He gave the curly-headed fellow a last violent thrust as they neared the boarding, and made him plunge over into the snowy stretch beyond.
CHAPTER I.

DIPLOMACY.

"Sit down, Eric."

The tall, slim, dark-eyed youth, who had entered Frank Merriwell's office in response to the latter's summons, came forward quickly and took a chair close to the big, flat-topped mahogany desk.

There was a look of suppressed curiosity on his rather handsome face, and mingled with it was just a trace of anxiety; for he wondered what the head of the School of Athletic Development could have to say to him.

On his way through the hall he had made a swift mental review of his own doings for the past few days, but he could think of no faults either of commission or omission which warranted anything in the nature of a reproof.

It had not always been thus. When he first came to Farnham Hall in the early fall, Eric Carpenter had been one of the wildest, most harum-scarum boys who had ever entered its portals. There was nothing in the least mean or underhand or vicious about him.

He was simply chock-full of animal spirits which found vent in a constant succession of crazy pranks and jokes.

Sometimes, to be sure, these tricks went further than even his thoughtlessness had meant them to, and for several weeks he kept the school in a continual uproar.

Then almost imperceptibly the change came. Little by little his high spirits found vent in other, more orderly channels. He took up football, and played the game with every bit of skill and enthusiasm which was in him, so he soon forged into the very front rank. And coming in from the field at dusk, tired, sore, and tingling all over with the violent exercise, he had been too weary to do anything but eat his supper, study a little in his room afterward, and then tumble into bed.

In the cabinetmaking shop, which was a part of the regular equipment of the school, he had discovered an unexpected and latent talent for nice work and delicate tools and beautiful, foreign woods, and had developed a patience and skill which one would have
thought impossible in a quick-tempered, headstrong nature such as his.

More than once he wondered a little at the change which had come about in him, but Frank Merriwell had done his work so skillfully and with so much tact that the boy never realized that he alone was responsible for the transformation. He only knew that, as time went on, he became more and more attached to this man who was so kind and sympathetic, and yet under whose easy, pleasant manner was an indomitable purpose and a will of iron.

He had never known any one in all his life whom he so admired and respected, and at the same time so thoroughly liked. For Frank had the rare faculty of making the boys understand that he was interested in each and every one of them, body and soul. He was never too busy to lay aside his work and talk to them about problems and troubles which might have seemed very trivial to some men, but which loom so big and important in a boy's mind.

And somehow they always went away from his office cheered and comforted by the feeling that there was some one who understood them, and who sympathized with their troubles, which never seemed so bad after a talk with Merriwell.

Of course there were some boys—just as there are men in the great world outside—who were not amenable to such handling. Boys who had to be taken figuratively, by the scruff of their neck and shaken into a realizing sense of the error of their ways. And these boys were not long in finding out that Merriwell was a man who would stand no nonsense. They found that underneath the glove of velvet was a hand of iron; and woe betide the fellow who tried to deceive him with a lie. That boy learned his lesson with a swift thoroughness which produced a lasting effect.

So Eric Carpenter took his seat with a feeling of curiosity, but with no alarm. He was conscious of no particular wrongdoing, with the possible exception of some pranks played the day before on a new arrival, which had been so trivial that Frank would scarcely be likely to have heard of them, much less make them the subject of a special interview.

Merriwell sat back in his chair and placed the tips of his fingers lightly together.

"Garth Tennant has been here a little over a week," he said quietly. "What do you think of him, Eric?"

Carpenter gave a slight start and his face flushed a little. So it was that, then. How in the mischief had the information leaked out?

"I?" he murmured in a puzzled way.

Frank smiled a bit.

"Yes, you," he returned calmly. "What do you think of him? How have you sized him up? What sort of a fellow do you think he is, down at the bottom?"

Eric hesitated an instant.

"Well," he said slowly, at length, "he's not very sociable."

There was a twinkle in Merriwell's eyes.

"A little grouchy, eh?" he suggested seriously.

Carpenter darted a swift look of astonishment at his face.

"Why, how——" he exclaimed.

Then he broke off abruptly, wondering how under the sun Merriwell knew that the fellows had, for obvious reasons, applied the name of "Grouch" to the new arrival.

"It's very simple," Frank explained, as if he read the boy's thoughts. "I heard them calling him that yesterday, and when you fellows give any one a nickname I notice that it generally hits the nail on the head. Besides, I've been watching Tennant pretty closely myself, and had come to practically the same conclusion. He is unsociable; but haven't you gone any deeper than that? Haven't you wondered what made him so?"

Eric shook his head slowly.

"No, sir," he confessed. "When he first came I tried to draw him out a bit. We need some more beef on the hockey team, and he seemed just the right sort; but when I asked him about it he nearly snapped my head off, so I gave him up as a bad job."

He hesitated and his face flushed a little.

"I reckon I'm the one who's responsible for that name," he went on, in a low tone. "I was a little riled when he flew at me that way, and I called him a beastly grouch. Some of the fellows heard me, and it's stuck to him ever since."

Frank's lips curved a little at the corners.

"That being the case," he said gravely, "perhaps you will feel more like helping me out."

He smiled openly at the look of amazement on the young fellow's face, and then went on quickly:

"Tennant is a boy who has lived all his life in the backwoods. I don't think he has ever had many companions or friends, and I am perfectly certain that his father has never understood his rather peculiar nature. I have watched him quite closely and my impression is that his ill-tempered surliness is put on like a defensive armor. I believe that, deep down underneath it, there is as great a love of human companion-
ship as is possessed by any of you. I think he would like to make friends, but he does not know how; and so he draws back into his shell and hides his ungrati-
fied longing as if it were something of which to be ashamed. Now, what I want you to do is to make a determined effort to draw him out. Don't do it ob-
viously, but try again to get him interested in hockey. Talk to him now and then as you would to any of your own friends. Find out, if you can, what inter-
estis him. Perhaps you may find a kindred taste which will be a bond in common. And don't be discouraged if he freezes you at first, as he probably will. Just plug at him, and I think you will succeed in the end. What do you say to the idea? Will you under-
take it?"

"Of course, sir," Carpenter answered readily. "I'll do my best, but I'm awfully afraid he won't come to anything. I don't believe he likes me for a cent."

"Then make him," Frank returned quickly. "I'm sure you can if you try hard enough."

Eric was still a little unconvinced, and for five minutes longer Frank talked earnestly to him. When the boy arose and started for the door, he was resolved to throw himself heart and soul into the matter of winning the surly lad's confidence and liking if it could possibly be done.

It had become a matter of pride with him to suc-
ceed if it was a possible thing. He did not know, of

course, that Merriwell, having noted his occasional
lapses into the old-time mischief, now that the stress
and worry of the football season was over, had been
searching about for some time for something with
which to occupy the high-spirited boy's mind, and,
though he was perfectly sincere in his desire for the
reclamation of Garth Tennant, he had requested Eric's
cooperation because he saw in this chance the oppor-
tunity he had been searching for to fill Carpenter's
mind so full of a definite, absorbing purpose, that
there would be no room left for anything else.

But it was by just such displays of tact as this that Frank Merriwell had made himself admired, respected, and liked to a degree almost unheard of in a man of his position.

CHAPTER II.

REBUFFED.

Eric Carpenter hurried through the hall to the outer
doors, his mind full of the unexpected nature of his
talk with Merriwell. He meant to do his very best not
to disappoint the man for whose good opinion he cared
so much, but he was more than a little doubtful as to
how he should begin the missionary work, and he was
thinking over various plans as he ran over to the
gymnasium, where he should have reported at least
minutes ago for his regular morning work.

As soon as he got into his togs, he explained to Bart
Hodge, Frank's chief assistant and the one who had
exclusive charge of the gym, what had kept him, and
then started at once on the delayed exercises.

Being a boy who had always been fond of out-of-
door sports and games, he was extremely well de-
veloped, without a particle of superfluous flesh on
his body. On first coming to Farnham Hall he had
been obliged, of course, to go through some more or
less routine work in the matter of regular exercising,
but very soon Bart Hodge put him in the small class
of boys who were allowed to do pretty much as they
liked in the gymnasium, so long as they put in their
time in actual work.

Carpenter usually took a turn on the elevated run-
ning track and devoted the rest of the period to work
on the flying rings. To-day, being late, he elimi-
nated the sprinting and went at once to the rings.

He had gone through half a dozen evolutions and
was pausing for an instant to rest when he happened
to glance downward and found himself looking
straight into the sullen, scowling face of the fellow
who had occupied his mind to the exclusion of every-
thing else for the past half hour.

Tennant was working a set of chest weights on the
floor below with a vigor which threatened a speedy
disintegration of the machine. But while he yanked
on the handles and nearly broke the cord with every
pull it was most apparent that his mind was not in
the least on what he was doing.

His somber eyes were fixed intently on the graceful
figure of Eric Carpenter, hanging high above him,
and on his square, strong, rough-hewn face was a look
of decided envy mingled with a kind of grudging ad-
miration.

But the instant Eric looked down and their eyes
met the look of envy vanished and its place was in-
stantly taken by one of defiance. The scowl deep-
ened and he averted his eyes swiftly and deliberately,
as if he did not wish to acknowledge the other's
cheery nod and smile.

Carpenter bit his lips and frowned the least bit at
this exhibition of unmistakable hostility. It was a
rather new and not altogether pleasant experience for
him to have his greeting ignored. He was one of those
fortunate individuals who win popularity from every quarter without any visible effort. Generous to a fault, absolutely square in his dealings with every one, a fine athlete and perfectly fearless under every circumstance, he had besides all these accomplishments a fund of that wonderful quality, personal magnetism, which made fellows like him sometimes against their inclinations and almost against their will.

After the first instinctive feeling of annoyance at Tennant's behavior a rueful smile flashed into Eric's face.

"By Jove!" he murmured. "This isn't going to be a bit of a cinch. Old Grouchy looks as if he'd like to eat my head off."

With each leg thrust through a ring, he swayedslowly back and forth, his dark eyes fixed in speculative thoughtfulness on the fellow below him.

Garth Tennant was tall, big-boned and heavily built. In his everyday clothes he seemed almost awkward, but stripped to a gymnasium suit his splendid physique showed to much more advantage. As he yanked viciously at the weights, Eric watched with a curious feeling of admiration the muscles of his powerful shoulders and arms rippling up and down under the smooth, satiny skin.

"He's strong as a horse," he thought to himself. "If he only knew the game, what a guard or full back he'd make. I wish I knew whether he could skate or not."

Tennant continued to avert his head obstinately as if nothing would induce him to look at Carpenter, but somehow, in spite of this, he seemed to know intuitively that he was under inspection; and presently Eric saw a dull red mount slowly from Garth's muscular neck, spreading upward to the very roots of his coarse, wiry black hair, which was sadly in need of the barber's shears.

