little into condition."

There was a murmur of assent among the boys who had accompanied him, but there was no great heartiness in the sound; for indeed Skinner had pressed them all to a much higher rate of speed than was pleasant in their ordinary clothes, although they would not have minded it in flannels.

"You all look as if you had enjoyed it," Easton said, regarding them one by one with an air of innocent approval; "warmed yourselves up a bit, I should say. I remark a general disappearance of collars, and Rupert Clinton's face is scratched as if he had been having a contest with some old lady's cat."

"I went head-foremost into a hedge," Rupert laughed. "My foot slipped in the mud just as I was taking off, and I took a regular header into it."

"And what is the matter with your hand, Wordsworth?"

"A beast of a dog bit me. We were going across a field, and the brute came out from a farmhouse. My wind had gone, and I happened to be last and he made at me. Some fool has written in a book that if you keep your eyes fixed upon a dog he will never bite you. I fixed my eye on him like a gimlet but it did not act, and he came right at me and sprang at me and knocked me down and got my hand in his mouth, and I don't know what would have happened if Skinner hadn't pulled a stick out of the hedge, and rushed back and hit him such a lick across the back that he went off yelping. Then the farmer let fly with a double-barrelled gun from his garden; but luckily we were pretty well out of reach, though two or three shots hit Scudamore on the cheek and ear and pretty nearly drew blood. He wanted to go back to fight the farmer, but as the fellow would have reloaded by the time he got there, and there was the dog into the bargain, we lugged him off."

"Quite an adventurous afternoon," Easton said in a tone of cordial admiration, which elicited a growl from Skinner.

"You wish you had been with us, don't you?" he said, with what was meant to be a sneer.

"No, rackets was quite hard work enough for me; and I don't see much fun in either taking a header into a hedge, being bitten by a farmer's dog, or being peppered by the man himself. Still, no doubt these things are pleasant for those who like them. What has become of Templar?"

"He fell into a ditch," Wordsworth said; "and he just was in a state. He had to go up to the matron for a change of clothes. He will be here in a minute, I expect."

"Quite a catalogue of adventures. If I had known beforehand that there was going to be so much excitement I might have been tempted to go with you. I am afraid, Mossop, I have kept you out of quite a good thing."

"There, shut up Easton!" Pinkerton said, for he saw that Skinner was at the point of explosion; "let us have peace and quiet this first night. You have got the best of it, there is no doubt. Skinner would admit that."

"No I wouldn't," Skinner interrupted.

"Never mind whether you would or not, Skinner, it clearly is so. Now, let us change the conversation. For my part I cannot make out why one fellow cannot enjoy football and that sort of thing, and another like to lie on his back in the shade, without squabbling over it. If Skinner had his own way he would never sit quiet a minute, if Easton had his he would never exert himself to walk across the room. It is a matter of taste. I like half and half, but I do not want to interfere with either of your fancies. Now, it is about time to set to work. I expect there are a good many holiday tasks not perfect."

There was a chorus of assent, and the senior boys went off to their private studies, and the juniors to the large study, where they worked under the eye of the house-master.

Skinner's mournful anticipations as to the effect of the want of weight in the football team were speedily verified. The trial matches were almost all lost, the team being fairly borne down by

the superior weight of their opponents. There was general exasperation at these disasters, for River-Smith's House had for some years stood high, and to be beaten in match after match was trying indeed. Skinner took the matter terribly to heart, and was in a chronic state of disgust and fury. As Easton observed to Edgar Clinton:

"Skinner is becoming positively dangerous. He is like a Scotch terrier with a sore ear, and snaps at every one who comes near him."

"Still it is annoying," Edgar, who thoroughly sympathized with Skinner, said.

"Well, yes, it is annoying. I am annoyed myself, and it takes a good deal to annoy me. I think we ought to do some thing."

"Well, it seems to me that we have been doing all we can," Edgar said. "I am sure you have, for it was only yesterday Skinner was holding you up as an example to some of us. He said, 'You ought all to be ashamed of yourselves. Why, look at that lazy beggar Easton, he works as hard as the whole lot of you put together. If it was not for him I should say we had better chuck it altogether.'"

"I observe that Skinner has been a little more civil to me lately," Easton said. "Yes, I do my best. I object to the whole thing, but if one does play one does not like being beaten. I think we had better have a talk over the matter together."

"But we are always talking over the matter," Edgar objected. "All the fellows who had a chance of turning out well have been tried, and I am sure we play up well together. Every one says that we are beaten just because we cannot stand their rushes."

That afternoon the house was badly beaten by the Greenites in the trial match, and as there was a special rivalry between Green's and River-Smith's the disgust not only of the members of the team but of the whole house was very great. Seven of the seniors met after tea in Skinner's study to discuss the situation.

"I don't see any thing to be done," Skinner said, after various possible changes in the team had been discussed; "it is not play we want, it is weight. The Greenites must average at least a stone and a half heavier than we do. I have nothing to say against the playing. We simply cannot stand against them; we go down like nine-pins. No, I suppose we shall lose every match this season. But I don't see any use in talking any more about it. I suppose no one has anything further to suggest."

"Well, yes, I have a few words to say," Easton, who had been sitting on the table and had hitherto not opened his lips, remarked in a quiet voice.

"Well, say away."

"It seems to me," Easton went on without paying any regard to the snappishness of Skinner's tone, "that though we cannot make ourselves any heavier, weight is not after all the only thing. I think we might make up for it by last. When fellows are going to row a race they don't content themselves with practice, they set to and train hard. It seems to me that if we were to go into strict training and get ourselves thoroughly fit, it ought to make a lot of difference. We might lose goals in the first half of the play, but if we were in good training we ought to get a pull in the second half. By playing up all we knew at first, and pumping them as much as possible, training ought to tell. I know, Skinner, you always said we ought to keep ourselves in good condition; but I mean more than that, I mean strict training—getting up early and going for a three or four mile run every morning, taking another run in the afternoon, cutting off pudding and all that sort of thing, and going in for it heart and soul. It is no use training unless one does a thing thoroughly."

"Well, one could but try," Skinner said. "There is no reason why one shouldn't train for football just as one does for rowing or running. You are the last fellow I should have expected to hear such a proposal from, Easton, but if you are ready to do it I am sure every one else will be."

There was a cordial exclamation of assent from the others.

"Well, of course it will be a horrible nuisance," Easton said regretfully; "but if one does go in for a thing of this sort it seems to me that it must be done thoroughly. And besides, it is very annoying

just at the ticklish point of a game, when you would give anything to be able to catch the fellow ahead of you with the ball, to find that your lungs have given out, and that you haven't a cupful of wind left."

"I believe, Easton, that you are a downright humbug," Scudamore said; "and that while you pretend to hate anything like exertion, you are just as fond of it as Skinner is."

"Well, at any rate," Skinner broke in, "we will try Easton's suggestion. From to-night the team shall go into strict training. I will see River-Smith now and get leave for us to go out at six o'clock every morning. We will settle about the afternoon work afterwards. Of course pudding must be given up, and there must be no buying cakes or things of that sort. New bread and potatoes must be given up, and we must all agree never to touch anything to drink between meals. We will try the thing thoroughly. It will be a month before we play our next match with Green's. If we can but beat them I do not care so much about the others. There are two or three houses we should have no chance with if we were to train as fine as a university eight."

The rest of the team were at once informed of the determination that had been arrived at. Had it emanated only from Skinner several of the members might have protested against the hardship of going into training for football, but the fact that Easton had proposed it weighed with them all. If he was ready to take such trouble over the matter no one else could reasonably object, and the consequence was that, although not without a good deal of grumbling at being got up before daylight, the whole team turned out in their flannels and two thick jerseys punctually at six o'clock.

"Here is an egg and half cupful of milk for each of you," Skinner said as they gathered below. "Look sharp and beat up your egg with the milk. Here is a mouthful of biscuit for each. River-Smith said he did not like our going out without taking something before we started, and Cornish, who rowed in the trials at Cambridge, told me that egg and milk was the best thing to take."

Five minutes later, comforted by the egg and milk, the party started.

"We don't want to go at racing speed," Skinner said; "merely a good steady trot to make the lungs play. We don't want to pull ourselves down in weight. I don't think, after the last month's work, we have any fat among us. What we want is wind and last. To-morrow we will turn out with the heaviest boots we have got instead of running shoes. When we can run four miles in them, we ought to be able to keep up pretty fairly through the hardest game of football."

There was a good deal of lagging behind towards the last part of the run, a fact that Skinner pointed out triumphantly as a proof of want of condition, but after a wash and change of clothes all the party agreed that they felt better for the run.

Mr. River-Smith was as much concerned as the boys at the defeats of the house at football, and when they sat down to breakfast the members of the team found that a mutton-chop was provided for each of them. Strict orders had been issued that nothing was to be said outside the house of the football team going into training; and as, for the afternoon's exercise, it was only necessary that every member of the team should take part in football practice, and play up to the utmost, the matter remained a secret. In the first two or three matches played the training made no apparent difference.

"You must not be disheartened at that," Mr. Cornish, who was the "housemaster," told them. "Fellows always get weak when they first begin to train. You will find the benefit presently."

And this was the case. They won the fourth match, which was against a comparatively weak team. This, however, encouraged them, and they were victorious in the next two contests, although in the second their opponents were considered a strong team, and their victory had been regarded as certain.

The improvement in the River-Smithites' team became a topic of conversation in the college, and there were rumours that they had put themselves into regular training, and that some one had seen them come in in a body at seven in the morning after having been for a run. The challenge cup matches were now at hand, and as it happened they were drawn to meet the Greenites, and the match was regarded with special interest throughout the school. The rivalry between the two houses was notorious, and although the Greenites scoffed at the idea of their being defeated by a team they had

before so easily beaten, the great improvement the latter had made gave promise that the struggle would be an exceptionally severe one. Skinner had for some days before looked after the team with extreme vigilance, scarcely letting one of them out of his sight, lest they might eat forbidden things, or in other ways transgress the rules laid down.

"We may not win," he admitted, as they talked over the prospect on the evening before the match, "but at any rate they will have all their work cut out to beat us. I know they are very confident, and of course their weight is tremendously in their favour. Now, mind, we must press them as hard as we can for the first half the game, and never leave them for a single moment. They are sure to get savage when they find they have not got it all their own way, and that will help to pump them. We shall have more left in us the second half than they will, and then will be our chance."

These tactics were followed out, and from the first the game was played with exceptional spirit on both sides; and as the Greenites failed, even by the most determined rushes, to carry the ball into their opponents' goal, the game became, as Skinner had predicted, more and more savage.

The sympathies of the school were for the most part with River-Smith's, and the loud shouts of applause and encouragement with which their gallant defence of their goal was greeted, added to the irritation of the Greenites. When the half-play was called neither party had scored a point, and as they changed sides it was evident that the tremendous pace had told upon both parties.

"Now is our time," Skinner said to his team; "they are more done than we are, and our training will tell more and more every minute. Keep it up hard, and when we see a chance make a big rush and carry it down to their end."

But the Greenites were equally determined, and in spite of the efforts of their opponents, kept the ball at their end of the field. Then Skinner got it and made a rush. One of the heaviest of the Greenites charged down upon them at full speed, but was encountered by Easton before he reached him, and the two rolled over together. The River-Smithites backed up their leader well, and he was more than half-way down the ground before the Greenites had arrested his progress. Then there was a close scrimmage, and for a time the mass swayed backwards and forwards. But here weight counted for more than wind, and the Greenites were pushing their opponents back when the ball rolled out from the mass.