Swiftly Carpenter twisted about and the next moment had resumed his evolutions in the air, a feeling of annoyance strong within him that he had allowed his surprise and interest to get the better of his good breeding.

"I might have known better than to stare at him that way," he muttered. "I suppose he thought I was making fun of him. I wish he could know how much I was admiring his muscles. But, gee! you can't tell a fellow a thing like that."

Though he kept his eyes open for a chance to brace Tennant again to come out and try for the hockey team, he was quite unsuccessful. It seemed almost as if the fellow was deliberately avoiding him, and presently Eric made up his mind that such was the case.

Again he felt that unpleasant little twinge of annoyance, and again the increasing difficulty of the affair stimulated him to succeed in spite of all obstacles.

It was not until after dinner that he managed by waiting at the foot of the stairs leading to the dormitory to corner the obstinate Tennant as the latter came pounding down, three steps at a time, evidently in a good deal of a hurry to get somewhere.

Garth's face darkened when he saw Carpenter there, and though he could not help in some way acknowledging the latter's cordial nod, he did it as briefly and as ungraciously as possible, hurrying on toward the outside door, before Eric had a chance to speak.

"Say, Tennant," the latter called after him, "wait a second, won't you? I want to talk to you for a minute."

The big fellow hesitated, stopped slowly, and half turned, a dark frown on his face.

"Well," he snapped, "what is it?"

Eric walked over to him.

"I wish you'd reconsider your decision and try out for the hockey team," he said quickly.

The scowl deepened on Tennant's tanned face.

"No, I won't!" he exclaimed emphatically.

There was a note of finality in his voice, but Carpenter was not so easily discouraged.

"I'm sure you could catch on to the game even if you've never played before," he said encouragingly. "If you can skate, there's nothing hard about hockey; and honestly, Tennant, I'd like awfully—"

"I won't do it!" broke in the big fellow angrily. "Haven't you got enough sense to know that I mean what I say? You've sure got a gall to come softsoaping around me. I should think you'd know I haven't any use for a fellow like you."

Without waiting for a reply, he turned sharply on his heel, and the next moment the front door banged noisily behind him.

Eric Carpenter stood gazing after him in speechless amazement. His face turned scarlet and he clenched both fists.

"You confounded surly country bumpkin!" he exclaimed furiously, taking a swift stride toward the door. "I'll knock that thick head of yours off your shoulders."

No one had ever spoken that way to him before, and, though he scarcely realized it, Tennant's tone
hurt bitterly. Friendship and liking came to the handsome youth so easily that he did not know what it was to have his advances repulsed. It was generally the other way; boys were, as a rule, only too eager to be on friendly terms with him.

With flashing eyes, he caught hold of the doorknob; and then he stopped still. What was he going to do—try to lick a boy because the latter had declined to do what he wanted him to and apparently had no desire for the friendship which had been offered him? Did he imagine for an instant that he could force Tennant to like him whether he wanted to or not?

He dropped his arm to his side and some of the color ebbed out of his cheeks as he stood thoughtfully silent, his eyes fixed on the floor.

Presently he threw back his head and laughed, but the usual ringing, spontaneous mirth was absent from his voice.

"By Jove! If he isn't a regular bulldog!" he murmured, in a chagrined tone. "He hates me like poison and doesn't care who knows it. I suppose it's because I called him a grouch the other day. Silly reason, but it's all I can think of."

He turned and walked swiftly toward the stairs, his jaw squared and his sensitive lips firmly set.

"But, by smoke, he'll like me before I get through!" he went on, in an undertone. "I'll make the old idiot like me if it takes every minute of my time and every ounce of persuasion I've got in my body."

CHAPTER III.

"THE GROUCH."

Meanwhile, Garth Tennant was striding down the snowy road which led from the school buildings, his face black as a thundercloud and his dark eyes flashing fire.

"Thinks he can fool me with his wheeling ways, does he?" he muttered. "Wants to get me down on the pond so he can make a show of me before all those other idiots, I suppose. Well, he won't! He's up against the wrong proposition this time."

He wheeled through the big gates and turned sharply toward the right along the highroad. As he did so a shrill voice from behind him rang through the frosty air.

"Hi, there, Grouch! Going the wrong way, aren't you? Thought you were coming down to the lake to show us how to skate."

Tennant did not turn his head, but his face flushed dully under the tan and he clenched his big, powerful hands tightly. He recognized the voice as belonging to Reddy Payne, a small, sorrel-topped, harum-scarum boy who was always to the front when there was any mischief on foot, and who had taken particular delight in teasing Garth Tennant from the first moment of his arrival.

But, oddly enough, the latter did not seem to bear him so much animosity as he did the youth who had been first responsible for the nickname which was now applied to him by almost the entire school.

"You little whippersnapper!" he muttered through clenched teeth. "I could take you and break you in half. But you're not so much to blame. You just follow the example that some one else sets. You'd never have thought of such a name if it hadn't been for that rotten Carpenter. But I'll get even with him before very long. He'll wish he hadn't been so smart before I get done with him. I reckon, after the way I shut him up to-day, he won't be coming around very soon again with his sneaking ways."

As he hurried down the lonely road, piled up at the sides with great banks of snow, he felt a thrill of fierce joy at the way he had repulsed Eric Carpenter's advances and put him in his place. It never occurred to him that these advances had been made for any other purpose than to get him down to the lake and ridicule him before the other boys. Had not Eric been responsible that very first day for saddling him with a name which he loathed beyond words! Had he not ever since been foremost among the boys who had jibed and mocked him, and only the day before had baited him in the gym until he was almost beside himself with rage and fury! Surely nothing good could be expected from such a fellow.

Garth Tennant was a strange mixture of the most opposite traits, and it was a perfect example of Frank Merriwell's amazing ability at sizing up a man's character that he should have judged the fellow with so near an approach to accuracy.

Brought up on a farm in the wilds of northern New Hampshire, the boy's life had been a lonely one. His mother's death, when he was only a few years old, had taken from him the one person who might have understood his complex nature, and who might by love and sympathy have molded him into something different.

She was a woman of much refinement and considerable force of character. Her people considered
that she had married very much beneath her and their subsequent treatment of her had been the reverse of pleasant. It was from her that Garth inherited the gentler traits which his rough-hewn father could not understand, and which he had ridiculed as effeminate, leading the boy to strive with all his might to hide them under a brusque roughness which was most deceptive.

The elder Tennant, while thoroughly just and upright, according to his lights, was as rough and hard and stony as the rocks of his native State. Something of the struggle to wrest a living from the sterile soil seemed to have eaten into his very soul; and, as the years followed one upon another, he had changed gradually from the handsome, high-spirited youth who had fairly swept the Boston girl off her feet with his ardor, to the silent, taciturn, unsympathetic man who made life so hard for his only son.

The boy had naturally a passionate longing for companionship, which, to begin with, the isolated life on the farm made difficult of gratification. In spite of this obstacle, however, he might have made friends and kept them had it not been for his father's narrow-minded hardness; for John Tennant made things so unpleasant for boys who came to the house that they seldom repeated the performance, and he kept his son so hard at work that the latter rarely had the time to go elsewhere.

As a result, the boy was thrown almost entirely upon his own resources, and was obliged to employ his scant leisure in hunting and fishing and long, solitary tramps through the woods, when he would much rather have been playing baseball or hockey or some other sport like any normal boy.

Thus he grew up, his better instincts stifled and dwarfed, and the hot-tempered, sullen, boorish streak which he had inherited from his father thrived and grew from constant intercourse with the latter, until at last the great change came.

An artist had spent the preceding summer at the Tennant farm, devoting his days to painting the wild, sullen, rocky beauty of the New Hampshire hills and his nights in endeavoring to draw out young Garth, for whom he had taken a great liking.

He succeeded, after much effort, in penetrating beneath the outer shell of silent reserve and distrust, and found there the real boy, generous, true-hearted, and shy almost to brusqueness in giving expression to his feelings. He saw also, with infinite regret, that this generous nature was in a fair way of being utterly ruined; that the defensive armor was constantly increasing in strength and thickness until, presently, it would be utterly impossible to break through, and the boy would be condemned to go through life misinterpreted, misunderstood, a distorted travesty of what he might have been.

Stirred by this realization, Temple Wainwright did something which was of more value than all the pictures he had ever painted—for he was a wealthy man who dabbled in art as a mere diversion; did something which was perhaps more far-reaching than anything he had ever done before in all his indolent, kindly, fluttering life—he saved a human soul.

He knew of Merriwell's school, he had even met Frank himself, and he conceived the idea of having Garth go there. One would have supposed it an utter impossibility to persuade the boy's father to such a notion, but Wainwright had a certain fund of obstinacy in his make-up. For weeks he hammered at the man until at last he extracted a grudging permission that, as soon as the fall work had been done and the winter's supply of wood been cut and stacked, Garth could go to Bloomfield.

Then, having done his work, the artist flitted away to warmer climes, and after his fashion promptly forgot the very existence of the boy who had so interested him and for whom he had accomplished so much. The check which he had handed to the elder Tennant for his son's expenses also included an amount sufficient to hire some one to take the boy's place on the farm for a year; but it meant little to Temple Wainwright, who received as much as that every week of his life without lifting a finger.

But to Garth it was like a glimpse of paradise. He showed nothing of what he felt to his father, but he went about his chores as if he were walking on air.

The thought of what was in store for him was almost unbelievable. At last he would have the friends and companions he had longed for all his life. At last he would be able to acquire the knowledge which had so far been denied him, and which must open the door to something higher and better than that grinding, monotonous, soul-killing life which was the only existence he had ever known.

He had started on his journey with such high hopes; but how swiftly, how thoroughly, had those hopes been shattered! He found the companions he had longed for so much, and among the boys at Farnham Hall were many whose looks he liked and whom he would have given anything to make his friends; but he did not know how to win friendship.

He had lived a hermit's life so long that he had
lost the ability to make advances. When he was first shown about the school a horrible wave of shyness had overwhelmed him and caused him to shut up like a clam. He was gruff and brusque and surly, bristling all over as a porcupine bristles, when he would have been given anything in the world to have been friendly.

Naturally such an attitude made the boys set him down as an ill-tempered door; and, as boys will, they treated him accordingly, calling him "Grouch" and various other appropriate names, teasing him unmercifully, little knowing that every jeer and sneer and innuendo cut him to the quick like so many knife blades.

Thus matters went from bad to worse. Tormented and laughed at, Garth drew into his shell in much the same spirit that a wounded animal seeks its lair. Nothing could induce him to let these fellows see how much they hurt him.

His dream had vanished and there was nothing to do but bear the persecution as best he could, fighting back with rough, bitter words, which would lead to blows in the very near future; for he felt sure that he could not keep a grip on his hot temper much longer. Presently he would flare up and administer a thorough licking to some of his tormentors, which would show them that he was not so easy as they seemed to think.