Edgar Clinton picked it up, and was off with it in a moment, dodging through those who attempted to check his course. He was down near the Greenites' goal before two of them threw themselves upon him together; but his friends were close behind, and after a desperate scrimmage the ball was driven behind the Greenite goal. Some loose play followed, and a Greenite who had the ball threw it forward to one of his own team, who caught it and started running. The River-Smithites shouted "Dead ball!" "Dead ball!" and claimed the point; but the holder of the ball, without heeding the shouts, ran right through followed by the rest of his team, and touched down behind the River-Smith goal. The ball was then brought out and a goal kicked. All this time the River-Smithites had not moved from behind the Greenite goal, but had remained there awaiting the result of their appeal to the umpire, who now at once decided in their favour. Not satisfied with this the Greenites appealed to the referee, who confirmed the decision of the umpire. Too angry to be reasonable, the captain refused to continue the game, and called upon his team to leave the field. They were going, when the derisive shouts of the lookers-on caused them again to alter their intentions, and the game was renewed.

There were ten minutes yet remaining, and for that time the game was played with a fury that caused it to be long memorable in the annals of Cheltenham football. But weight and strength could not prevail over the superior last and coolness of the defenders of the River-Smith goal. Every attempt was beaten off, every rush met, and as no point had been added to the score when time was called, the umpire decided that the game had been won by the River-Smithites by one touch down to nothing. The captain of the Greenites appealed from the umpire's and referee's decision to the football committee of the college, who gave it against him, and he then appealed to the Rugby Union,

who decided that the umpire's decision was perfectly right, and the victory thus remained beyond further contention with the River-Smithites.

CHAPTER III. GONE

"Bravo, Clinton! Well done, indeed!" so shouted one of the big boys, and a score of others joined in in chorus.

"Which is Clinton?" a woman who was standing looking on at the game asked one of the younger boys.

The boy looked up at the questioner. She was a woman of about forty years old, quietly dressed in black with a gloss of newness on it.

"I will point him out to you directly. They are all mixed up again now."

"There are two of them, are there not?" the woman asked.

"Yes, that's the other; there—that one who has just picked up the ball and is running with it; there, that's the other, the one who is just charging the fellow who is trying to stop his brother."

"Well done!" he shouted, as Edgar's opponent rolled over.

The woman asked no more questions until the match was over, but stood looking on intently as the players came off the ground. Rupert and Edgar were together, laughing and talking in high spirits; for each had kicked a goal, and the town boys had been beaten by four goals to one. The boy to whom she had been speaking had long before strolled away to another part of the field, but she turned to another as the Clintons approached.

"Those are the Clintons, are they not?" she asked.

"Yes, and a good sort they are," the boy said heartily.

She stood looking at them intently until they had passed her, then walked away with her eyes bent on the ground, and made her way to a small lodging she had taken in the town. For several days she placed herself so that she could see the boys on their way to and fro between River-Smith's and the college, and watched them at football.

"I wonder who that woman is," Rupert said one day to his brother. "I constantly see her about, and she always seems to be staring at me."

"I thought she stared at me too," Edgar said. "I am sure I do not know her. I don't think I have ever seen her face before."

"She asked me whether you were Clinton the other day when you were playing football. It was just after you had made a run with the ball, and some one shouted, 'Well done, Clinton!' And she asked me which was Clinton, and whether there were not two of them. And of course I pointed you both out," a youngster said who was walking with them.

"That is rum, too," Rupert said. "I wonder who the woman is, Edgar, and what interest she can have in us."

"If she has any interest, Rupert, I suppose she will stop staring some day and speak. Perhaps it is some old servant, though I don't remember her. Well, it is no odds any way."

Jane Humphreys was much puzzled as to what step she should take first. During all these years she had waited she had always expected that she should have known which was her own child as soon as she set eyes on the boys, and was surprised and disappointed to find that even after a week's stay at Cheltenham, and examining their faces as closely as she could, she had not the slightest idea which was which. She had imagined that she should not only know, but feel an affection for the boy who was her own, and she had fully intended to place him in the position of Captain Clinton's heir, trusting to receive the promise of a large sum from him when he should come into possession.

Now it seemed to her that she cared no more for one than for the other, and that her best plan therefore was to place in the position of heir whichever of them was most likely to suit her purpose. But here, again, she was in a difficulty. If they resembled each other in no other point, they

both looked thoroughly manly, straightforward, and honest lads, neither of whom would be likely to entertain any dishonourable proposition. Her intention had been to say to her son, "You are not really the twin brother, as you suppose, of the other. Captain and Mrs. Clinton do not know which of you two is their child." She wondered whether they already knew as much as that. Probably they did. So many people had known of that affair at Agra, that Captain Clinton had probably told them himself. She would tell the boy, "I am the only person in the world who can clear up the mystery. I have the key to it in my hand, and can place either you or the other in the position of sole heir to the estate. I shall expect to be paid a handsome sum from the one I put into possession. Remember, on one hand I can give you a splendid property, on the other I can show you to have been from the first a usurper of things you had no right to—an interloper and a fraud."

It had seemed to her a simple matter before she came down to Cheltenham. Surely no boy in his senses would hesitate a moment in accepting her offer. It had always been a fixed thing in her mind that this would be so, but now she felt that it was not so certain as she before imagined. She hesitated whether she should not defer it until the boys came of age, and the one she chose could sign a legal document; but she was anxious to leave England, and go right away to America or Australia. Besides, if she had the promise she could enforce its fulfilment. Which boy should she select? She changed her mind several times, and at last determined that she would leave it to chance, and would choose the one whom she next met.

It chanced that Edgar was the first she encountered after having taken this resolution, and it happened that he was walking by himself, having remained in the class-room a few minutes after the rest of the boys had left, to speak to the master respecting a difficult passage in a lesson. The woman placed herself in his way.

"Well, what is it?" he said. "You have been hanging about for the last week. What is it you want?"

"I want to speak to you about something very important."

"Oh, nonsense!" he said. "There is nothing important you can have to tell me."

"Yes, there is; something of the greatest importance. You do not suppose that I should have been here for a week waiting to tell it to you, if it was not."

"Well, I suppose you think it important," he said; "so fire away."

"I cannot tell you now," she said; "it is too long a story. Could you spare me half an hour, young sir? You will not be sorry for it afterwards, I promise you."

Edgar looked impatiently at his watch. He had nothing particular to do at the moment, and his curiosity was excited. "I can spare it you now," he said.

"I am staying at this address," she said, handing him a piece of paper. "It is not five minutes' walk from here. I will go on, if you will follow me."

"All right," Edgar said, looking at the paper; "though I expect it is some fooling or other." She walked away rapidly, and he sauntered after her. She was standing with the door open when he arrived, and he followed her into a small parlour. He threw himself down into a chair.

"Now, fire away," he said; "and be as quick as you can."

"Before I begin," she said quietly, "will you tell me if you know anything relating to the circumstances of your birth?"

He looked at her in astonishment. "No," he said. "What in the world should I know about the circumstances of my birth?"

"You know that you were born at Agra in India?"

"Of course I know that."

"And your father, Captain Clinton, has never spoken to you about the circumstances?"

Edgar shook his head. "No; I only know that I was born there."

"I should have thought that he would have told you the story," she said; "for there were many knew of it, and you would be sure to hear it sooner or later."

"I do not want to hear of it," he said, leaping to his feet. "If there was anything my father wanted me to know he would tell it to me at once. You do not suppose I want to hear it from anyone else?"

He was making for the door, when she said, "Then you do not know that you are not his son?"

He stopped abruptly. "Don't know I am not his son!" he repeated. "You must be mad."

"I am not mad at all," she said. "You are not his son. Not any relation in the world to him. Sit down again and I will tell you the story."

He mechanically obeyed, feeling overwhelmed with the news he had heard. Then as she told him how the children had become mixed, and how Captain Clinton had decided to bring them up together until he should be able to discover by some likeness to himself or wife which was his son, Edgar listened to the story with a terrible feeling of oppression stealing over him. He could not doubt that she was speaking the truth, for if it were false it could be contradicted at once. There were circumstances too which seemed to confirm it. He recalled now, that often in their younger days his father and mother had asked casual visitors if they saw any likeness between either of the children to them; and he specially remembered how closely Colonel Winterbottom, who had been major in his father's regiment, had scrutinized them both, and how he had said, "No, Clinton, for the life of me I cannot see that one is more like you and your wife than the other." And now this woman had told him that he was not their son; and he understood that she must be this sergeant's wife, and that if he was not Captain Clinton's son she must be his mother.

"You are Mrs. Humphreys, I suppose?" he said in a hard, dry voice when she had ceased speaking.

"I am your mother," she said. He moved as if struck with sudden pain as she spoke, but said nothing.

"I sacrificed myself for your sake," she went on after a pause. "I had them both, and it seemed to me hard that my boy should grow up to be a boy of the regiment, with nothing better to look forward to than to enlist in it some day, while the other, no better in any respect than him, should grow up to be a rich man, with everything the heart could desire, and I determined that he should have an equal chance with the other. I knew that perhaps some day they might find out which was which by a likeness, but that was not certain, and at any rate you would get a good education and be well brought up, and you were sure to be provided for, and when the time should come, if there was still doubt, I could give you the chance of either having the half or all just as you chose. It was terrible for me to give you up altogether, but I did it for your good. I suffered horribly, and the women of the regiment turned against me. Your father treated me badly, and I had to leave him and come home to England. But my comfort has all along been that I had succeeded; that you were being brought up as a gentleman, and were happy and well cared for."

Edgar sat silent for some time. "How do you know," he asked suddenly, "that it is Rupert and not I who is the real son?"

"One of the infants," she said, "had a tiny mole no bigger than a pin's head on his shoulder, and I was sure that I would always know them apart from that."

"Yes, Rupert has a mark like that," Edgar admitted, for he had noticed it only a short time before.

"Yes," the woman said quietly. "Mrs. Clinton's child had that mark. It was very, very small and scarcely noticeable, but as I washed and dressed them when babies, I noticed it."

"Well, what next?" Edgar asked roughly.

"As I said, my boy,"—Edgar winced as she spoke—"it is for you to choose whether you will have half or all the property. If I hold my tongue you will go on as you are now, and they will never know which is their son. If you like to have it all, to be the heir of that grand place and everything else, I have only to go and say that my boy had a mole on his shoulder. There is nothing I would not do to make you happy."

"And I suppose," Edgar said quietly, "you will want some money for yourself?"

"I do not wish to make any bargain, if that is what you mean," she said in an indignant tone. "I know, of course, that you can give me no money now. I suppose that in either case you would wish to help a mother who has done so much for you. I don't expect gratitude at present. Naturally you are upset about what I have told you. Some day when you grow to be a man you will appreciate better than you can now what I have done for you, and what you have gained by it."

Edgar sat silent for a minute or two, and then he rose quietly and said, "I will think it all over. You shall have my answer in a day or two," and without another word left the room and sauntered off.

"What is the matter, Edgar?" Rupert asked two hours later. "I have been looking for you everywhere, and young Johnson has only just said that you told him to tell me you were feeling very seedy, and were going to lie down for a bit."

"I have got a frightful headache, Rupert," Edgar, who was lying with his face to the wall, said. "I am too bad to talk, old fellow; let me alone. I daresay I shall be all right when I have had a night's sleep. Tell River-Smith, will you, that I am seedy, and cannot come down to tea. I do not want the doctor or anything of that sort, but if I am not all right in the morning, I will see him."