Already he had pitched upon Eric Carpenter as the one who would receive the first lesson.

CHAPTER IV.

ADDING FUEL TO THE FLAMES.

"Next time he tries any funny business he'll get what's coming to him," Tennant muttered. "He started the whole thing. If it hadn't been for him maybe the fellows wouldn't hammer me the way they do. I s'pose he thinks just because I'm poor and ignorant and don't say 'please' and 'beg your pardon' and all that, that I don't amount to shucks; but I'll show him I'm as good a man as he is."

Garth, not in the least lacking in common sense or power of observation, had noticed at once the difference between his own rough manners and those of most of the boys at Farnham Hall. At first they had seemed affected, but after a time he found himself wondering where he had heard the words and phrases before. Mr. Wainwright had used them, of course; but he was thinking of some one long before the friendly artist's time.

At last, one day, with a sudden twiching at his heartstrings, he remembered that his mother had spoken in much that same way. She was only a vague, fading memory to him, but he recalled that much quite vividly. Probably, had she lived, she would have taught him all those little tricks and graces of speech. He wondered whether it was too late to learn.

Once, in the seclusion of his room, he ventured on one or two of the phrases he had overheard, but they were scarcely uttered before he flushed with shame. They sounded so unnatural and effeminate. He would not try again.

Presently he left the road and plunged through a gap in the stone wall opening into the forest. A well-worn path in the deep snow showed that it was not the first time he had been that way. He had taken up in desperation his old habits of wandering about the country, for, somehow, he was lonelier by far amid that great crowd of hostile boys than he had ever been on the bleak New England farm.

There was nothing to hope for there, nothing to expect; but here, he felt like a man starving in the sight of plenty, and it was almost more than he could stand. As he pushed his way through the thick trees, now and then dislodging a mass of snow which fell in showers over his head and shoulders, he wished he were back home again. He might have written and asked his father to take him away, but pride stayed his hand. The elder Tennant had been opposed to the project from the very beginning and had sneeringly prophesied that no good would come of it. Garth knew well what to expect if he acknowledged himself beaten and returned home. No; he would stick it out. That was the only way.

Every little while throughout the long tramp his mind kept coming back to Eric Carpenter. After the first flush of anger at what he considered the latter's attempt to make fun of him, the handsome face of the slim, lithe youth flashed into his brain time and time again. He had liked the fellow's looks from the very start, and wondered what it would be like to have him for a friend. But when Eric had spoken to him he was so shy and nervous and tongue-tied that he could not have answered him in any other than that gruff, brusque manner.

Then had followed the epithet of "grouch," and, with that, Garth felt that all hope of there ever being anything like friendship between them had vanished utterly. He had been a fool to think of it for an instant. What use could that handsome, high-spirited, popular lad possibly have for such as he, except per-
haps, to use him as a butt for ridicule? He did not consider that Carpenter had pretty much the same sort of temper as his own, though it was under better control; he did not see that the short, snappy answer which had been fairly forced from him, because nothing else would come, must have looked to Eric like a deliberate attempt to ignore advances which were meant to be friendly. He did not know, either, that the handsome fellow had regretted his own hasty reply the moment the words had left his lips.

And so he tramped on through the snowy woods, his heart aching with a dull, poignant bitterness, his mind longing for what he wanted so desperately and yet which he did not know how to bring about.

It was quite dark when he returned to the school and went straight up to his room. As he had expected, he found his roommate there before him, comfortably settled by the reading lamp, absorbed in a flashy-looking, paper-covered novel.

Guy Wrexler was slim and narrow-shouldered, with a long, pale face, very blond hair, and light-blue eyes. Fastidious in dress and appearance, with an extremely high opinion of himself, one would have thought that he would bitterly resent sharing his rooms with a fellow of Tennant's rather humble origin and bringing up.

This did not prove to be the case, however. A tremendous talker, with a bitter, cynical, sarcastic tongue, which spared nobody, Wrexler had disgusted every boy who knew him, and had found it impossible to persuade any one to room with him.

He might have occupied his quarters by himself, had he chosen, for at Farnham Hall the boys were not obliged to share their rooms unless they wished; but Wrexler wanted some one to talk to—or, rather to talk at. It did not matter much who it was, but he found it a positive agony to sit still night after night, unable to give voice to the thoughts which flowed through his mind in such abundance; and he had welcomed the arrival of Garth Tennant with a warmth which had at first deceived that youth into believing that they would be good friends.

Such a state of affairs was impossible with one of Wrexler's temperament. Garth very soon sized him up for what he was, but, strangely enough, the two oddly assorted boys got along without actually coming to blows.

Though Wrexler did not spare him in the least, Tennant saw that he treated every boy in school in exactly the same way. Moreover, Guy never called him "Grouch" to his face, though he invariably did so behind his back; and, what was more, he would often have a group of fellows in fits of laughter over his cruely realistic, and yet exaggerated, imitations of the idiosyncrasies of his roommate.

Of course, Garth did not know this. To his face Wrexler treated him rather more decently than he did any other fellow in school. The truth was that the cynical youth stood just a little in awe of the big New Englander. He had had one or two exhibitions of Garth's temper; he had seen, himself, the great, rippling muscles which betokened the strength of a bull, and, consequently, he carried himself rather more discreetly than was his wont.

As Tennant stepped into the sitting room that evening he glanced up from his book with an unpleasant grin.

"Been moping off by yourself again to-day, have you?" he commented.

"What's it to you what I've been doing?" snapped Tennant.

His nerves were on edge, and he was in no humor to be hectored by any one.

Wrexler elevated his eyebrows.

"My gracious, aren't you fierce!" he remarked. "I'm sure I haven't the least interest in what you do. You can go drown yourself in the river, for all I care—if you can manage to break a big enough hole through the ice. I rather expected to see you on the lake this afternoon, though. About everybody else was there. You can skate, can't you?"

Tennant yanked his sweater over his head, rumpling his coarse, wiry black hair into disorder.

"Yes," he ripped out shortly, as he threw the garment onto a chair.

Wrexler eyed him curiously for a moment, wondering how any human being could be so persistently, eternally silent. How was it possible for any one to sit still for hours at a time as Tennant did, never speaking unless he were asked a question and then only in the fewest possible words?

"You're not waiting for an invitation, I hope," he went on presently. "That's only necessary when a fellow wants to try for the hockey team."

Garth did not answer at once. His face was plunged into a bowl of water; but the next instant he withdrew it, and, reaching blindly for a towel, began to rub it hurriedly over his glowing skin.

"I don't want any invitations," he growled ill-temperedly, the thought of his troubles surging back upon him with renewed force. "I had one to-day and turned it down."
Wrexler’s blue eyes widened with surprise.

“You did?” he exclaimed incredulously. “To try for the team?”

Tennant nodded silently, and, turning to the glass, began to brush his stubborn hair fiercely.

“Why, who——”

“Carpenter!” the big fellow retorted savagely, without looking around.

Something in his voice made it instantly clear to the quick-witted Wrexler that there was no love lost between the two. He was a little puzzled to know why Eric Carpenter should have asked this surly country bumpkin to come out and try for the hockey team. But, at all events, it was very evident that Tennant bitterly disliked the man who was such a general favorite in the school.

It was a very welcome discovery. Wrexler hated Carpenter with all the venom which was in him—and that is saying a good deal. He envied the handsome fellow his good looks, his skill at athletics, even his popularity, which seemed a strange thing in a boy who not only made no effort whatever to win the liking of his fellow mortals, but deliberately went to the opposite extreme.

He knew that Eric had not the slightest use for him, and he never let slip an opportunity to say spiteful, bitter things about him behind his back. And there lay, perhaps, one of the most potent reasons for the intense feeling in Wrexler’s mind. No one paid a particle of attention to anything he could say against Carpenter. The latter’s popularity was too strong to be affected by mere words, and, as a result, Wrexler’s bitter hate had increased by leaps and bounds until he would readily have taken advantage of any means to bring about the downfall of its object.

And now into his fertile brain leaped the notion that here was the means. A little careful fostering of Tennant’s already strong dislike, and there was no telling how far the big fellow’s violent temper might carry him.

The blond chap leaned back in his chair and surveyed the powerful shoulders of his silent companion with curious speculation. Then, as Garth laid down the brushes and turned around, he said carelessly:

“So Carpenter asked you to come out and play hockey, did he? I suppose you know what his reason for that was?”

“So he could have a little fun at my expense?” Tennant snapped. “I may be green, but I can see through a millstone as far as any one.”

“Exactly,” Wrexler said quickly. “You hit the nail on the head this time. I wondered why he was doing those stunts down on the lake.”

Tennant scowled fiercely.

“What stunts?” he demanded, his face flushing.

“Oh, giving a little imitation of you, that was all,” Wrexler returned airily.

And, with unblushing effrontery, he went on to pour into the angry fellow’s ears a fairly accurate description of a performance which had taken place on the lake that afternoon, in which Garth had been held up to ridicule, to the amusement of a large number of the boys; but, instead of giving himself the credit of being the chief actor in the affair, he calmly turned that honor over to Eric Carpenter.

The result was that by the time the supper bell rang Tennant’s rage was at a white heat, and he made up his mind to settle the score once and for all, at the earliest opportunity.

CHAPTER V.

GARTH MAKES A MISTAKE.

At the supper table Eric Carpenter was decidedly thoughtful. He did not often fail when he undertook to accomplish a purpose, and yet he had failed miserably that afternoon in attempting to win over Garth Tennant.

It was an odd feeling for a fellow who had never had to try when he wanted a boy’s friendship, to realize that he had been repulsed, definitely and decidedly, by a youth who was more or less looked down on by the whole school.

It hurt his pride and made him wonder what there was lacking in his make-up which caused the rugged New Englander to hate him so; for he realized that it was dislike, pure and simple, which had made Tennant snap back at him so fiercely.

But, far from being discouraged, that first failure simply put him on his mettle and made him more determined than ever to make good his promise to Frank Merriwell. Surely there must be some way in which the misunderstanding could be explained. If he only had not made that first mistake when, irritated by the fellow’s surliness, he had flared up and, without realizing how far the epithet would go, had fixed on Tennant the name which had at once been taken up by the whole school. That had been an error, but there was no help for it now. It only made things harder to straighten out; but Eric had no doubt of his ultimate success.
He was thinking now of how he should proceed in the rather delicate undertaking, and finally he resolved to take the simplest, most direct way, and talk the matter over with Tennant himself.

Consequently, about an hour afterward, as the big New Engander sat alone in his room, he was rather surprised to hear a quick, sharp knock at the door.

"Come in," he called gruffly.

The next instant the expression of surprise on his face changed to one of wonder, which, with equal swiftness, vanished and was replaced by a heavy scowl as Eric Carpenter stepped into the room and closed the door behind him.

"Hello, Tennant," he said cheerily. "May I come in for a few minutes?"

Mechanically Garth nodded slightly, but he did not rise from his chair to shake hands. He was dazed at the sudden, absolutely unexpected nature of the call, and it was a minute or two before he could collect his wits.

Not receiving an invitation to sit down, Eric calmly took possession of a chair and for a moment gazed straight into the level, passionate-looking black eyes which were regarding him with such unmistakably bitter hostility. And in that moment he realized with a curious, inexplicable thrill that he had undertaken something which was going to be far more difficult than he had ever imagined it would be. Even that afternoon he had not realized the full strength of the animosity which he had to combat. For the first time he wondered whether he was going to fail.

No sign of this doubt appeared in his frank, open face, however. He sat back comfortably on the chair, a half smile on his lips, regarding Tennant with an expression of friendliness which had the latter been unbiased, he would have seen was perfectly sincere.

"I met Wrexler downstairs," Eric began pleasantly. "So I knew you'd be alone, and thought I'd drop in for a little talk."

Still Tennant did not speak, but the frown deepened on his face and his eyes narrowed. He was wondering at the amazing effrontery of the fellow in coming here after the way he had behaved on the lake that afternoon. What was his object? What could he possibly be after?

Carpenter crossed his legs and linked his hands loosely over one knee.

"We had a pretty good game this afternoon," he went on quietly. "But, somehow, I couldn't help thinking how much better you would be as one of the forwards than the boys who are there now. I don't like to seem to harp on a thing, Tennant, but I'm sure you'd enjoy hockey if you once took it up."

Garth's eyes gleamed. What a smooth talker this handsome fellow was! One would almost suppose that he really meant what he said. But he would get no satisfaction here.

"You seem to be awfully anxious to get me down on the lake," the big fellow snapped. "Why don't you come straight out with it, and tell me the real reason?"

Eric looked a little surprised, and a slight flush spread over his face at the open contempt in the other's tone. Was it possible that he knew of the talk with Merriwell? Of course not. There was not the slightest chance of his having learned that.

"That is the real reason," he said simply, "though I'll admit I'm a little selfish, perhaps. You know I'm captain of the team, and I want to have as good a one as I can get together. We played the first game of the season the day after you came, and just won it by the skin of our teeth. We've got to brace up before we play Fairdale. We've got to get more beef, for we simply must beat them, old fellow. It would never do to get licked. You see that, don't you?"

His voice quivered with earnestness, and for an instant his dark eyes held Tennant in thrall. A sudden doubt assailed the big New Engander. How was it possible that any human being could dissemble to this extent? Every accent of his pleasant, well-modulated voice rang true. Could Wrexler have been mistaken?

Garth's hesitation was but momentary, however. An instant later he remembered, bitterly, all he had suffered at the hands of this fellow, and his rancor blazed up again with renewed strength and fire.

"What do I care whether you're beaten or not?" he flared up. "I'd be glad of it."

Carpenter's face hardened a little and into his eyes flashed a look of incredulity.

"You can't mean that, Tennant!" he exclaimed. "You surely wouldn't want to see your own school beaten."

"I'd like to see you beaten so's you wouldn't have a leg left to stand on," Garth retorted significantly.

For an instant there was perfect silence in the room, as Eric returned the other's hostile look with perfect steadiness. A sense of impotency, of utter failure, swept over him. He had an odd feeling of helplessly beating against a wall of granite on which he could not make the least impression. The fellow was unrepentant—implacable; and it hurt desperately to be the object of a hatred so unrelenting.
Presently Carpenter arose quietly from his chair.

"I am sorry you feel that way, Tennant," he said quietly. "I hoped you might forget my thoughtlessness that day you first came. I regretted it the minute the words were out of my mouth, but you were pretty snappy, and my temper got the best of me. I've tried to make up for it since; I've said I was sorry. A fellow can't do any more than that, Tennant."

His voice was earnest and there was an undercurrent of real pain in it. He had forgotten his promise to Frank. It was not that which moved him now, but rather a strange, inexplicable feeling that he wanted the liking and respect of this big, rugged, rough-hewn fellow—more, almost, than he had ever wanted anything before.

Perhaps it was because friendships usually came to him unsought that in this case the very difficulty appealed to him. Perhaps he had penetrated for an instant beneath that armor of reserve and caught a glimpse of the real character there. At all events, he had humbled himself to Garth Tennant as he had never done to any one in all his life before, but a glance at the stern, rugged face showed that his effort had been in vain.

"I'm sorry," he said quietly, as he walked toward the door. "I won't bother you about this again, Tennant. Good night."

Before Garth could force himself to reply civilly, Carpenter was gone.

For a long time the big fellow sat like a statue, his somber eyes fixed upon the closed door and a curious look of indecision on his face. Was it possible that his judgment of Carpenter could be at fault? It seemed incredible that the handsome, popular fellow could really have been in earnest when he said that he was sorry for what he had done. And yet the note of regret in his voice seemed very genuine.

Tennant's heavy brows drew down over the dark eyes and his broad forehead was furrowed with wrinkles. He had a vague feeling that he had been tried in the balance and found wanting—that he had been too unrelenting, too obstinate. And presently that feeling became a dull, poignant ache as he realized that he had thrust aside the friendly hand of the fellow he had wanted to like better than any one he had ever known.

He moved uneasily and a look of despair came into his eyes.

"Why couldn't I have been decent to him and let it drop!" he groaned. "Why couldn't I have acted quickly instead of sitting here like a bump on a log. He came halfway—more than half—and I was too slow to meet him. And now he's gone away thinking that I'm a thick-headed fool. He'll never come back. He'll never want to have anything to do with me after this, and I don't blame him a bit. I'm just a plain, dumb fool; and I wish—I wish somebody would kick a little sense into me!"

CHAPTER VI.

A RESOLUTION.

But though he realized too late what a blunder he had made, Garth Tennant could not bring himself to go frankly to Carpenter the next morning and tell him of it.

He knew that was the only thing to do, but his shy, taciturn nature made him shrink from it as something which would be utterly impossible. He pictured to himself Eric's quiet scorn, or, worse yet, his open ridicule. After his churlish repulse the night before of Carpenter's apologies, how could the latter feel anything but the greatest contempt and dislike for him?

In spite of that, however, he might have risked it had not his intolerable shyness stood in the way. More than once during the morning he worked himself up to the point when he felt that he would explain things to Eric, come what might of it; but at the sight of the tall, slim, curly-haired fellow, his courage oozed away at his finger tips, his tongue cleave to the roof of his mouth, and he could not have uttered a word to save his life.

And so the morning passed in bitter unhappiness. As soon as dinner was over Garth slipped away from the school and hurried toward the woods.

Reaching the point where he usually left the road and plunged into the forest, he hesitated. For some time he stood there in thoughtful silence. Once he made a great effort and walked briskly into the woods for half a dozen paces, only to turn back to the road again.

At length, slowly, and as if a powerful magnet were drawing him, against his will, he turned about and retraced his steps along the highroad.

He passed the school swiftly, looking keenly around for possible onlookers, and a little beyond the gates he turned into the woods to his left.

There was no signs of vacillation in his manner now. Evidently his mind was made up, and he plunged through the deep, unbroken snow, with head down and
arms swinging rhythmically, heading straight for the edge of the lake.

Presently the trees began to thin; a moment later the shouts and yells of the enthusiastic skaters came faintly to his ears, and then, dropping down on hands and knees, he crawled to a thick clump of bushes through whose naked branches he got a good view of the wide expanse of laboriously cleared ice.

It was dotted thickly with swiftly flying figures, circling, wheeling, or darting straight ahead in a sudden burst of speed. Here and there some boy was doing fancy stunts, to the admiration of an attentive group of enthusiastic onlookers. The place resounded with shouts, and yells, and bursts of laughter, which sent a strange pang of bitter longing through Tenant's heart.

He would have given anything to be down there with them—to be one of them; but it was impossible. He knew that his appearance on the ice would be the signal for the nagging persecution which, to his supersensitive mind, started the moment he showed up anywhere.

With a sigh, he thrust the thought out of his mind and searched with his eyes for the thing which had brought him here.

He found it almost instantly.

A little to the left and quite near the edge of the lake was a long, oval space of ice surrounded by a low, wooden barrier perhaps twelve or fourteen inches high.

Though he had never seen such a thing before, he knew intuitively that it was the hockey rink. He examined it intently and with much interest. He had played the game often enough, but in no scientific way. At home the whole pond had been used as a rink, and every fellow who wanted to come in was permitted. Here, as he understood it, there were only a certain number of picked players on each side. Carpenter had spoken last night of forwards, so each fellow must have a regular position, as they did in baseball or football.

The two teams were just forming, so that Tenant had a good chance of seeing how the game was played from the very start. In half an hour he had a pretty good notion of the main points. It was very much simpler than he had supposed. He was sure he could do as well as some of the fellows down there, but he would never have a chance now. After the way he had treated Carpenter the night before it was not likely the captain of the team would ask him again.

His eyes followed Eric's graceful form with an expression of wistful longing in their somber depths. How splendidly he played the game! It was no wonder he was looked up to and admired by the fellows. He seemed to be all over the rink at once, dashing into a scrimmage like a whirlwind, snaking the puck away from some player on the opposite side and then racing with it toward the goal. There were a number of other good players on both teams, but none of them approached Carpenter in speed or agility.

Sick at heart, Garth realized that this was the fellow who had deliberately made overtures of friendship to him last night, which he had as deliberately turned down. He must have been blind—willfully, foolishly blind—to have done such a thing. And now, when it was too late, he felt a desperate longing, which was almost a physical ache, to live over that night and have once more the chance which he had thrown away and which would never come again.

For a long time he lay there in the snow, his eyes fixed eagerly on the game which was going on below him. And gradually, in the interest and excitement of following every move, he forgot his troubles for the time. He sized up the different players with calm, dispassionate judgment, which was characteristic of him, allowing no personal dislike to enter into the question. He saw Reddy Payne, playing on the second team, carried away by the excitement of the moment and making mistakes which would never have occurred had he used a little judgment. His swift, mercurial, fly-away nature showed up here as it did in everything, and made him at times brilliant, but, as a rule, not to be depended on.

Garth noted with more approbation the steady work of Vincent Schuyler on the first team. He was a big, broad-shouldered, fresh-faced boy, whom the fellows sometimes called "Venus." Tenant wondered whether he ever resented the name. He should have hated it himself, almost more than he disliked his own cognomen. But Schuyler seemed to take it good-naturedly, as he did almost everything.

A little later, as he was retracing his steps through the woods, he was still pondering over the question which had started a train of thought in his mind.

Slowly it began to dawn upon him that perhaps he had been too thin-skinned—too hasty to resent something which other boys took as a matter of course. He had heard many of the other boys called all sorts of names, but up to now he had not given it much thought.