Rupert went out quietly. It was something new Edgar's being like this, he never remembered him having a bad headache before. "I expect," he said to himself, "he got hurt in one of those scrimmages yesterday, although he did not say anything about it. I do hope that he is not going to be ill. The examinations are on next week, it will be a frightful nuisance for him to miss them." He went into Edgar's dormitory again the last thing. He opened the door very quietly in case he should be asleep.

"I am not asleep," Edgar said; "I am rather better now. Good-night, Rupert," and he held out his hand. Rupert was surprised at the action, but took his hand and pressed it.

"Good-night, Edgar. I do hope that you will be all right in the morning."

"Good-night, old fellow. God bless you!" and there was almost a sob in the lad's voice.

Rupert went out surprised and uneasy. "Edgar must be worse than he says," he thought to himself. "It is rum of him saying good-night in that way. I have never known him do such a thing before. I wish now that I had asked River-Smith to send round for the doctor. I daresay Edgar would not have liked it, but it would have been best; but he seemed so anxious to be quiet and get off to sleep, that I did not think of it."

The first thing in the morning Rupert went to his brother's dormitory to see how he was. He tapped at the door, but there was no answer. Thinking that his brother was asleep, he turned the handle and went in. An exclamation of surprise broke from him. Edgar was not there and the bed had not been slept in, but was just as he had seen it when Edgar was lying on the outside. On the table was a letter directed to himself. He tore it open.

"My dear Rupert," it began, "a horrible thing has happened, and I shall be off to-night. I have learned that I am not your brother at all, but that I was fraudulently put in that position. I have been writing this afternoon to father and mother. Oh! Rupert, to think that it is the last time I can call them so. They will tell you the whole business. I am writing this by the light of the lamp in the passage, and you will all be up in a few minutes, so I have no time to say more. I shall post the other letter to-night. Good-bye, Rupert! Good-bye, dear old fellow! We have been happy together, haven't we? and I hope you will always be so. Perhaps some day when I have made myself a name—for I have no right to call myself Clinton, and I won't call myself by my real name—I may see you again. I have taken the note, but I know that you won't grudge it me."

Rupert read the letter through two or three times, then ran down as he was, in his night-shirt and trousers, and passed in to the master's part of the private house. "Robert," he said to the man-servant whom he met in the passage, "is Mr. River-Smith dressed yet?"

"He is not finished dressing yet, Master Clinton; at least he has not come out of his room. But I expect he is pretty near dressed."

"Will you ask him to come out to me at once, please?" Rupert said. "It is a most serious business, or you may be sure I should not ask."

The man asked no questions, for he saw by Rupert's face that this must be something quite out of the ordinary way. "Just step into this room and I will fetch him," he said.

In a minute the master came in. "What is it, Clinton,—nothing serious the matter, I hope?"

"Yes, sir, I am afraid it is something very serious. My brother was not well yesterday evening. He said that he had a frightful headache, but he thought it would be all right in the morning, and he went and lay down on his bed. I thought that he was strange in his manner when I went in to say good-night to him; and when I went in this morning, sir, the bed hadn't been slept in and he was gone, and he has left me this note, and it is evident, as you will see, that he is altogether off his head. You see, he fancies that he is not my brother."

The master had listened with the gravest concern, and now glanced hastily through the letter.

"'Tis strange indeed," he said. "There is no possibility, of course, that there is anything in this idea of his?"

"No, sir, of course not. How could there be?"

"That I cannot say, Clinton. Anyhow the matter is most serious. Of course he could not have taken any clothes with him?"

"No, sir; at least he cannot have got any beyond what he stands in. I should think the matron would not have given him any out, especially as he must have told her that he was ill, or he could not have got into the dormitory."

"I had better see her first, Clinton; it is always well to be quite sure of one's ground. You go up and dress while I make the inquiries."

Rupert returned to the dormitory, finished dressing, and then ran down again. "He has taken no clothes with him, Clinton. The matron says that he went to her in the afternoon and said that he had a splitting headache, and wanted to be quite quiet and undisturbed. She offered to send for the doctor, but he said that he expected that he should be all right in the morning, but that if he wasn't of course the doctor could see him then. So she unlocked the door of the dormitory and let him in. I asked her if he had his boots on. She said no; he was going up in them, contrary to rule, when she reminded him of it, and he took them off and put them in the rack in the wood-closet. I have seen the boot-boy, and he says he noticed when he went there this morning early to clean them, No. 6 rack was empty. So your brother must have come down, after he had gone up to the dormitory, and got his boots."

"Now let us ask a few questions of the servants." He rang the bell, and sent for some of the servants. "Which of you were down first this morning?" he asked.

"I was down first, sir," one of the girls said.

"Did you find anything unusual?"

"Yes, sir. One of the windows downstairs, looking into the yard, was open, though I know I closed it and put up the shutters last night; and John says the door of the yard has been unbolted too, and that the lock had been forced."

The master went out, walked across the yard, and examined the lock.

"There would be no difficulty in opening that on this side," he said to Rupert; "it could be done with a strong pocket-knife easily enough."

"What is to be done, sir?" Rupert asked anxiously. "Shall I telegraph to my father?"

"I think you had better go and see him, Clinton. Your brother probably did not leave the house until twelve o'clock, though he may have gone at eleven. But whether eleven or twelve it makes no difference. No doubt he posted the letter he speaks of the first thing on leaving; but, you see, it is a cross post to your place, and the letter could not anyhow have got there for delivery this morning. You can hardly explain it all by telegram; and I think, as I said, it is better that you should go yourself. I will have breakfast put for you in my study, and I will have a fly at the door. You will be able to catch the eight-o'clock train into Gloucester, and you should be home by eleven."

"You do not think anything could have happened to him?" Rupert asked anxiously.

"No, I do not think that there is any fear of that, Clinton. You see, he has got a fixed idea in his head; he has evidently acted with deliberation. Besides, you see in his letter to you he says he shall not see you until he has made a name for himself. I tell you frankly, Clinton, that my own impression is that your brother is not mad, but that he has—of course I do not know how, or attempt to explain it—but that he has in some way got the idea that he is not your brother. Has he been quite himself lately?"

"Quite, sir; I have seen nothing unusual about him at all."

"Did he seem bright and well yesterday morning?"

"Just the same as usual, sir. I was quite surprised when, just at tea-time, I found that he had gone to lie down with the headache."

"Did he get any letter yesterday?"

"No, sir; we neither of us had any letter, in the morning anyhow. He may have received one in the afternoon, for anything I know."

"I will go and ask Robert," the master said; "he always takes the letters from the letter-bag."

"No, Clinton," he went on when he returned; "there were only three letters for the boys in the afternoon mail, and neither of them was for him. He cannot have seen anyone, can he, who could have told him any story that would serve as a foundation for this idea?"

Then an idea flashed across Rupert. "Well, sir, a rather curious thing has happened in the last few days. There has been a woman about here, and it appears she asked one of the boys which were the Clintons; and we have seen her every time we have been out, and we both noticed that she has stared at us in a very strange way. I don't know that that can possibly have anything to do with it. She may have spoken to Edgar yesterday. Of course I cannot say."

"Well, I must be going now. I have told Robert to put your breakfast in my study, and to send the boy for a fly."

"What will you say to the boys, sir?" Rupert asked anxiously.

"There will be no occasion to say anything for a day or two beyond the fact that you are obliged to go home suddenly. I shall only say Clinton, but it will naturally be supposed that I mean both of you. If it gets out that you have gone alone, which it may do, although I shall give strict orders to the contrary, I shall of course mention that we fear that your brother got his head hurt in that football match, and that he has taken up some strange ideas and has gone off. But it is hardly likely that the matter will leak out in any way until you return, or I hear from you. I think you can make yourself quite easy on that score."

It was half-past eleven when Rupert Clinton reached home. On the way he had thought over how he had best break the news quietly to his father, and he got out of the trap that had driven him from the station at the lodge, and made a long circuit so as to reach the stable without being seen from the front windows of the house. He went at once to the old coachman, who was a great ally of the boys. The man uttered an exclamation of astonishment at seeing him.

"Why, Master Rupert, I thought that you were not coming home for another fortnight. Well, you have given me a start!"

"Look here, Fellows, I have come to see my father about a serious matter, and I want to see him before I see my mother."

"Nothing the matter with Master Edgar, I hope, sir?"

"Yes, it is about him; but I will tell you presently, Fellows, I don't want to lose a minute now. Please go into the house and get my father to come out at once to the stables. Make any excuse you like to bring him out, and as you come along you can tell him I am here."

In five minutes Captain Clinton hurried into the saddle-room, where Rupert was standing. He was pale and agitated.

"What is the matter, Rupert,—has anything happened to Edgar? I know that it must be something very serious or you would never come like this."

"It is serious, father, very serious;" and he told him what had happened, and handed him the letter that Edgar had left. "You see he has evidently gone out of his mind, father."

Captain Clinton ran his eye over the letter and gave an exclamation of surprise and grief, then he stood for a minute covering his face with his hand. When he removed it Rupert saw that his eyes were filled with tears. "Poor boy!" he murmured, "I see that we have made a terrible mistake, although we did it for the best."

"A mistake, father! Why, is it possible, can it be true that—"

"That Edgar is not your brother, my boy? Yes, it is certain that he is not your brother, though whether he or you is our son we know not."

Rupert stood speechless with astonishment. "One of us not your son!" he said at last in a broken voice. "Oh, father, how can that be?"

"It happened thus, Rupert," Captain Clinton said, and then told him the story of the confusion that had arisen between the children. He then went on: "You see, Rupert, we hoped, your mother and I, at first that we should find out as you grew up, by the likeness one of you might develop to your mother or myself, which was our child; but for some years now, my boy, I have feared rather than hoped to discover a likeness, and have been glad that neither of you took after either of us, as far as we could see. We loved you equally, and could not bear the thought of losing either of you. We had two sons instead of one, that was all; and had one been proved to be ours, we should have lost the other. We intended to tell you in a short time how the matter stood, and that while one was our adopted son and the other our own, we neither knew nor cared which was which, loving you both equally and regarding you both as our own. Indeed we should never have told you about it, had it not been that as the story of the confusion at your birth was known to a great many men who were at that time in India, it was almost sure to come to your ears sooner or later. Had we ever dreamt that it would come like this, of course we should have told you long ago. But how can Edgar have learnt it? Still more, how can anyone have been able to tell him—what even we do not know—that he is not our son?"

"You will know when the letter arrives by the next post, father. But now I have heard the story, I think it must have been told him by a woman;" and he related how they had been watched by a woman who was a stranger to them.

"What was she like, Rupert?"

Rupert described her as well as he was able.

"I have no doubt that it was Mrs. Humphreys, Rupert; she would be about the age you describe, and, allowing for the seventeen years that have passed since I have seen her, like her in appearance. But we had better go in to your mother now, she must be told. I will go in first and break it to her. Of course there is nothing else that can be done until we get Edgar's letter. I will send a man off on horseback to the post-office, we shall get it an hour earlier than if we wait for the postman to bring it."

It was half an hour before Captain Clinton came out from the drawing-room and called Rupert in. The boy had been telling the news to Madge, having asked his father if he should do so. She had been terribly distressed, and Rupert himself had completely broken down.

"You can come in now, both of you," Captain Clinton said. "Of course, your mother is dreadfully upset, so try and keep up for her sake."

Mrs. Clinton embraced Rupert in silence, she was too affected for speech.

"Do you think," she said after a time in broken tones, "Edgar can have gone with this woman?"

"I don't know, mother; I have not been able to think about it. I should not think he could. I know if it had been me I should have hated her even if she was my mother, for coming after all this time to rob me of your love and father's. I should run away as he has done, I daresay, though I don't know about that; but I would not have gone with her."