Under the influence of this new idea, however, he deliberately considered such of them as he could re-
member, and asked himself point-blank whether they were better or worse than the one which had fallen to his share.

By the time he struck the road and turned toward the school gates his cheeks were flushed a little and a rueful smile lightened his somber face. He had realized that there were a good many worse things than "Grouch" which he might have been called, and the discovery was not a little humiliating.

"Looks like I'd been even more of an ass than I thought," he muttered. "No wonder the fellows think I'm a dope."

He paused and squared his shoulders with a determined gesture.

"There's one thing I'm going to do if it kills me," he murmured. "I'm going to see Carpenter to-night and tell him what a fool I've been. I don't s'pose it will make any difference—I certainly wouldn't be in a hurry to take up with a fellow who talked to me the way I did to him last night; but it's up to me to do it, and I'll feel better when it's over."

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CHAPTER VII.

A BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT.

It was unfortunate that Garth Tennant chose the stairway he did to ascend to his corridor. Just why he entered the building by the side entrance instead of that at the front, he could never have told. Probably he was so much immersed in thought that he did not realize where he was going, and when he did finally come to himself he was in the hallway and considerably nearer the small stairway at the back of the building than the larger main one in front.

In order to reach this, however, he had to pass the doors of two classrooms, and he was somewhat surprised to hear voices issuing from the first one. Had he but known it, there was nothing unusual in the fact, for it was a room which the boys were allowed to use during the evening, and there they often congregated before supper. But Garth, being new to the place, was unaware of this, and for an instant he hesitated, wondering what was going on there.

And in that momentary pause he heard his own name spoken by some one inside the door in accents of derision.

"Oh, you won't catch the Grouch down on the lake. He's too foxy for that. Eric tried to get him to go down to-day so's he could make a holy show out of the loon, but it was no use."

There was a general snicker, and then another voice spoke up.

"It's a rotten shame! I was waiting for him to show up all afternoon, expecting some fun. Can you imagine the Grouch on skates, fellows? I near died at the imitation we had down there yesterday."

At that moment Garth recovered from the surprise which had held him momentarily paralyzed, and stalked past the door, head held high and eyes straight ahead of him.

He did not look to see who the fellows were. What matter did it make, anyway? Whoever they were, they had wrecked his faith in Carpenter as completely as if it had never been.

In that single instant the high hopes on which he had been counting for so much were overthrown like a ruined house of cards. And only at the moment of their blasting did he realize to the full just how much he had counted on them.

So that was the reason for the handsome Eric's amazing condescension—that was why he had come up to the room the night before with his realistic story of the team needing beef. That accounted for the clever farce of begging pardon.

It had all been done for an object, and that object was the complete humiliation of Tennant before most of the fellows in the school. They had taken it for granted that he could not skate, because he was such a duffer in most other ways. It was either that, or Carpenter had some scheme up his sleeve which the big New Englander did not fathom, for making him ridiculous.

At first Garth was almost beside himself with rage. As he ran up the narrow stairs he vowed that he would turn the tables by the simple and effective method of smashing Eric's face the first time he saw him. That would certainly put the shoe on the other foot with a vengeance.

But swiftly on the heels of that came another idea which made the big fellow tingle from head to foot with joy. This would be the better way. There would be no real gratification in fighting with a fellow whom he knew was not so strong as he. He even doubted whether he could bring himself to force a scrap on the other in cold blood without a seeming reason.

But what was there to prevent his going down to the lake the next day and asking Carpenter to let him
try for the team? If Eric's object was to get him on
the ice in order to play a trick on him, he would be
only too glad to accede to the request. And, once on
the rink, why should not Garth make every effort to
beat the popular captain at his own game? Already
he knew that he could skate as fast as his enemy. Was
it not likely that, having so strong an incentive to win,
making every effort, straining every nerve, he might
come to play a better game than the man he hated?
That would indeed be a triumph. At once he would
be revenged signally on Carpenter and show these fools
who had jeered and belittled him since his first com-
ing to the school that he was a better man than they.

When Garth reached his room Guy Wrexler had
not yet appeared; but he entered a moment later, and
was not a little surprised at the change he found in his
erstwhile taciturn roommate.

Tennent was not exactly loquacious, but he wanted
to find out a few things, and lost no time in opening
fire on Wrexler the instant he appeared.

"Say, Wrexler, what are the rules about hockey?"

The blond youth opened his pale eyes to their widest
extent.

"By gracious, Tennant!" he exclaimed. "You're not
thinking of playing, are you?"

"Never you mind what I'm thinking of," responded
Garth shortly. "Just answer my question, if you
can."

Wrexler snorted indignantly. Was there any ques-
tion which he could not answer—or, at least, make a
stab at it.

"Of course I can," he returned promptly. "You can't swing your stick above your waist, and you can't
touch the puck with anything but your stick. You've
got to be on side, and you can't trip a man up."

"Is that all?" Tennant asked quietly.

Wrexler nodded.

"What about shoving a man with your shoulder, the
way you'd interfere in football?" Garth asked sud-
denly, after a moment's pause.

"Oh, sure, you can do that," the blond fellow an-
swered quickly. "You can butt him all over the rink,
if you want to."

Tennent's eyes glittered as still another possibility
occurred to him. There seemed to be nothing to pre-
vent his rushing Carpenter at any time and making a
systematic effort to break up his game and spoil the
effect of his playing, even if the big New Englander
accomplished nothing on his own hook.

He glanced at Wrexler and found that youth eying
him with an expression of the most intense curiosity
on his thin face.

"Is that all you want to know?" he asked, as his
eyes met Tennant's.

"Sure."

"What are you thinking about doing, anyhow?"

Wrexler burst forth, unable to contain himself an-
other minute. "You're not really going to try for the
team, are you?"

"Why shouldn't I?" Garth asked quietly.

The slim, pale-eyed youth shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, I don't know," he returned slowly. "A fel-
low's got to be able to skate pretty well to even think
of hockey."

A curious and not altogether pleasant smile ap-
ppeared on Tennant's face.

"How do you know whether I can skate or not?"

he inquired.

"I don't," Wrexler answered hastily. "Only I
thought——"

"Say, can you?"

But Garth had answered all the questions he pro-
posed to, and no amount of wheeling on the part of
his roommate could coax another word out of him.

But Wrexler was a fellow who could put two and
two together as well as the next man. He recalled
Tennent's anxiety to know the rule about interfer-
ence, and he had not missed the look of fierce satis-
faction which leaped into the big fellow's eyes when
he found that he could shove any one about all he
wanted to on the rink.

"By Jove!" he muttered, on his way down to sup-
ner. "I'll bet he's going to get even with Carpenter
by breaking up his game on the rink. What a dandy
scheme! I'd never have given the lumphead credit
for thinking it up. Gee! I certainly hope it's right.
What a sell it would be for that stuck-up ass to be
done by a greenhorn from the farm. It would just tickle
your Uncle Dudley to death, and wild horses wouldn't
keep him from watching the performance to-morrow."

Chuckling maliciously, he made his way to the
dining room; and, strange to say, he held his tongue
for once in his life. He did not want to spoil the
effect of the surprise by having even a hint of it leak
out before the appointed time.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRANSFORMATION.

Had Garth Tennant been able to follow up his
scheme at once, without waiting for the next day, it
would have been comparatively easy. He was fur-
ous at what he considered a deliberate attempt on the part of Carpenter to shame and humiliate him publicly. His sense of justice was outraged, and a spirit of combativeness aroused within him, which made him eager to pit himself against the fellow who had been so false.

He never doubted his ability to defend himself against anything which might come to him on the lake. He would have been only too glad to have a rough-and-tumble fight started so that he might get in a few good licks at the fellows who had been tormenting him for the past week, but such a thing was unlikely in the extreme. Their methods were more subtle and vastly more effective than a crude recourse to pugilistic tactics.

But, shy as he was, Garth had lost even the fear of making himself ridiculous. He did not care what the boys thought or said of him, so absorbed was he in his plan for getting even with the fellow who had been so treacherous.

Though he did not realize it, the thing which stirred him most was the destruction of his faith in the boy he had so much admired. It had taken him a long time to make himself believe that Carpenter had really wanted to be friendly with him, for he was not a fellow who had a high opinion of his own value. It had been hard to understand why a person like Eric should have the least interest in him; but once having come to that conclusion, he was filled with such high hopes as to what might be the result that the swift, bitter disillusion hit him pretty hard.

In his room that night, after the first flush of anger had passed away, it was this which filled his thoughts to the exclusion of everything else. Try as he would, he could not seem to understand. His experience with boys from Eric's walk of life had been very limited, but human nature is much the same everywhere, and it seemed incredible that any one could possibly be so false—so double-faced. He could not fathom the mind of a fellow who would deliberately stoop to such contemptible deception.

There was but one bit of satisfaction to be had out of the whole miserable matter—he had not taken Carpenter's bait and fallen into the cleverly spread snare. To-morrow he would do so seemingly, but it would be with his eyes open, knowing well what to expect, prepared for anything.

But somehow, as the evening wore away and he turned the matter over and over in his mind as well as he could amid Guy Wrexler's ceaseless chatter, the feeling of grim satisfaction which he had experienced at first whenever he thought of how he would be revenged lessened considerably.

In the morning it was still less strong, but, nevertheless, he did not give it up. There was a certain bulldog tenacity about him which was difficult to arouse, but which made him cling obstinately to anything about which he had once definitely made up his mind.

Directly after dinner he got out his skates and a battered hockey stick, and, stalking out of the house, made his way along the path which led to the lake.

His appearance on the ice was a distinct surprise to the fellows already congregated there. There were exclamations of astonishment, followed by a quick buzz of conversation among the various groups scattered over the smooth surface; but Tennant's outward appearance gave not the slightest hint of the turmoil which filled his soul.

Seeing his cool, calm demeanor as he sat down deliberately and commenced to fasten on his skates, no one would have imagined for an instant that it had taken the full force of every ounce of will power he possessed to bring him there.

Reddy Payne crouched and raised one hand to shade his eyes with an exaggerated gesture.

“Oh, look who's here!” he chirped gleefully. “My eyes must deceive me. It can't—simply can't—be the Grouch.”

“It is, though,” returned Wrexler eagerly. “And, by thunder, if he hasn't got a hockey stick in his hand!”

“No!” exclaimed another incredulously.

“Fact!” Payne giggled excitedly. “What do you think of that? Oh, joy! I believe he thinks he can play! This is too good to be true, fellows. Watch him——”

The words died suddenly on his lips; his eyes widened in breathless amazement, as he saw Tennant step suddenly onto the ice, give his feet a couple of stamps, and then shoot toward the hockey rink, where Carpenter and a few of the regular team were having a little desultory practice while they waited for the arrival of the rest of the boys to start the game.

The big, rough New Engander went over the ice like a race horse. The dazed fellows in the little group behind thought they had never seen any human being go so fast, and they watched him with staring, unbelieving eyes.

The tense silence was broken by Reddy Payne’s voice, sobered, incredulous, almost awed.
“Will you look at that!” he gasped. No one answered him. They were too busy taking in the astounding spectacle and adjusting their minds to this strange, new point of view regarding the fellow they had so jeered at and ridiculed.

There was nothing to laugh at here. Try as he might, not a single one of them could do what the despised Tennant seemed to be accomplishing without the slightest effort.

Guy Wrexler’s pale-blue eyes were alight with an expression of malicious satisfaction as he watched the tall, powerful figure reach the low boarding with a scarcely perceptible slackening of speed, take it with a swift leap, and skim over the smooth ice toward Eric Carpenter. His guess was right. Tennant was out for blood. He fairly itched for the fun to commence.

Carpenter himself was no less amazed. He could hardly believe his senses when he saw who was coming toward the rink at such an astonishing speed. And as Tennant cleared the low barrier in a spectacular manner he gave vent to an exclamation of amazement and thorough approval.

When Garth stopped before him, Eric’s face was alight with eager interest.

“By Jove, Tennant!” he ejaculated. “Where in the world did you learn to skate like that?”

Garth was a little taken back. There was no mistaking the look of admiration in Carpenter’s eyes, and for a moment the big New Englander hesitated. Then he remembered the lesson he had learned so painfully.

“We have ice now and then in New Hampshire,” he returned shortly.

Carpenter laughed.

“I suppose you do,” he said genially. “But I had no idea you had taken advantage of it to this extent. I was wondering how on earth you had been able to stay away from the lake so long. Why, a fellow who skates the way you do ought to have been down the very first day.”

Tennant’s face did not soften. Twenty-four hours ago he might have believed this blarney; it would have pleased him intensely and thrilled him to the very core. But now he knew about how much truth there was in it.

“If it isn’t too late to take up your offer,” he said stiffly, “I’d like to try for the team.”

“Good!” Eric exclaimed tersely. “Of course it’s not too late. I’m awfully glad you decided to come out. It would be a shame for you not to when we need strengthening so much.”

Garth did not answer. He was wondering again how a fellow like this could bring himself to play so contemptible a part. That it was a part Tennant felt sure; but he tried to make himself believe he did not care—tried hard to stifle the inexplicable feeling which swept over him that, if he allowed himself, he could still like Carpenter in spite of everything.

He succeeded for the moment, and Eric, setting his sullen demeanor down to embarrassment and shyness, purposely ignored it, and talked pleasantly on all sorts of subjects for the few minutes which intervened until the arrival of the remainder of the boys.

Instantly he dropped his easy, conversational rôle and became the sharp, short, masterful captain of the hockey team.

Ripping out orders right and left, he soon had the boys in their places, and almost before he realized it Garth found himself one of the forwards on the scrub, waiting with breathless eagerness for the game to begin.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BETTER WAY.

Then came the “face off” by the forwards, and the puck was shot to one side.

Vincent Schuyler went after it, and in another moment was driving it along the ice.

Garth darted for him, bending almost double and giving an amazing exhibition of speed. He overtook Schuyler, and the latter, as soon as he saw that he could not escape, shot the puck cleverly across the rink to Carpenter, who had skated over into position to receive it, and who started instantly with it toward the goal.

Swiftly circling, Tennant went after him, as did one or two other members of the scrub. But Eric was clever. He succeeded in dodging the boys nearest him, and was just preparing to shoot for the goal, when the big New Englander, with teeth set and black eyes glittering fiercely, bore down upon him at full speed.

Eric shot hurriedly—too hurriedly, in fact, for he missed by a hair’s breadth, and the next instant Tennant’s great shoulder, lowered for the onslaught, struck him square in the back, and bore him relentlessly across the ice toward the low boarding which defined the rink.

The big New Englander’s speed was so great that Carpenter was quite helpless. He expected, of course,
that the moment he shot the rubber disk Tennant would naturally cease his pursuit and turn his attention to the puck. He could not know that Garth was not half so much interested in that as he was in thwarting the captain of the team; for, now that he had his enemy at last in his power, the big fellow forgot everything but his desire to get even.

And so he shoved the slim, curly-haired fellow before him with all his strength, giving him a last violent thrust as they neared the boarding, which sent him against it with a crash, and made him plunge over it headfirst into the uncleared snowy stretch beyond.

Then, with a scraping, grinding, digging of his skates into the ice, he stopped himself, and stood over the prostrate man, breathing a little quickly with the exertion he had made, a look of grim expectancy on his sullen face, waiting for the explosion he felt sure would follow.

To his amazement, Eric sat up the next minute and laughed. There was no mistaking the genuineness of his mirth, either; and Tennant, who had expected the boy to be furiously angry, was conscious of an odd feeling of sheepishness.

"By Jove, you're a perfect whirlwind, Tennant!" Carpenter grinned. "I've got a pretty good notion what it would be like to be in a flying machine, after the way you propelled me across the ice. Give me a hand, will you?"

He reached his hand up, and Garth took it without a word and yanked him to his feet.

"But you don't want to go off your head playing this game," Carpenter went on, as they turned back toward the middle of the rink. "Rush a man all you want to, so long as he has the puck, but it's a waste of time to bother with him after he's shot it—and it's a foul. You know it's the fellows who keep their heads that get along at hockey, and 'most every other game. And I want you to get along. I never saw such speed before in all my life."

Tennant did not answer him. He saw at once that the fellow had no idea that his action had been intentional, and, as he realized that fact, somehow he felt mean, and petty, and hateful.

However underhand Carpenter might have been, it was no excuse for him to make a blackguard of himself.

He took his place in the line with chin squared and lips firmly set. He would stick to his original plan of outplaying his enemy, and he would do it fairly. Nothing which he might accomplish in the way of annoying or thwarting Carpenter could repay him for his loss of self-respect.

It was rather surprising that Garth Tennant should have reached that conclusion of his own volition. One would hardly have supposed that, brought up as he had been, he should be possessed of such a sense of honor. But, however churlish his manners might be, however lacking in nicety, he was a fellow who had never lied and never consciously done a mean thing. He had always had his own ideals of honor, and had done his best to live up to them. It was probably this quality of steadfast, rugged honesty, more than any other, which attracted those who managed to penetrate beneath the crusty outer shell of reserve.

From that moment the big fellow deliberately thrust Carpenter from his mind, and put his whole attention on the game.

Having a healthy, normal love of sports and games, what was at first an effort very soon ceased to be done with any real intention. In an incredibly short space the interest of the game had banished every other thought from his mind.

He found an intense joy in throwing himself heart and soul into what he was doing. He soon saw that Eric was right when he had said that the fellow who used his head was always the one who came out on top in the end. He discovered, also, that there was considerably more to hockey than he had supposed.

What had looked simple enough when viewed from a spectator's standpoint became much more complicated when undertaken on the rink. Garth found that he could count on accomplishing very little if he depended solely on his own unaided efforts.

For a time he tried pushing the puck down the rink, trusting to his exceptional speed and rugged strength to force it through against all obstacles; but presently he realized that this was not the right way. Almost invariably when he did this some one on the opposite side darted in and stole the disk from under his hockey—and often as not it was a smaller, weaker, slower boy than he.

Thus, little by little, the necessity for organized teamwork became apparent. He saw that when hard pressed he must pass the puck swiftly to another player on his own side, instead of trying to buck the whole opposing team alone.

He found that there were an infinite number of dodges and tricks which were not listed in the book of rules. And in learning all these things his point of view unconsciously broadened.

More than once when he had borne the puck safely
out of a tough scrimmage or raced it spectacularly
down the rink, he was vaguely conscious of hearing his
name shouted from the little knots of interested on-
lookers which were scattered here and there outside
the boarding.

“Good boy, Grouch!”
“Too bad, Grouch! That was close!”
“Better luck next time, Grouchy, old fellow.”

It was the old name which he had disliked so in-
tensely, and yet it was not the same. The tones of
those who uttered it had miraculously transformed it
from an epithet of derision to one of friendship, and
approval, and good comradeship, and Garth’s heart
thrilled as he heard it.

This was what he had so longed for. It did not
matter what they called him, so long as the smile—
metaphorical or actual—was there. It was the spirit
of the thing which counted, not the matter.

And so the afternoon wore on to its close, and to
Garth it was the most gloriously happy afternoon he
had ever spent. His whole body tingled ecstatically
with the sense of power, and superiority, and ability
to do things. He realized intuitively that the opinion
of those about him had changed. He felt, without
knowing why, that the boys were looking on him with
a new respect. He was lifted out of himself for the
moment, and there was no room in his mind for the
suspicions and doubts which had crowded it when he
first appeared on the lake.

The climax came when he shot his second goal in
that trying half light of early evening, which is almost
as impenetrable as total darkness, and infinitely more
deceptive, and thus ended the game.

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CHAPTER X.

PERPLEXITY.

As the boys leaped the wooden barrier and skated
toward the bank, Garth found Eric Carpenter at his
side.

“By Jove! that was great playing, Tennant,” he said
enthusiastically. “For a fellow who’s never seen real
hockey before, you put up a simply ripping game.
You’re coming out to-morrow, of course?”

Tennant hesitated. Now that the tension was re-
relaxed and the excitement over, the old shyness swept
over him like a wave, making him shut up like a clam
and draw back quickly into his shell.

“Yes,” he answered shortly.

Eric glanced swiftly at his rough-hewn, tanned face,
which was just now flushed a little, and wondered what
was going on in the mind back of that impassive mask.
Somehow, he felt that Tennant was very far from
being the sullen, morose boor which he seemed. He
had been positively transformed that afternoon, and
yet here he was back in the old silent, taciturn manner.

Probably Merriwell had been right when he said that
the boy was one who wanted to make friends but who
did not know how. And yet Eric had an odd feeling
that there was something more than mere shyness and
embarrassment which kept the big fellow so continu-
ously aloof.

Though Garth did not treat him any differently than
he did the other boys, Carpenter felt as if there was a
difference. It was almost as if the big, rugged, silent
fellow had a grudge against him. Was it possible that
he could still be harping on that first unfortunate error
which Carpenter had made? It did not seem as if
any sane mortal could make so much of so small an
affair.

But Eric’s intuitions in this regard were seldom
wrong, and, having decided that Tennant disliked him,
he deliberately set about to combat it.

All the way back to the school he talked amusingly
and entertainingly about all sorts of subjects which he
thought might interest his companion, but without, it
must be confessed, making much headway. But Car-
penter gave no hint that he had been defeated; he was
not that sort. When they parted in the hall—Tenn-
ant’s rooms were on the floor above—he said, with
apparent carelessness:

“Drop in some evening and see me, Tennant. You
know where my rooms are.”