"I cannot make out how she could have known which was which," Captain Clinton said, walking up and down the room; "we have never seen any likeness in either of you to ourselves, but it is possible she may have seen a likeness in Edgar to her husband. By the way," he said suddenly, "I must send

off a telegram to River-Smith; he, of course, will be most anxious." He took a telegram form from his desk, and after a minute's hesitation wrote: "No anxiety as to Edgar's mind can account for his conduct—will write fully to-morrow after I have received his letter—shall keep Rupert here some days." Then putting it in an envelope, he rang the bell and directed the servant to give it to one of the grooms with orders to ride with it at once to the nearest telegraph station.

"Now, Rupert, the best thing you and Madge can do is to go out for a walk. You can know nothing more until the letter arrives, and it will be better for you to be moving about than to be sitting here quietly. Your mother had best lie down until the letter comes; it cannot be here until five o'clock."

Madge and Rupert as they walked talked the matter over in every possible light, the only conclusion at which they arrived being that whoever might be Edgar's father and mother they would always regard him as their brother, and should love him just the same as before.

"I cannot think why he ran away!" Madge exclaimed over and over again. "I am sure I should not run away if I found that I wasn't father and mother's real daughter. They have been everything to me, and I could not love them a bit less if I did know that I was their adopted child instead of being their real one."

"No, certainly not," Rupert agreed; "but then, you see, Madge, Edgar may have thought that he had been adopted, not as childless people sometimes adopt children, but because they could not help adopting him."

"But that wasn't his fault, Rupert."

"No, that wasn't his fault; but I can understand him feeling that it made a great difference. Oh, I wonder what he is doing! I expect he went up to London by the night mail; he would have caught that at Glo'ster. But what could he do when he got there?"

"Oh, I am not thinking about that!" the girl said. "I am thinking what he must feel when he knows father and mother are not his father and mother, and that you and I are not his brother and sister. It must be awful, Rupert."

"It must be awful," Rupert agreed. "I do not know what I should have done had it been me, and you know it might just as well have been me as Edgar. I wish it were five o'clock!"

The afternoon seemed indeed endless to them all. For the last half-hour Rupert and Madge sat at the window gazing across the park for the first sight of the horseman, and at last they exclaimed simultaneously, "There he comes!"

Captain Clinton, who had been sitting by the sofa holding his wife's hand in his, rose. "I will go and meet him," he said. "Rupert and Madge, you had better go into the library until I call you. I must read it over first to your mother."

Without a word they went into the other room, and from the window watched Captain Clinton as he walked quickly down the drive to meet the groom. They saw him take the letter, and, as the man rode on towards the stables, open it and stand reading it.

"It is very bad," Madge said almost in a whisper, as she saw her father drop his hand despondently to his side, and then with bent head walk towards the house. Not another word was spoken until Captain Clinton opened the door and called them. Madge had been crying silently, and the tears were running fast down Rupert's cheeks as he sat looking out on to the park.

"You had better read the letter here," Captain Clinton said. "I may tell you what I did not mention before, that there was a strong opinion among many at the time, that the confusion between the children arose, not from accident, as was said, but was deliberate, and this letter confirms that view. This is what has hit Edgar so hard."

The letter was as follows:—

"My dearest father, for I cannot call you anything else, I have just heard about my birth from a woman who calls herself my mother, and who, I suppose, has a right to do so, though certainly I shall never call her or think of her so. She has told me about her child and yours getting mixed, and how you brought both up in hopes of finding out some day which was which.

"Rupert and I had noticed for some days a woman looking at us, and she met me this afternoon and said she had some thing of extreme importance to tell me. I went with her and she told me the story, and said that I was her son and not yours. I asked her how she knew me from Rupert, and she said that one of us had a small mole on the shoulder. I knew that Rupert had a tiny mole there, and she said that that was the mark by which she knew your son from hers.

"Then, father, she told me that she had done it all on purpose, and had sacrificed herself in order that I might benefit from it. This was all horrible! And then she actually proposed that I should not only keep silent about this, but offered to come forward and declare that it was her son who had the mole on his shoulder, so that I might get the whole and Rupert none. I don't want to say what I felt. I only told her I would think it over. I have been thinking it over, and I am going away. My dear father and mother, for I shall always think of you so, I thank you for all your love and kindness, which I have received through a horrible fraud. If it had all been an accident, and you had found out for yourselves by the likeness that Rupert was your son, I do not think that I should have minded, at least nothing like so much. I should, of course, have been very grieved that you were not my father and mother, and that Rupert and Madge were not my brother and sister; but it would have been nobody's fault, and I am sure that you would all still have loved me. But to know that it has been a wicked fraud, that I have been an impostor palmed upon you, that there has been a plot and conspiracy to rob you, and that I have a mother who not only did this, but who could propose to me to go on deceiving you, and even to join in a fresh fraud and to swindle Rupert, is so awful that there is nothing for me to do but to go away.

"I feel sure you will all be sorry, and that though I am not your son you would go on treating me as if I were a younger brother of Rupert's. But I could not bear it, father. I could not accept anything from you, for I should feel that it was the result of this wicked fraud, that it was what this woman, I cannot call her mother, had schemed for me to get. Some day when I have made my way, and when all this may not hurt me so horribly as it seems to do now, I will come and see you all if you will let me, to thank you all for the love and kindness that should never have been mine. But that will not be till I am in a position when I can want nothing, for I feel now that were I dying of hunger I could not accept a crust from your hands, for if I did so I should feel I was a party to this abominable fraud. God bless you, dearest father and mother and Rupert and Madge!—Your unhappy Edgar."

CHAPTER IV. BACK AT SCHOOL

It was a long time after they had, with many breaks, read Edgar's letter to the end before Rupert and Madge could compose themselves sufficiently to accompany their father into the drawing-room. They again broke down when they met their mother; and it was not until Captain Clinton said, "Come, we must all pull ourselves together and see what is to be done, and talk the whole matter over calmly," that by a great effort they recovered their composure. "Now, in the first place, we must try to find Edgar. He has got twenty-four hours' start of us, but that is not very much. I suppose you think, Rupert, that there is no doubt that he went up to town by the night train."

"I have no doubt that he got away in time to do so, father; but of course he might have gone by the down train, which passes through Gloucester somewhere about the same time."

"I do not think it likely that he did that, Rupert. I should say he was sure to go to London; that is almost always the goal people make for, unless it is in the case of boys who want to go to sea, when they would make for Liverpool or some other port. But I don't think Edgar was likely to do that. I don't think he had any special fancy for the sea; so we may assume that he has gone to London. What money had he?"

"He had that five-pound note you sent three days ago, father, to clear off any ticks we had, and to pay our journey home. That is what he meant when he said, 'I have taken the note, but I know you won't grudge it me.' I think he had about a pound left—that is about what I had—and I know when the note came he said that the money he had was enough to last him to the end of the term. So he would have the five-pound note untouched when he got to London, and if driven to it he could get, I should think, six or seven pounds for his watch and chain."

"That would give him enough to keep him some little time. If he had been a couple of years older I should say that he would probably enlist at once, as you had both made up your minds to go into the army. But although lads do enlist under the proper age, no recruiting officer or doctor would pass him as being eighteen. The first thing to do will be to advertise for him—in the first place to advertise offering a reward for information as to his whereabouts, and in the second place advertising to him direct, begging him to come home."

"But he would never come, father," Rupert said, looking at the letter, which Captain Clinton still held in his hand.

"It would depend how we advertised. Suppose I were to say, 'Statement of woman not believed; we are in as much doubt as before.'"

The others looked up in intense surprise.

"Oh, father, how could you say that?" Rupert exclaimed. "Oh, if we could but say so! I should be quite, quite content to know that either of us might be her son—that would not matter so much if we felt that you loved us both equally; but how could you say so?"

"Because, Rupert," Captain Clinton said gravely, "I still think there is great ground for doubt."

"Do you really, father? Oh, I am pleased! I think—yes, I am sure that I could bear now to know that Edgar is your real son, and not I. It would be so different to learn it from your lips, to know that you all love me still, instead of hearing it in the dreadful way Edgar did. But how do you doubt, father? It seemed to me from reading the letter so certain."

"Do you really doubt, Percy?" Mrs. Clinton asked.

"I do indeed, Lucy; and I will give you my reasons. In the first place, this woman left India a few weeks after the affair. She certainly could not have seen the children until we returned to England, and, so far as we know, has never seen them since. If she has seen them, she never can have spoken to them or come in any sort of contact with them, therefore she cannot possibly have known which is

which. When she saw them at Cheltenham, and Rupert says that she was there more than a week, she met them upon every possible occasion and stared hard at them. It is evident, therefore, that she was for all that time doubtful. No doubt she was doing what we used to do, trying to detect a resemblance. Now, if we in all these years with the boys, constantly watching their ways and listening to their voices, could detect no resemblance, it is extremely improbable that she was able to do so from merely seeing them a score of times walking in the streets. I do not say that it is impossible she could have done so; I only say it is extremely improbable; and I think it much more likely that, finding she could see no resemblance whatever, she determined to speak to the first whom she might happen to find alone."

"But there is the mark, father," Rupert said.

"Yes, there is the mark," Mrs. Clinton repeated.

"I did not know you had a mark, Rupert. I wonder we never noticed it, Lucy."

"It is a very tiny one, father. I never noticed it myself—indeed I can hardly see it before a glass, for it is rather at the back of the shoulder—until Edgar noticed it one day. It is not larger than the head of a good-sized pin. It is a little dark-brown mole. Perhaps it was smaller and lighter when I was a baby; but it must have been there then, or she would not have known about it."

"That is so, Rupert; but the mere fact that it is there does not in any way prove that you are our son. Just see what Edgar says about it in his letter. Remember the woman could not have known which of you boys had the mark; and that she did not know, that is to say, that she had not recognized the likeness, appears from Edgar's letter. This is what he says: 'She said that one of us had a small mole on the shoulder. I knew that Rupert had a tiny mole there; and she said that was the mark by which she knew your son from hers.' Suppose Edgar had replied, 'Yes, I have such a mark on my shoulder,' might she not have said, that is the mark by which I can distinguish my son from that of Captain Clinton?"

The others were silent. Then Mrs. Clinton said, "You know, Percy, I do not wish to prove that one more than the other of the boys is ours; but naturally the woman would wish to benefit her own boy, and if it had been her own boy who had the mark, why should she not have told Edgar that she had made a mistake, and that it was Rupert who was her son?"

"I do not suppose, Lucy, that she cared in the slightest which was her son; her main object, of course, was to extort money. Edgar does not say anything at all about that; and of course at first she would try and make out that she was ready to sacrifice herself for him, and would scarcely say that she expected him to make her a handsome allowance when he came into the property, but I have no doubt that was her motive. Well, you see, she had already begun with Edgar. Suppose she said that she had made a mistake, and Rupert was her son. Edgar would have gone in and told him, and would probably have telegraphed to me, so that I could get to Rupert before this woman saw him, and she would have known then that her story would have been upset altogether. No court of law would attach any weight to what she might say. She would have to stand confessed as having been concerned in a gross fraud, and with having lied at first; and unless she was in a position to produce corroborative evidence to prove that her child had this mark, her word would go for nothing.

"Now, I feel sure that she could produce no such evidence. The mark was almost an invisible one, for it was never afterwards noticed. Had she shown it to any of the women of her acquaintance, they would have come forward when the change of children took place, and have pointed out that the children could be easily distinguished, inasmuch as my child had a peculiar mark. I feel sure that even her husband knew nothing about this mark, for I don't believe he was a party to the fraud. He was terribly upset by the whole business, and took to drink afterwards. There were continual quarrels between his wife and himself, and she left him and went to England. I believe if he could have pointed out which was my child and which was his own, he would have done so.

"Certainly, I myself should have attached little or no weight to this woman's story if she had come here with it. I should have turned her out of the house, and have told her to go to a court if she dare and claim the custody of her son. She must have known the weakness of her own position,

and as I say, having once opened the matter to Edgar, she determined to stick to it, knowing that a boy taken thus on a sudden would be likely to believe her, whereas if she said that you were her son she would find you already prepared and probably have to confront me too. So you see, Rupert, I can truthfully advertise—'Woman's story not believed; we are in as much doubt as before; both are regarded by us as our sons.'"

"I am glad, father!" Rupert exclaimed excitedly. "Oh! if Edgar had but written to you first, instead of going straight away."

"It would have been better," Captain Clinton said, "but I cannot blame him. I think it was natural that he should go as he did. He would have thought that had he written to me it would have seemed as if he wanted something from me, and anything would have seemed better to him than that. However, we must set about doing something at once. I shall go by the nine o'clock local to Swindon, and on by the night mail to town. Then I shall set a detective at work. He may find out from the porters if anyone noticed a lad arrive by the night mail this morning, and shall draw up carefully-worded advertisements. I shall write to Mr. River-Smith before I start. What would you like, Rupert—to go back to-morrow, or to stay away until the end of the term? If you take my advice, you will go back; it would be a pity for you to miss your examinations."

"I don't think I could get through the examinations, father, with this on my mind; besides, what should I say to the fellows about Edgar's going away? You see, if we find him before next term begins, we need say nothing about it."

"You would have to account for his having run away, Rupert, anyhow. I think you had better go back, my boy, and tell the facts of the story. There is not the slightest discredit in it, and it would be better for Edgar himself that it should be known that he went under the influence of a mistake than that all sorts of reasons should be assigned for his absence. There will, of course, be no occasion to go into full details. You would tell the story of the confusion that arose as to the children, and say that Edgar had received some information which led him erroneously to conclude that the problem was solved, and that he was not my son, and that therefore he had run away so as to avoid receiving any further benefits from the mistake that had been made."

"Perhaps that would be best, father. Indeed I don't know what I should do if I were to stop here now with nothing to do but to worry about him."

"I am sure it will be best, Rupert. I will tell your master you will return to-morrow afternoon."

Captain Clinton went up to town by the night mail, and in the morning went to a private detective's office. After giving particulars of Edgar's age and appearance he went on: "As he had no luggage with him, and there was nothing particular about his personal appearance, I consider it altogether useless to search for him in London; but I think it possible that he may try to enlist."

"Sixteen is too young for them to take him, unless he looks a good deal older than he is."

"Yes, I quite see that. At the same time that is the only thing that occurs to us as likely for him to try."

"Not likely to take to the sea, sir?"

"Not at all likely from what we know of his fancies. Still he might do that for a couple of years with a view to enlisting afterwards."

"How about going to the States or Canada?"

"That again is quite possible."

"Had he money with him, sir?"

"He had about five pounds in his pocket, and a gold watch and chain that he had only had a few months, and could, I should think, get seven or eight pounds for; but I do not see what he could do to get his living if he went abroad."

"No, sir; but then young gents always have a sort of fancy that they can get on well out there, and if they do not mind what they turn to I fancy that most of them can. Is he in any trouble, sir?"

You will excuse my asking, but a young chap who gets into trouble generally acts in a different sort of way to one who has gone out what we may call venturesome."

"No, he has got into no trouble," Captain Clinton said. "He has gone away under a misunderstanding, but there is nothing whatever to make him wish to conceal himself beyond the fact that he will do all he can to prevent my tracing him at present. Here are half a dozen of his photos. If you want more I can get them struck off."

"I could do with another half-dozen," the man said. "I will send them down to men who act with me at Southampton, Hull, Liverpool, Glasgow, and Plymouth, and will send two or three abroad. He might cross over to Bremen or Hamburg, a good many go that way now. I will look after the recruiting offices here myself; but as he is only sixteen, and as you say does not look older, I do not think there is a chance of his trying that. No recruiting sergeant would take him up. No, sir; I should say that if he has no friends he can go to, the chances are he will try to ship for the States or Canada. But what are we to do if we find him?"

Captain Clinton had not thought of this.

"Of course," the man went on, "if you gave an authority for me to send down to each of my agents, they could take steps to stop him."

"No," Captain Clinton said after a pause, during which he had been thinking that as he could not swear that Edgar was his son, he was in fact powerless in the matter. "No, I do not wish that done. I have no idea whatever of coercing him. I want, if possible, to see him and converse with him before he goes. If that is not possible, and if he is not found until just as the ship is sailing, then I want your agent to wire to me the name of the steamer in which he goes and the port to which it sails. Then if there is a faster steamer going, I might be there as soon as he is; if not, I should wish you to telegraph to a private detective firm across the water, which I suppose you could do, to have somebody to meet the steamer as she came in, and without his knowing it to keep him under his eye until I arrive."

"I could manage all that, sir, easily enough. I will send off four of the photographs at once to the ports and the others as soon as I get them, and will go down with the other photograph to the recruiting office and arrange with one of the sergeants engaged there to let me know if he turns up, and will send a man down to the docks to watch the ships there. I will send off the other photos directly I get them."

There was nothing else for Captain Clinton to do, but before he returned home he wrote out a series of advertisements and left them at the offices of the principal papers. They ran as follows:—"If E.C., who left Cheltenham suddenly, will return home he will find that he has acted under a misapprehension. The woman's story was untrustworthy. He is still regarded as a son by P.C. and L.C." Having done this he drove to Paddington, and went down by an afternoon train.

Rupert arrived at Cheltenham just as the others had sat down to tea.

"Hullo, Clinton! Back again, eh? Glad to see you."

Rupert nodded a reply to the greeting. His heart was too full to speak, and he dropped into the seat he was accustomed to use, the others moving up closely to make room for him. A significant glance passed between the boys. They saw that Edgar was not with him, and guessed that there was something wrong. There had been a good deal of wonder among them at the Clintons' sudden disappearance, and although several of the boys had seen Rupert go into his brother's dormitory none had seen Edgar, and somehow or other it leaked out that Rupert had started in a cab to the station alone. There had been a good deal of quiet talk among the seniors about it. All agreed that there was something strange about the matter, especially as Robert, when questioned on the subject, had replied that Mr. River-Smith's orders were that he was to say nothing about it. As a precautionary measure orders were given to the juniors that no word about the Clintons' absence was to be said outside the house.

After tea was over Rupert went up to Pinkerton.

"Pinkerton, I should like to have a talk with you and Easton and two or three others—Skinner, and Mossop, and Templer—yes, and Scudamore."

"Just as you like, Clinton. Of course if you like to tell us anything we shall be glad to hear it, but we all know that your brother was not the sort of fellow to get into any dishonourable sort of scrape, and I can promise you we shall ask no questions if you would rather keep the matter altogether to yourself."

"No, I would rather tell you," Rupert said. "I know none of you would think that Edgar would have done anything wrong, but all sorts of stories are certain to go about, and I would rather that the truth of the matter were known. You are the six head fellows of the house, and when I have told you the story you can do as you like about its going further."

"Well, if you go up to my study," Pinkerton said, "I will bring the others up."

In three or four minutes the party were gathered there.

"Look here, Clinton," Easton said, "Pinkerton says he has told you that we are all sure that, whatever this is all about, your brother has done nothing he or you need be ashamed about. I should like to say the same thing, and if it is painful for you to tell it do not say anything about it. We shall be quite content to know that he has left, if he has left—although I hope we shall see him again next term for some good reason or other."

"No, I would rather tell it," Rupert said. "It is a curious story, and a very unpleasant one for us, but there is nothing at all for us to be ashamed about." And he went on to tell them the whole story, ending with "You see, whether Edgar or I am the son of Captain Clinton, or of this sergeant and his scheming wife, is more than we can say."

"It does not matter a bit to us," Easton said, breaking the silence of surprise with which they had listened to the story. "We like you and your brother for yourselves, and it does not matter a rap to us, nor as far as I can see to anyone else, who your fathers and mothers were."

"I call it horribly hard lines for you both," Skinner put in; "deuced hard lines, especially for your brother."

Pinkerton said: "By what you say Captain Clinton and his wife don't care now which is their real son; one is real and the other adopted, and as they regard you in the same light they don't even want to know which is which. Well, now you know that, it seems to me you are all right anyhow. You see your brother didn't know that, and when this woman told him she was his mother, and that the whole thing had been a preconcerted plot on her part, I can quite understand his going straight away. I think we should all have done the same if we had had the same story told to us, and had seen we were intended to be parties to a fraud of that sort. Well, I am glad you told us, but I do not think there is any occasion for the story to go further."

"Certainly not," Easton agreed, "it would do no good whatever; and of course it would never be kept in the house, but would come to be the talk of the whole school. All that need be said is that Clinton has told us the reason of his brother leaving so suddenly, that we are all of opinion that he acted perfectly rightly in doing so, and that nothing more is to be said about the matter. We will each give Clinton our word of honour not to give the slightest hint to anyone about it, or to say that it is a curious story or anything of that sort, but just to stick to it that we have heard all about it and are perfectly satisfied."

"That will certainly be the best plan," Pinkerton agreed; "but I think it would be as well for us to say he has left for family reasons, and that it is nothing in any way connected with himself, and that we hope that he will be back again next term."

"Yes, we might say that," Easton agreed; "family reasons mean all sorts of things, and anyone can take their choice out of them. Well, Clinton, I shouldn't worry over this more than you can help. I daresay Edgar will be found in a day or two. At any rate you may be sure that no harm has come to him, or is likely to come to him. If he emigrates, or anything of that sort, he is pretty safe to make his way, and I am sure that whatever he is doing he will always be a gentleman and a good fellow."

"That he will," Mossop said cordially. "I hope we should all have done as he has under the same circumstances, but it would be a big temptation to some fellows to have the alternative of a good fortune and a nice estate on one side, and of going out into the world and making your own living how you can on the other."

There was a chorus of assent.

"Yes," Easton said, "it is very easy to say 'Do what is right and never mind what comes of it;' but we should all find it very hard to follow it in practice if we had a choice like that before us. Well, you tell your brother when you hear of him, Clinton, that we all think better of him than before, and that whether he is a sergeant's son or a captain's we shall welcome him heartily back, and be proud to shake his hand."

And so it was settled, and to the great disappointment of the rest of the house no clue was forthcoming as to the cause of Edgar Clinton leaving so suddenly; but as the monitors and seniors all seemed perfectly satisfied with what they had heard, it was evident to the others that whatever the cause might be he was not to blame in the matter.

During the short time that remained of the term Rupert got on better than he had expected. While the examination was going on Easton invited him to do his work in his private study, gave him his advice as to the passages likely to be set, and coached him up in difficult points, and he came out higher in his form than he had expected to do.

Three days before the school broke up Easton said: "Clinton, I have had a letter from my father this morning, and he will be very glad if you will come down to spend the holidays at our place. And so shall I. There is very good hunting round us. My father has plenty of horses in his stables, and I expect we shall be rather gay, for my brother comes of age in the week after Christmas, and there is going to be a ball and so on. I don't know how you feel about it, but I should say that it would be better for you than being at home where everything will call your brother to your mind, and your being there will make it worse for the others."