Garth hesitated.

“All right, I will—some time,” he returned shortly.

He did not realize how ungracious the speech was
until after the words were spoken, and then it was too
late to recall them. But his tone hurt Eric more than
he would have cared to confess to any one. He would
rather have had a point-blank refusal than this grudging
approbation which really meant the same thing; and, as he went on down the corridor, he felt again
the hopeless sensation of trying to make an impression
on a wall of granite. But this time the feeling was
stronger and the disappointment more lasting. He
knew now, without any question, that he wanted des-
perately to make a friend of Garth Tennant; and it
was for the boy alone and not because of any promise
he had made to Frank Merriwell.
Going into his room, he lit the lamp and flung himself down in a chair.

“What in thunder is there about the fellow I like so much?” he exclaimed petulantly. “Most anybody would let well enough alone after they’d been thrown down as many times as I have. Why don’t I drop it? He doesn’t like me. Worse yet, I believe he hates the very sight of me, and yet I keep on, like a fool, trying to make him change.”

He smiled whimsically, but under that smile was a flicker of very real perplexity and regret as he sat thoughtfully regarding the carpet.

“I wish I knew what it was that has set him against me,” he murmured presently.

The real trouble at present was that Garth Tennant was like the burned child who dreaded fire. He had been so hurt before when he had allowed himself to think that Eric Carpenter really wanted to know him and be friendly with him that he was extremely chary about repeating the experience.

There are some natures which make friends with an ease and facility which is a source of despairing wonder to fellows like Tennant. Naturally shy and retiring, with a very small opinion of his own virtues, it always took him a long time to realize that there was any one who really wanted to know him.

This had been his experience with Carpenter. He could not imagine what possible use a fellow of his sort could have for a raw, unpolished countryman; but after Eric’s visit to his rooms that night he had been actually forced to believe that the handsome chap really wanted to make friends.

The realization was as welcome as it was surprising. All that next day he had had it in his mind as something very precious and scarcely to be believed. The struggle against his overwhelming shyness had been a hard one, but at last he had made up his mind to go and beg Eric’s pardon for having doubted him. He had even planned what he should say and how he should say it.

Upon the heels of that, to have his eyes so rudely opened to the truth and to learn that it was all a put-up job, that his idol had feet of clay, had hurt him desperately and made him very bitter. He was not going to run the chance of having it happen again.

Reaching his room, he sat down in the dark to think it all over. There seemed to be no question that Carpenter had deliberately made fun of him the other day on the lake. He not only had Wrexler’s very circumstantial account of the affair—which he might not have trusted alone—but it was corroborated by the scrap of conversation he had overheard as he passed through the hallway last night—words which by no possible chance could have been meant for his ears.

And yet, on the other hand, Carpenter’s behavior to-day could not have been more cordial. Not once had he acted as Garth had expected he would. There had been no attempt at ridicule, but he could not decide whether that was on account of his own unexpected exhibition of skill on the ice or not.

Tennent tried hard to be judicial, but through all his doubts and wonderings there ran that curious, inexplicable feeling which he had noticed all afternoon—the desire to believe the best of Eric in the face of every evidence. It was so strong now that it almost overwhelmed him and made it difficult for him to view things from an unbiased point of view.

Finally, he resolved to let things go on as they were for a little while longer. He would make no overtures of friendship to Carpenter, and neither would he be openly hostile until he was better able to decide what Eric’s attitude toward him really was.

If the fellow was nice to him simply because he had discovered that the supposed greenhorn was capable of developing into an amazingly good hockey player, then Tennant felt that he would rather let things remain as they were. There was no friendship in that; it was simply self-interest of a rather higher order. And that this was a very probable solution of the problem which was perplexing him, Garth felt sure.

As captain of the team, Carpenter would naturally wish to make the very best he could of the materials at his hand. Having found that Tennant was such a promising candidate, it was quite likely that he would use every means of securing him; but once the hockey season was over—the moment the last game had been played—he was quite as likely to drop Garth like a hot cake—to toss him aside as blithely and carelessly as he would throw away a wornout glove.

Tennent had barely come to this decision and lit the lamp when his roommate flung open the door and bounced in. He was evidently not in the best of tempers.
“Why the deuce didn’t you keep it up?” he exclaimed, as he flung his cap into a corner and stood surveying Tennant with an odd mixture of petulance and curiosity in his pale-blue eyes.

The big New Englander turned slowly from the bureau.

“What are you talking about?” he asked. “Keep what up?”

“Why, bullying Carpenter,” Wrexler returned plaintively; “butting him all over the rink. I thought that’s what you came out for. You started in fine knocking him over the boarding. Why didn’t you keep on with it?”

A slow flush darkened the tanned, rugged face of the New Englander, and for an instant his lids dropped. There was something humiliating in the fact that his motives and intentions had been so apparent. He wondered whether every one else had seen as much as Wrexler. He might have disclaimed any set purpose in what he had done and credited that fierce, angry rush across the ice to the excitement of his first real hockey game, but he was too honest. With a swift movement, he raised his head and eyed Wrexler steadily.

“I don’t know how you found out what was in my mind,” he said slowly, “but you happened to guess right. I did have it in for Carpenter, and meant to break up his playing all I could, but I stopped when I realized how mean and contemptible I was.”

Wrexler’s eyes widened with surprise. This was a point of view which he could not understand. Then he dropped down in a chair with an exclamation of disgust.

“Shucks!” he snorted. “That’s all rot! You know why Carpenter’s soft-soaping you. I told you what he did the other day. I should think you’d have a little spirit, and hit back, instead of lying down and letting him walk all——”

“That’ll about do for you!” Tennant broke in swiftly. “I can manage my own affairs without your help. If you’re so hot against Carpenter, why don’t you do something yourself instead of trying to make a catspaw out of me?”

There was an emphatic note of finality in his voice as he turned back to the glass and went on tying his necktie, and a dazed look flashed into the thin, long face of the fellow in the chair.

Was this the boy he had set down as a dumb fool? Could this be the fellow upon whom he had counted so confidently to wreak his own petty revenge on Eric Carpenter?

He had an odd feeling that he had suddenly and unexpectedly run against an impenetrable and insurmountable barrier—that, for a single instant, he had felt the full force of an iron will and a personality which was so infinitely stronger than his own.

Not being in the least slow-witted, he realized instantly that he need hope for no help from Tennant in his plan for getting revenge on Carpenter; and, having counted so confidently on being able to wind this big, rugged New Englander around his finger, the sudden, unpleasant awakening was more than impalatable. It made him furiously angry. Scowling fiercely at the broad shoulders of Garth Tennant, he registered a swift, silent vow that he would get even with him, and that soon.

CHAPTER XI.

* GARTH’S EYES ARE OPENED.

After his spectacular and unexpected exhibition on the rink the day before, Garth Tennant had an admirable chance to acquire, if not actual popularity, at least a good measure of respect among the boys of Farnham Hall.

Most of them were quite ready to admit that their first judgment of the silent, rough-hewn New Englander had been wrong. Boys are very seldom unfair in their treatment of each other, and they had been deceived by Garth’s cold, sullen manner.

Now, however, when he had shown that he was made of such different stuff, they were willing to extend a friendly hand, and call quits of everything in the past.

Unfortunately Tennant did not respond to their overtures. In his supersensitive mind was a dislike,
amounting almost to a mania, for being valued for what he could do rather than for what he was. He did not realize that the measure of a man's ability to do things is the only real standard by which he can be judged. He did not understand how utterly impossible it was for any one to fathom his real nature until they knew him well enough to penetrate beneath the armor of reserve which he had thrown about himself. And in order to know him at all they must first be attracted and have their interest aroused by just some such thing as his surprising performance in the hockey game of yesterday.

Garth had a great deal yet to learn both about the world and about himself; and it was the sort of knowledge which comes only by bitter experience.

It was partly due to this train of thought, and partly on account of his ever-present shyness, that he was more than ordinarily sullen and churlish the morning after the game. And, quite naturally, the boys who made a special point of greeting him pleasantly and trying to talk to him were disgusted at his unresponsiveness, presently ceasing their friendly efforts, confirmed in their first belief that he was an ill-bred country bumpkin and a boor.

This impression was strengthened by the efforts of Guy Wrexler, still chafing under the rebuff he had met with the night before, who went about busily dropping a sarcastic word here and an insinuation there, for the sole purpose of destroying any measure of liking or respect which Tennant might have acquired. And, though most of the boys knew how much value to put upon Wrexler's remarks, his caustic, biting sneers could not help but leave their mark, and make an unconscious impression on many minds.

Eric Carpenter was not slow to see the trend of things, and before long he became irritated beyond measure at Tennant.

The big New Englander had treated him in the same short, brusque manner and unresponsiveness which he had vouchsafed to the other boys, but it was not this fact which aroused his wrath. He was angry at Garth on account of the latter's amazing obtuseness and pigheaded obstinacy.

"I'd like to take him by the scruff of the neck and shake a little sense into him," he muttered, as he watched the swift process of alienation going on. "Why don't he brace up, and smile, and say something pleasant now and then? Does he think the fellows are going to keep on being decent when he throws them down this way? Oh, gee! I wish I could tell him just once what a fool he's making of himself."

This was scarcely possible, however. Eric smiled ruefully as he recalled how thoroughly he had been frozen out a few minutes before. He had discovered that Garth could snub a fellow more thoroughly and completely in fewer words than any one he had ever known. But through it all the strong desire to make friends with the boy never wavered. He was discouraged, but not disheartened. His "dander was up," as he expressed it, and he was determined to succeed in the end. For the moment he had let things slide, but he meant to renew the attack that afternoon on the ice.

Garth himself was not having a very pleasant time. It was far from enjoyable to administer the mental slaps in the face which he had been dealing out all morning. But every time a fellow would say something to him in the pleasant, cordial manner, which was such a complete contrast to the treatment he had been experiencing ever since he first set foot in the school, he would mutter to himself:

"That's for my skating; it isn't meant for me at all. He doesn't really give a rip for me."

Then he would proceed to throw a clash of cold water on the boy, effectually and permanently cooling his enthusiasm, and making him resolve to have nothing more to do with such a grouch in the future.

Of course, it was all wrong—an absurd, idiotic, childish point of view; but Garth had much to learn, and to him it seemed perfectly natural.

He had a long debate with himself after dinner as to whether he would go down to the lake or not. For a fellow of his strength, of will he was strangely vacillating. His desire to outplay Eric Carpenter, which had been uppermost in his mind yesterday, was not nearly so strong now. What could he accomplish, anyway, by rising superior in ability to the captain of the hockey team? Already he had shown the boys
that he was not the dub they had supposed, and he did not know whether to be glad or sorry that he had done it. Somehow, he did not enthuse over the notion of putting Eric into the shade, even if he was able to.