"I am very much obliged to you, Easton; I should like it very much. I will write off to the governor at once and hear what he says. They might like to have me home, and possibly I might be useful in the search for Edgar. As I have told you, I feel sure that he has enlisted. He would be certain to change his name, and it would be no use anyone who did not know him going to look at the recruits."

"But we agreed, Clinton, that no one would enlist him at his age, and he is altogether too old to go as a band-boy."

"Yes, I know that; and that is what worries me more than anything. Still I cannot help thinking that he will try some how to get into the army. If he can't, I believe he will do anything he can to get a living until they enlist him."

"I don't think he can anyhow pass as eighteen, Clinton. If it was for anything else he might get up with false moustache or something; but you see he has got to pass a strict examination by a surgeon. I have heard that lots of fellows do enlist under age, but then some fellows look a good bit older than they are. I don't believe any doctor would be humbugged into believing that Edgar is anything like eighteen."

"Well, I will write to my father this afternoon and hear what he says. If he thinks I cannot do any good and they don't want me at home, I shall be very pleased to come to you."

Captain Clinton's letter came by return of post. He said that he was very pleased Rupert had had an invitation that would keep him away. "We have received no news whatever of Edgar, and I don't think that it would be of any use for you to join in the search for him. There is no saying where he may have gone or what he may be doing. I agree with you that he will most likely take any job that offers to keep him until he can enlist. Arrangements have been made with one of the staff sergeants at the head-quarters of recruiting in London to let us know if any young fellow answering to Edgar's description comes up to be medically examined. So we shall catch him if he presents himself there."

Unfortunately there are such a number of recruiting depôts all over the country, that there is no saying where he may try to enlist—that is, if he does try. However, at present there is certainly nothing you can do. I should like to have you home, and your mother says she should like you too, but I do think that for her sake it is better you should not come. As long as you are away there is nothing to recall at every moment the fact that Edgar has gone, whereas if you were here his absence would be constantly be before her. She is quite ill with anxiety, and Dr. Wilkinson agrees with me that change is most desirable. I am sure she would not hear of going away if you were at home; it would give her a good excuse for staying here; but when she hears that you are not coming I think I may be able to persuade her to listen to Wilkinson's opinion, and in that case I shall take her and Madge down to Nice at once. If I can get her there by Christmas so much the better, for Christmas at home would be terribly trying to us all. Once we are there, we can wander about for two or three months in Italy or Spain, or across to Algeria or Egypt—anything to distract her mind."

Accordingly Rupert accepted Easton's invitation, and went with him to his father's in Leicestershire. Had it not been for the uncertainty about Edgar he would have enjoyed his holidays greatly. Although he had always joined to a certain extent in the chaff of his school-fellows at Easton's care about his dress and little peculiarities of manner, he had never shared in Skinner's prejudices against him, and always said that he could do anything well that he chose to turn his hand to, and had appreciated his readiness to do a kindness to anyone who really needed it. It had been his turn now, and the friendly companionship of the elder boy had been of the greatest value to him. Easton had never said much in the way of sympathy, which indeed would have jarred Rupert's feelings, but his kindness had said more than words could do; and Rupert, as he looked back, felt ashamed at the thought that he had often joined in a laugh about him.

At home the points that had seemed peculiar at school were unnoticeable. The scrupulous attention to dress that had there been in strong contrast to the general carelessness of the others in that respect, seemed but natural in his own house, where there were a good many guests staying. Rupert and Edgar had always been more particular at home than at school; but Easton was the same, indeed Rupert thought that he was if anything less particular now than he had been at River-Smith's.

A week after Christmas Rupert received a letter from his father, written at Nice, saying that a letter from Edgar had been forwarded on from home, and giving the brief words in which the lad said that he was well, and that they might be under no uneasiness respecting him. "This does not tell us much," Captain Clinton went on, "but we are very pleased, inasmuch as it seems that Edgar does not mean altogether to drop out of our sight, but will, we hope, write from time to time to let us know that at any rate he is well. The letter has the London post-mark, but of course that shows nothing; it may have been written anywhere and sent to anyone—perhaps to a waiter at an hotel at which he stopped in London, and with whom he had arranged to post any letters that he might inclose to him. The letter has greatly cheered your mother, who, in spite of all I could say, has hitherto had a dread that Edgar in his distress might have done something rash. I have never thought so for an instant. I trust that my two boys are not only too well principled, but too brave to act a coward's part, whatever might befall them. Your mother, of course, agreed with me in theory; but while she admitted that Edgar would never if in his senses do such a thing, urged that his distress might be so great that he would not be responsible for what he was doing. Happily this morbid idea has been dissipated by the arrival of the letter, and I have great hopes now that she will rouse herself, and will shake off the state of silent brooding which has been causing me so much anxiety. It was but this morning that we received the letter, and already she looks brighter and more like herself than she has done since you brought us the news of Edgar's disappearance."

This news enabled Rupert to enjoy the remainder of the holidays much more than he had done the first fortnight. He and Edgar had both been accustomed to ride since they had been children, and had in their Christmas holidays for years accompanied their father to the hunting field, at first upon ponies, but the previous winter on two light-weight carrying horses he had bought specially for them.

Mr. Easton had several hunters, and Rupert, who was well mounted, thoroughly enjoyed the hunting, and returned to school with his nerves braced up, ready for work.

"I won't say anything against Easton again," Skinner said when he heard from Rupert how pleasant his holidays had been made for him. "I noticed how he took to you and made things smooth for you the last ten days of the term, and I fully meant to tell him that I was sorry I had not understood him better before; only, in the first place, I never happened to have a good opportunity, and in the second place I don't know that I ever tried to make one. However, I shall tell him now. It is not a pleasant thing to be obliged to own that you have behaved badly, but it is a good deal more unpleasant to feel it and not have the pluck to say so."

Accordingly the next time Easton came into the senior study, Skinner went up to him and said:

"Easton, I want to tell you that I am uncommonly sorry that I have set myself against you because you have been more particular about your dress and things than the rest of us, and because you did not seem as keen as we were about football and things. I know that I have behaved like an ass, and I should like to be friends now if you will let me."

"Certainly I will, Skinner," Easton said, taking the hand he held out. "I don't know that it was altogether your fault. My people at home are rather particular about our being tidy and that sort of thing, and when I came here and some of you rather made fun of me about it, I think that I stuck to it all the more because it annoyed you. I shall be going up for Sandhurst this term, and I am very glad to be on good terms with all you fellows before I leave; so don't let us say anything more about it."

And with another shake of the hands their agreement to be friends was ratified.

The term between Christmas and Easter was always the dullest of the year. The house matches at football were over. Although a game was sometimes played, there was but a languid interest in it. Paper-chases were the leading incident in the term, and there was a general looking forward to spring weather, when cricket could begin and the teams commence practice for the matches of the following term.

Easton was going up in the summer for the examination for the line. He was not troubling himself specially about it; and indeed his getting in was regarded as a certainty, for Mr. Southley had said that he would be safe for the Indian Civil if he chose to try, and considered it a great pity that he was going up for so comparatively an easy competition as that for the line. He occasionally went for a walk with Rupert, and while chatting with him frequently about Edgar, was continually urging him not to let his thoughts dwell too much upon it, but to stick to his work.

The watch at the various ports had long since been given up, for had Edgar intended to emigrate he would certainly have done so very shortly after his arrival in London, as his means would not have permitted him to make any stay there.

"I think it is very thoughtful of Edgar," Easton said one day when Rupert told him that he had heard from his father that another letter had arrived. "So many fellows when they run away or emigrate, or anything of that sort, drop writing altogether, and do not seem to give a thought to the anxiety those at home are feeling for them. He is evidently determined that he will go his own way and accept no help from your people, and under the circumstances I can quite enter into his feelings; but, you see, he does not wish them to be anxious or troubled about him, and I don't think there is anything for you to worry about, Clinton. He may be having a hardish time of it; still he is no doubt getting his living somehow or other, and I don't know that it will do him any harm."

"I think he is the sort of fellow to make his way in whatever line he takes up, and though what he has learnt here may not be of much use to him at the start, his having had a good education is sure to be of advantage to him afterwards. A fellow who could hold his own in a tussle such as we had with the Greenites last term can be trusted to make a good fight in anything. At any rate it is of no use your worrying yourself about him. You see, you will be going up in a year's time for your examination for the line, and you will have to stick to it pretty steadily if you are to get through at the first trial. It won't help matters your worrying about him, and wherever he is and whatever he is doing he is sure to

keep his eye on the lists, and he will feel just as much pleasure in seeing your name there as he would have done if he had been here with you. So I should say, work steadily and play steadily. You have a good chance of being in the college boat next term; that and shooting will give you enough to do.

"It is no use sticking to it too hard. I was telling Skinner yesterday he will regularly addle his brain if he keeps on grinding as he is doing now. But it is of no use talking to Skinner; when his mind is set on a thing he can think of nothing else. Last term it was football, now it is reading. It must be an awful nuisance to be as energetic as he is. I cannot see why he should not take life comfortably."

"He would say," Rupert laughed, "he cannot see why he should do things by fits and starts as you do, Easton."

"Ah! but I do not do it on principle," Easton argued. "I am all for taking it quietly, only sometimes one gets stirred up and has to throw one's self into a thing. One does it, you know, but one feels it a nuisance—an unfair wear and tear of the system."

"Your system does not seem to suffer seriously, Easton."

"No; but it might if one were called upon to do these things often. But it is time for us to turn back, or we shall be late for tea."

CHAPTER V. ENLISTED

Edgar had found but little difficulty in getting out from the house. He had timed himself so as to arrive at the station just before the train left for Gloucester, and taking his ticket, had slipped into an empty carriage. At Gloucester there was half an hour to wait before the up-train came in. This time he got into a carriage with several other people. He did not want to spend the night thinking, and as long as his fellow-passengers talked he resolutely kept his attention fixed on what they were saying. Then when one after the other composed themselves for a sleep, he sat with his eyes closed, thinking over his school-days. He had already, while he lay tossing on his bed, thought over the revelation he had heard from every point of view. He had exhausted the subject, and would not allow his thoughts to return to it.

He now fought the football match of the Greenites over again in fancy. It seemed to him that it was an event that had taken place a long time back, quite in the dim distance, and he was wondering vaguely over this when he too fell asleep, and did not wake up until the train arrived at Paddington. It was with a feeling of satisfaction that he stepped out on to the platform. Now there was something to do. It was too early yet to see about lodgings. He went to a little coffee-house that was already open for the use of the workmen, had some breakfast there, and then walked about for two or three hours until London was astir, leaving his things at the coffee-house. Then he went to a pawnbroker's and pawned his watch and chain. Then, having fetched his things from the coffee-house, he went into the Edgware Road and took an omnibus down to Victoria and then walked on across Vauxhall Bridge, and set to work to look for lodgings.

He was not long in finding a bed-room to let, and here he installed himself. He was convinced Captain Clinton would have a vigilant search made for him, but he thought that he was now fairly safe, however sharp the detectives might be in their hunt for him. He felt deeply the sorrow there would be at home, for he knew that up to now he and Rupert had been loved equally, and that even the discovery that he had had no right to the care and kindness he had received would make no great difference in their feeling towards him. Had the change of children been really the result of accident, he would not have acted as he had done.

He himself had had no hand in the fraud, but were he to accept anything now from Captain Clinton he felt that he would be an accessory to it. Had not his mother, his own mother, proposed that he should take part in the plot, that he should go on deceiving them, and even that he should rob Rupert altogether of his inheritance? It was too horrible to think of. There was nothing for it that he could see but for him to go out utterly from their lives, and to fight his way alone until he could, at any rate, show them that he needed nothing and would accept nothing. He was dimly conscious himself that he was acting unkindly and unfairly to them, and that after all they had done for him they had a right to have a say as to his future; but at present his pride was too hurt, he was too sore and humiliated to listen to the whisper of conscience, and his sole thought was to hide himself and to make his own way in the world.

Lest his resolution should be shaken he carefully abstained from a perusal of the papers, lest his eye might fall upon an advertisement begging him to return. His mind was made up that he would enlist. He knew that at present he could not do so as a private, but he thought that he might be accepted as a trumpeter. He thought it probable that they would guess that such was his intention, and would have given a description of him at the recruiting offices. It was for this reason that he determined to live as long as he could upon his money before trying to enlist, as if some time elapsed he would be less likely to be recognized as answering the description that might be given by Captain Clinton than

if he made the attempt at once. From Vauxhall he often crossed to Westminster, and soon struck up an acquaintance with some of the recruiting sergeants.

"Want to enlist, eh?" one of them said.

"I am thinking of entering as a trumpeter."

"Well, you might do that. There are plenty of younger lads than you are trumpeters in the cavalry. I will look at the list and see what regiments have vacancies; but I doubt whether they will take you without a letter from your father saying that you are enlisting with his consent."

"I have no father that I know of," Edgar said.

"Well, then, it is likely they will want a certificate from a clergyman or your schoolmaster as to character; and I expect," the sergeant said shrewdly, "you would have a difficulty in getting such a paper."

Edgar nodded.

"Well, lad, if you have quite made up your mind about it, my advice would be, do not try here. In London they are a lot more particular than they are down in the country, and I should say you are a good deal more likely to rub through at Aldershot or Canterbury than you would be here. They are more particular here. You see, they have no great interest in filling up the ranks of a regiment, while when you go to the regiment itself, the doctors and officers and all of them like seeing it up to its full strength, so their interest is to pass a recruit if they can. I have known scores and hundreds of men rejected here tramp down to Aldershot, or take the train if they had money enough in their pockets to pay the fare, and get passed without a shadow of difficulty."

"I would rather not enlist for the next month or two," Edgar said; "there might be somebody asking after me."

"If you will take my advice, lad, you will go back to your friends. There are many young fellows run away from home, but most of them are precious sorry for it afterwards."

"I am not likely to be sorry for it, sergeant, and if I am I shall not go back. Do you think I could find anyone who would give me lessons on the trumpet?"

"I should say that there would not be any difficulty about that. There is nothing you cannot have in London if you have got money to pay for it. If you were to go up to the Albany Barracks and get hold of the trumpet-major, he would tell you who would teach you. He would not do it himself, I daresay, but some of the trumpeters would be glad to give you an hour a day if you can pay for it. Of course it would save you a lot of trouble afterwards if you could sound the trumpet before you joined."

Edgar took the advice, and found a trumpeter in the Blues who agreed to go out with him for an hour every day on to Primrose Hill, and there teach him to sound the trumpet. He accordingly gave up his room at Vauxhall, and moved across to the north side of Regent's Park. For six weeks he worked for an hour a day with his instructor, who, upon his depositing a pound with him as a guarantee for its return, borrowed a trumpet for him, and with this Edgar would start of a morning, and walking seven or eight miles into the country, spend hours in eliciting the most mournful and startling sounds from the instrument.

At the end of the six weeks his money was nearly gone, although he had lived most economically, and accordingly, after returning the trumpet to his instructor, who, although he had been by no means chary of abuse while the lessons were going on, now admitted that he had got on first-rate, he went down to Aldershot, where his friend the recruiting sergeant had told him that they were short of a trumpeter or two in the 1st Hussars.

It was as well that Edgar had allowed the two months to pass before endeavouring to enlist, for after a month had been vainly spent in the search for him, Rupert had suggested to his father that although too young to enlist in the ranks Edgar might have tried to go in as a trumpeter, and inquiries had been made at all the recruiting depôts whether a lad answering to his description had so enlisted. The sergeant had given him a note to a sergeant of his acquaintance in the Hussars.

"I put it pretty strong, young un," his friend had said when he gave him the note; "mind you stick to what I say."

The sergeant had indeed—incited partly perhaps by a liking for the lad, partly by a desire to return an equivalent for the sovereign with which Edgar had presented him—drawn somewhat upon his imagination. "I have known the young chap for a very long time," he said; "his father and mother died years ago, and though I am no relation to him he looks upon me as his guardian as it were. He has learned the trumpet a bit, and will soon be able to sound all the calls. He will make a smart young soldier, and will, I expect, take his place in the ranks as soon as he is old enough. Do the best you can for him, and keep an eye on him."

"I will take you round to the trumpet-major," the sergeant said; "he had better go with you to the adjutant. You know what Sergeant M'Bride says in this letter?"

"No, I don't know exactly what he says. He told me he would introduce me to you, and that you would, he was sure, do your best to put me through."

"Well, you had better hear what he does say. It is always awkward to have misunderstandings. He says you have lost your father and mother; you understand that?"

"That's right," Edgar said quietly.

"And that he has known you for a very long time?"

Edgar nodded.

"It seems to me a very long time," he added.

"And that though he is no actual relation of yours he considers he stands in the light of your guardian. That is important, you know."

"I will remember that," Edgar said. "There is certainly no one as far as I know who has a better right than Sergeant M'Bride to advise me, or give me permission to enlist."

"Well, you stick to that and you are all right. Now, come along."

"I wonder who the young chap is," the sergeant said to himself as they crossed the barrack yard. "As to what M'Bride said, we know all about that; I have been on the recruiting staff myself. But I think the young un was speaking the truth. He has lost his father and mother, he has known M'Bride for some time, and he has got no one who has any right to interfere with him. Rum, too. The boy is a gentleman all over, though he has rigged himself out in those clothes. Well, we are short of trumpeters, and I don't suppose the adjutant will inquire very closely."

The trumpet-major was quite willing to do his share of the business. He was glad to fill up one of the vacancies, especially as it seemed that the new-comer would soon be able to take his place in the ranks; and after asking a few questions he went across with him to the adjutant. The latter looked at Edgar critically.

"Smart young fellow," he said to himself. "Got into some scrape at home, I suppose, and run away. Of course he has some got-up lie ready. Well, sergeant, what is it?"

"Lad wishes to enlist as a trumpeter, sir. Here is a letter from his next friend, Sergeant M'Bride of the 18th Hussars. Lad's father and mother dead. M'Bride stands in place of guardian."

"A likely story," the adjutant muttered to himself. "What is your name, lad?"

"I enlist as Edward Smith," Edgar said, "age sixteen."

"Parents dead?"

"I lost them when I was a child, sir."

"Who were they?"

"My father was a sergeant in the 30th Foot, sir."

The adjutant was watching him narrowly.

"Either he is telling the truth," he said to himself, "or he is one of the calmest young liars I have ever come across."

"And there is no one who has any legal right to control you or to object to your enlisting?"

"No one, sir."

"You cannot play, I suppose?"

"I have been learning the trumpet for some little time, sir, and can sound a few of the calls."

"Well, I suppose that will do, sergeant. You had better take him across to the doctor. If he passes him put him up for the night, and bring him here to-morrow at twelve o'clock to be sworn in."

"Rather a tough case that," he said to himself as the trumpet-major left with the young recruit. "There is not a doubt the boy is lying, and yet I could have declared he was speaking the truth. Of course he may be the son of a non-commissioned officer, and have been brought up and educated by someone. He looks a gentleman all over, and speaks like one. Well, it is no business of mine;" and the adjutant gave the matter no further thought.

The next day Edgar was sworn in. The colonel, hearing from the adjutant that he had questioned the boy, and that there was no impediment to his enlisting, passed him without a remark, and Edgar was at once taken to the regimental tailor and measured for his uniform, and half an hour later was marched out with four or five of the other trumpeters beyond the confines of the camp, and was there set to work at the calls. His work was by no means light. He was at once sent into the riding-school, and he found it a very different thing to satisfy the riding-master and his sergeants than it had been to learn to sit a horse at home. However, his previous practice in that way rendered the work much easier for him than it would otherwise have been, and he was not very long in passing out from the squad of recruits. Then he had two or three hours a day of practice with the trumpet, an hour a day at gymnastics, and in the afternoon two hours of school. The last item was, however, but child's play, and as soon as the instructor saw that the lad could without difficulty take a first-class, he employed him in aiding to teach others.

The evening was the only time he had to himself; then, if he chose to take the trouble to dress, he could go out into the town or stroll through the camp or take a walk. If disinclined for this there was the cavalry canteen, with a large concert-room attached, where entertainments were given by music-hall singers brought down from London. The trumpeters and bandsmen had a barrack-room to themselves. Edgar, who had a healthy appetite, found the food of a very different description to that to which he had been accustomed. Although up at six o'clock in the morning, even in the winter, as it was, there was nothing to eat until eight. Then there was a mug of a weak fluid called tea, and an allowance of bread. The dinner, which was at one, consisted of an amount of meat scarcely sufficient for a growing boy; for although had the allowance consisted entirely of flesh, it would have been ample, it was so largely reduced by the amount of bone and fat that the meat was reduced to a minimum. However, when eked out with potatoes and bread it sufficed well enough.

Tea at six consisted, like breakfast, of a mug of tea and bread. Edgar found, however, that the Spartan breakfasts and teas could be supplemented by additions purchased at the canteen. Here pennyworths of butter, cheese, bacon, an egg, a herring, and many similar luxuries were obtainable, and two pence of his pay was invariably spent on breakfast, a penny sufficing for the addition to his tea.

He found that he soon got on well with his comrades. It was like going to a fresh school. There was at first a good deal of rough chaff, but as soon as it was found that he could take this good-temperedly, and that if pushed beyond a fair limit he was not only ready to fight but was able to use his fists with much more science than any of the other trumpeters, he was soon left alone, and indeed became a favourite with the bandsmen. Two months after he joined he was appointed to a troop. He found, however, that he did not have to accompany them generally on parade. The regiment, like all others at home, was very short of its complement of horses, and only one trumpeter to each squadron was mounted. Edgar, however, cared little for this. He considered his first two years' work as merely a probation which had to be gone through before he could take his place in the ranks as a trooper.

He found his pay sufficient for his needs. Although he had in the old days been in the habit of drinking beer, he had made a resolution to abstain from it altogether on joining the regiment. He determined to gain his stripes at the earliest possible opportunity, and knew well enough, from what he had heard Captain Clinton say, that drink was the curse of the army, and that men, although

naturally sober and steady, were sometimes led into it, and thereby lost all chance of ever rising. He had never smoked, and it was no privation to him to abstain from tobacco, and he had therefore the whole of his pay, after the usual deduction for stoppages, at his disposal for food, and had always a little in his pocket to lend to any comrade who had the bad luck to be put on heavy stoppages by the loss of some of his necessaries.

In this respect he himself suffered somewhat heavily at first. Accustomed at school to leave his things carelessly about without the slightest doubt as to their safety, he was astonished and shocked to find that a very much laxer code of morality prevailed in the army, and that any necessaries left about instantly disappeared. The first week after joining he lost nearly half the articles that had been served out to him, and was for some months on heavy stoppages of pay to replace them. The lesson, however, had its effect, and he quickly learnt to keep a sharp look-out over his things. He was soon dismissed from school, obtaining his first-class at the examination, which took place two months after he joined, and this gave him time to attend the fencing-school, and to give more time to gymnastics.

When once accustomed to his work he found his life an easy and pleasant one, and had far more time at his disposal than had been the case at school. He resolutely avoided dwelling on the past, and whenever he found himself thinking of what had so long been home, he took up a book, or went out for a walk, or engaged in some occupation that served to distract his thoughts. He missed the games. Football was occasionally played, but there was no observance of rules, and after trying it once or twice he gave it up in disgust. He often joined in a game at fives, and practised running and jumping, so as to be able to take part in the regimental sports in the spring.

When Easter had passed and the weather became bright and pleasant he often took long walks alone, for it was seldom he could find anyone willing to accompany him. He had learnt drawing at Cheltenham, and as he found that it would be useful for him when he obtained the rank of a non-commissioned officer to make sketches and maps to send in with reports of any country reconnoitred, he accustomed himself to do this on his walks, jotting down the features of the country, noticing the spots where roads came in, the width of the bridges across the canals and the nature of their banks, and taking sketches of what appeared to him positions that would be occupied to check a pursuing force, or to be taken up by an advanced one.

At this time, too, he joined a class for signalling, and found it highly interesting, and before the end of the summer could send a message or read one with flags or flash-lights. As soon as the summer really began he took to cricket, and here he speedily attracted the attention of the officers. He had been the best bowler in the second eleven, and would have been in the first the next season at Cheltenham. But it was some little time before his proficiency as a bowler became known, although it was soon seen that his batting was far above the average.

"That youngster handles his bat well, Moffat," one of the lieutenants said to the captain, who was the most energetic cricketer among the officers, and who with one or two of the sergeants generally made up the team when the regimental eleven played against that of another corps.

"Yes, he plays in good form, doesn't he? Who is the young fellow at the wicket now, sergeant?"

"He is trumpeter of D troop, sir. He only joined three months ago, but he could play a bit when he came, and got posted to a troop before two others who joined four or five months before him."

"The man who is bowling now is not up to much, sergeant. Suppose you take the ball for an over or two; I should like to see how that young fellow would stand up to your bowling."

The sergeant, who was one of the regimental bowlers, took the ball. Edgar, who had been driving the previous bowler in all directions, at once played carefully, and for an over or two contented himself with blocking the balls, then one came a little wide and he cut it to leg for four.

Captain Moffat took off his coat and waistcoat and took the end facing the sergeant, and began to bowl some slow twisting balls, that were in strong contrast to the fast delivery of the sergeant. Edgar felt now that he was being tried, and played very cautiously. There were no runs to be made off such bowling until the bowler became careless or tired. At last a ball came rather farther than

usual. Edgar stepped out to meet it, and drove it nearly straight forward and scored four, and it was not until his score ran up to thirty that he was at last caught.

"You will do, Smith," Captain Moffat said approvingly. "Where did you learn to play cricket?"

"I learned at school, sir."

"Ah! well, they taught you that well if they taught you nothing else. You go on practising, and I will give you a chance to play for the regiment the first time that there is a vacancy."

Two or three matches were played before the chance came. Then Sergeant Stokes, the bowler, hurt his hand the day before they were going to play the Rifle Brigade, which was considered the strongest team in camp.

"This is an unlucky business, sergeant," Captain Moffat said to him as they were talking over next day's play. "I thought if we had luck we might make a good fight with the Rifles. Bowling is never our strongest point, and now you are out of it we shall make a very poor show. Are there any of the men outside the eleven who show any bowling talent?"

The sergeant shook his head.

"Not one of them, sir. I hoped Corporal Holland would have made a bowler, but he seems to have gone off rather than come on. No; we must trust to the bowlers we have got. There are four or five of them who are not bad, though except yourself, sir, there is nothing, so to speak, to depend on."

"You cannot depend on me, sergeant; there is no certainty about my bowling. Sometimes I do pretty fairly, at other times I get hit all over the field. No; my proper place is wicket-keeping. I should never leave that if we had two or three bowlers we could depend upon. Well, we must go in for run making.

"I do not think that we can do better than put on that young trumpeter till you can play again. I have watched him several times at practice, and he always keeps his wickets up well, and hits freely whenever he gets a chance."

"Very well, sir. I will warn him that he will be wanted to-morrow. There can be no harm in trying him for once anyhow."

There was some little surprise among the men who played cricket at hearing that Trumpeter Smith was to play in the eleven against the Rifles, and some little grumbling among those who had hoped to be the next choice. However, all agreed that he was a very likely youngster. The Hussars won the toss, and went in first. The bowling of the Rifles was deadly, and the ten wickets fell for fifty-two runs. Edgar was the last to go in, and did not receive a single ball, his partner succumbing to the very first ball bowled after Edgar had gone out to the wicket. Then the Rifles went in, and the loss of the Hussars' fast bowler soon made itself felt. Two of the best bats of the Rifles were at the wicket, and in spite of several changes of bowling, seventy-four runs were scored without a separation being made. Captain Moffat looked round the field despairingly. He had tried all the men on whom he had any dependence. His own bowling had been very severely punished, and he had retired when thirty runs had been scored and was reluctant to take the ball again. As he was standing undecided after an over in which twelve runs had been scored, his eye fell on Edgar as he ran lightly across to take up his place on the opposite side.

"Smith!" Edgar ran up to him. "Do you bowl at all?"

"I have not bowled this season, sir, but I used to bowl pretty fairly."

"Very well, then, take the ball at this end after the next over. I am going to try Smith at this end," he said to the young lieutenant who was long-stop.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Well, there is one thing, he cannot make a worse mess of it than we are making already."

When the over was concluded, Edgar took the ball. The year that had elapsed since he had last played, and the gymnastics and hard exercise, had strengthened his muscles greatly, and as he tossed the ball from hand to hand while the field took their places he felt that he was more master of it than

he had been before. He had then been a remarkably fast bowler for his age, and would have been in the eleven had it not happened that it already possessed three unusually good bowlers.

The first ball he sent up was a comparatively slow one; he wanted to try his hand. It was dead on the wicket, and was blocked; then he drew his breath, and sent the next ball in with all his force. A shout rose from the Hussars as two of the wickets went flying into the air. Another player came out, but at the fourth ball of the over his middle stump was levelled.

"What do you think of that, Langley?" Captain Moffat asked the long-stop as they walked together to the other end. "We have found a treasure. He bowls about as fast as any one I have ever seen, and every ball is dead on the wicket."

"He is first-class," the lieutenant, who was an old Etonian, said. "I wonder where he learnt to play cricket?"

The wickets fell fast, and the innings concluded for 98, Edgar taking seven wickets for twelve runs. Captain Moffat put him in third in the second innings, and he scored twenty-four before he was caught out, the total score of the innings amounting to 126. The Rifles had therefore eighty-one runs to get to win. They only succeeded in making seventy-six, eight of them being either bowled out by Edgar or caught off his bowling. After this he took his place regularly in the Hussar team, and it was generally acknowledged that it was owing to his bowling that the regiment that season stood at the head of the Aldershot teams.

CHAPTER VI. EGYPT

Naturally his prowess at cricket made Trumpeter Smith a popular figure in the regiment, and even at the officers' mess his name was frequently mentioned, and many guesses were ventured as to who he was and what school he came from.

That he was a gentleman by birth nobody doubted. There was nothing unusual in that, for all the cavalry regiments contain a considerable number of gentlemen in their ranks; men of this class generally enlisting in the cavalry in preference to the other arms of the service. It was, however, unusual for one to enlist at Edgar's age. Many young men, after having failed to gain a commission by competition, enlist in hopes of working up to one through the ranks. Another class are the men who having got into scrapes of one kind or another, run through their money, and tired out their friends, finally enlist as the only thing open to them.

The first class are among the steadiest men in the regiment, and speedily work their way up among the non-commissioned officers. The second class are, on the other hand, among the wildest and least reputable men in the ranks. They are good men in a campaign where pluck and endurance and high spirits are most valuable, but among the worst and most troublesome when there is little to do and time hangs heavily on hand.

There were two of the sergeants who had failed in the examination for commissions, and were hoping some day to obtain them. One had been five years in the regiment, the other three. Their attention had first been called to Edgar by his getting a first-class in the examination, which at once stamped him as having had an education greatly superior to that of the majority of recruits. His position in the regimental cricket team further attracted their attention, and they took an opportunity to speak to him when it happened they were walking together and met Edgar returning from an afternoon's ramble across the country.

"Well, Smith, how do you like soldiering?"

"I like it very well; I don't think that there is anything to complain of at all."

"It is better than grinding away at Latin and Greek and mathematics, and that sort of thing," the younger of the two sergeants said with a smile.

"There are advantages both ways, sergeant."

"So there are, lad. Of the two I like drill better than grinding at books, worse luck; if I had been fond of books I should not be wearing these stripes. I asked the band-master if you were learning an instrument. He said you were not. So I suppose you mean to give up your trumpet and join the ranks as soon as you get to eighteen?"

"Yes. I should not care about being in the band."

"Your cricket is not a bad thing for you," the elder of the two men said. "It brings you into notice, and will help you to get your stripes earlier than you otherwise would do; as a man who does his regiment credit either as a good shot or as a cricketer or in the sports is sure to attract notice, and to be pushed on if he is steady and a smart soldier. If you won't mind my giving you a bit of advice, I should say don't try to push yourself forward. Sometimes young fellows spoil their chances by doing so. Some of the old non-commissioned officers feel a bit jealous when they see a youngster likely to make his way up, and you know they can make it very hot for a fellow if they like. So be careful not to give them a chance. Even if you are blown up when you do not deserve it, it is better to hold your tongue than to kick against it. Cheeking a non-commissioned officer never pays."

"Thank you, sergeant," Edgar said quietly; "I am much obliged to you for your advice."

"An uncommonly good style of young fellow," Sergeant Netherton, who was the son of a colonel in the army, and had been educated at Harrow, said to his companion. "Comes from a good school, I should say. Must have got into some baddish scrape, or he never would be here at his age."

"It does not quite follow," the other replied. "His father may have died or burst up somehow, and seeing nothing before him but a place at a clerk's desk or enlisting he may have taken this alternative; and not a bad choice either. For, putting aside altogether the chance of getting a commission, which is a pretty slight one, there is no pleasanter life for a steady, well-conducted young fellow who has had a fair education than the army. He is sure of getting his stripes in a couple of years after enlisting. A non-commissioned officer has enough pay to live comfortably; he has no care or anxiety of any sort; he has more time to himself than a man in any other sort of business. There are no end of staff appointments open to him if he writes a good hand, and does not mind clerk work. If he goes in for long service he has every chance of being regimental sergeant-major before he has done, and can leave the service with a pension sufficient to keep him in a quiet way."

"Yes, that is all very well, Summers, but he cannot marry. That is to say, if he has, as we are supposing, been born and educated as a gentleman, he cannot marry the sort of woman he would like as a wife."

"No, there is that drawback," the other laughed. "But then, you see, if he had been obliged to take a small clerkship leading to nothing, he could hardly invite a young countess to share it with him."

As Edgar walked back to barracks he thought over the advice that had been given him, and recognized its value. He knew that the chances of his ever obtaining a commission were exceedingly small, and that even young men whose fathers were officers of high standing and considerable influence seldom obtain a commission under six or seven years' service, and that the majority of commissions from the ranks are given to old non-commissioned officers who were made quartermasters or pay-masters. He had not entered the service, as had the two non-commissioned officers with whom he had been speaking, for the express purpose of gaining a commission, but simply because he had always had a fancy for soldiering, and because it seemed at the time he left Cheltenham the only thing open to him.

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