The truth was that he was gradually succumbing to the spell of the popular fellow's constant, sunny friendliness. Though he did not know it, much less admit it even to himself, he was beginning to care for Eric too much to wish to see him take a second place in the sport where he had always been leader.

Insensibly he had ceased to think of the way Carpenter had treated him in the beginning. He did not wish to think of it, for, if he did, it would be impossible for him to like the dark-eyed, curly-haired fellow as he desired.

All these thoughts went on in Garth's subconscious self. He did not realize why he came to certain conclusions. He only knew that his point of view seemed to have changed—that his usually definite purpose was vacillating, and his mind in a turmoil of unwonted hesitation.

But in the end he got out his skates and went down the path to the lake. There was no particular reason why he should not indulge in the sport he enjoyed so much, even if he had no real object or purpose in so doing. It would lift him out of himself for a little while and make him forget his worries and unhappiness.

He did better, even, than he had done the day before. Again the fellows, forgetting his frosty behavior of the morning, cheered him enthusiastically when he performed some spectacular play; and, as before, Garth's heart thrilled with pleasure at the tone of their voices.

He strained every nerve to do his best, and, as a result, when the game was over, Eric Carpenter skated up to his side, his handsome face glowing with enthusiasm.

"That settles it," he said quickly. "You'll go on the first team to-morrow. I never saw any one pick up the fine points of the game as you've done in all my life. If every one on the team was up to your standard, I shouldn't be a bit afraid of meeting Fardale. We'd simple wipe them off the map."

He laughed boyishly, in sheer happiness at having seen the fellow he liked do so amazingly well; and the laugh was so spontaneous, so good-humored, so thoroughly genuine, that Garth could not help but relax a little.

"Thank you," he stammered, in a low tone, an embarrassed blush slowly staining his face.

And in that moment the last doubt of Carpenter's thorough honesty of purpose quietly departed from his mind. There must have been some mistake—some misunderstanding. This fellow could never in the world have been guilty of the falseness and duplicity with which he had once credited him, and, gazing into the clear, honest, brown eyes, a rush of shame deepened the color on his tanned face, and he dropped his lids.

"Don't thank me," Eric smiled. "Thank yourself for having put up the bulliest game on record."

He hesitated an instant and then went on quickly: "You'll take the place, won't you?"

Garth raised his head swiftly, and in his level, passionate-looking black eyes Eric saw something which thrilled him through and through, and made him realize that at last he was beginning to succeed.

"Yes," Tennant said simply; "and thank you—again."

As they walked back to the school together scarcely a word passed between them. Tennant was too full of the joyful, amazing revelation which had come to him, for speech. He felt as if he wanted to get away by himself to think it all over, and actually realize that it was true.

Eric had enough tact to know when words were unnecessary, and, moreover, he was not particularly anxious to talk, himself. He felt that the worst was over. It was enough for the present that Garth had begun to like him. The rest would follow naturally in the course of time.

And so they parted in the hall, with a brief word or two, which were almost cold, after the manner of boys who strive their best to hide any display of feeling as something abhorrent and savoring of weakness.

But deep down in their hearts each of them knew; which was quite sufficient without showing it.
CHAPTER XII.
THE CONSUMMATION.

Garth Tennant did a good deal of thinking that night. It almost seemed as if the realization of how he had misjudged Eric Carpenter had opened his eyes in more ways than one, giving him a broader outlook upon life.

He was able, in some measure, to understand a little of how his stiff-necked obstinacy must have seemed to fellows who knew nothing of his inner self—boys who could not appreciate what a handicap his abnormal shyness and sensitiveness was to him; and the discovery troubled him beyond measure.

"No wonder they call me the Grouch," he murmured ruefully. "It ought to be something worse than that. I don't see how I could have been such a thundering idiot; and yet—and yet——"

And yet he would not have been Garth Tennant had he not followed out a line of conduct which had seemed, at the time, the only natural, possible one.

But now that he understood at last, he firmly resolved that from now on there would be a change, and a big one, in his behavior. No matter how hard he found it, he made up his mind diligently to cultivate the liking of his fellow students. If they were attracted to him by his skating, or anything else, so much the better. He would not turn them down because they were not especially interested in the personality of which they could know nothing, but, instead, he would be as pleasant, and decent, and friendly as he knew how; and perhaps in the end they would come to like him for himself alone.

It must not be supposed that Tennant's eyes were opened all at once. On the contrary, it was a slow, laborious process, which consumed the entire evening. One thought would lead to another until, little by little, bit by bit, the whole surprising realization of self was complete.

Happily Wrexler was spending the evening elsewhere, so that the laborious process of thought went on without interruption; and by the time Guy returned, pettish, cross, disgruntled, but talkative in spite of everything, Garth had come to his momentous decision, and had resolved to start the day by having a thorough understanding with Eric Carpenter.

Then, it being rather late, he slipped out of his clothes and tumbled into bed, trying to close his ears to the eternal stream of words which issued from his roommate's lips, until at last sleep came to his rescue.

How long it was before he awakened he did not know. It was pitch dark when he came to his senses, and for a moment he lay there wondering dazedly where he was and what caused that curious difficulty in breathing.

The next instant he sat up suddenly, with a half-suppressed exclamation of dismay.

"It was smoke!"

The room seemed full of it, biting, pungent, stifling. He wondered why he had not recognized it instantly.

With a leap, he was on the floor, and scarcely had he left the bed when the wild clanging of the big bell of Farnham Hall broke out somewhere above him, filling the night air with a wild, terrifying clamor which thrilled Garth to the heart, and made the shivers course up and down his spine.

A moment later he was calm, and cool, and collected again. Guy Wrexler lay on his back, breathing heavily. Apparently the noise of the alarm had made not the slightest impression on him.

Tennant grabbed him by the shoulder and shook him fiercely.

"Wake up!" he cried hoarsely. "Wrexler! Wake up!"

The next instant he had the fellow out of bed, dazed, bewildered, and only half awake.

"Wa——what——" he stammered.

"Fire!" snapped Tennant.

There is a marvelous power of suggestion in that single word. It penetrated swiftly to Wrexler's dulled brain and thrilled him to action. With a whimper of fear, he flew toward the door and flung it open, only to leap back and slam it quickly as he saw the smoke which filled the dimly lighted corridor.

"What'll we do?" he cried. "Oh, what will we do? We'll be burned to death!"

Garth had paused to slip on trousers, shoes, and coat. He realized the discomfort of facing the bitter
cold outside without them. Then he reached Wrexler's side.

"Rot!" he exclaimed tersely. "We'll get out, all right. Here's your clothes; take them."

With trembling hands the slim, blond fellow took the things mechanically from him; but made no attempt to put them on. Garth's lips curled a little contemptuously as he saw what a funk the other was in, but he made no comment. Instead, he opened the door again and stepped out into the corridor.

The smoke was pretty thick here, to be sure, but probably no more so than in the bedroom. The only difference was that they could see it.

Tennant took a long breath. It was ticklish and unpleasant but not in the least dangerous. But there was no telling how soon it might become so, and it therefore behooved them to make haste.

"You go this way and knock on all the doors," he said quickly, "and I'll take the other——"

He broke off abruptly when he found he was talking to empty air. Wrexler had disappeared. Evidently he proposed to look after number one first of all.

Garth's lips curled again, but he wasted no thoughts upon the delinquent one. Darting to the door of the room next his own, he flung it open and dragged the single occupant out of bed.

"Fire!" he yelled swiftly. "Beat it!"

Then he departed, leaving the fellow gasping and bewildered, but thoroughly alive to his danger.

Tennant ran through the corridor repeating this performance at every room. In some of them he found the fellows already aroused, and presently he began to run into them in the corridor as he hurried from room to room.

Some of them had lost their heads, as Wrexler had, but the majority were amazingly composed, considering the suddenness of their awakening.

Tennant sent them all scurrying to the staircase, and told them to report to Mr. Merriwell, who by this time must be at the scene of action below.

Oddly enough, they obeyed him implicitly, for there was something reassuring in his cool, confident manner—something masterful in the calm way he ordered them about as if they were so many children. Boys who had laughed and jeered at him did as he told them without hesitation or without question; for his was the sort of nature which is at its best in cases of emergency or times of peril—cool, level-headed, steady as a rock.

At last the corridor was empty, and Garth hastened down to the floor below. Here he found little to do. Either some one else had been there ahead of him or the boys had had more time to be awakened by the alarm bell, which clanged continuously.

Tennant made a special point of looking into Carpenter's room, but found it empty, like the rest. His quick eye noticed that Eric's clothes were gone. Evidently he had not lost his head, either.

So Tennant hurried on to the ground floor. The smoke thickened as he descended, but he was rather surprised to find no other evidences of fire.

When he reached the main floor, however, he distinctly heard the crackling of flames not far away, and at once he joined the little stream of boys who were hastening along the corridor with fire buckets. Catching up with the last of them, he found it to be Vincent Schuyler.

"Where is it?" he asked tersely.

Schuyler glanced around at him, and Garth noticed that his face was a little pale, but that otherwise he was perfectly composed.

"In the basement," he answered quietly. "It's got a good start in stores and things there. That's what makes so much smoke."

"Where's Mr. Merriwell?" Tennant went on.

"On the stairs, fighting it," Schuyler answered. "We've got to keep it from spreading or the whole building will go."

Garth asked no more questions. He had found out all there was to know, and a moment later he stepped to the side of Frank Merriwell, where the latter was directing operations from the head of the stairs, and asked him if there was anything in particular which he could do.

Merriwell glanced at him quickly.

"Ah—Tennant!" he said quietly. "Are the boys all down?"
Garth nodded.

"They're all out of their rooms," he answered. "I made sure they were out of the upper corridor, and some one else went through the lower one."

"Good," Merriwell returned. "I'm hoping we can keep the fire confined to the basement, but there are so many combustibles there that the smoke is likely to be dangerous. You'd better stay here and take turns with one of the lines of hose."

Tennant did as he was told without question. Several lines of fire hose had been unreelled, and streams were being played on the fire. He noticed with admiration the way Frank seemed to think of every possible expedient which would be of use. He was everywhere at once, ordering, directing, and even taking a hand at the hose when the occasion demanded. And all the time he was as cool and calm as if he had been watching a ball game.

The village fire department had been summoned by telephone, but the snowy condition of the roads made their progress very slow, so that before they reached the school, the smoke had driven every one outside the building, where they continued the fight through the many windows.

Garth had just taken a turn at one of the hose lines and had staggered back from the smoke to get a breath of air, when the thought suddenly struck him that he had seen nothing whatever of Eric Carpenter.

Where was he all this time? Most of the other boys were about, and it certainly seemed as if a fellow like Eric would be in the thick of the fray.

He glanced swiftly from face to face, but the familiar features were not there. He turned to Reddy Payne, who stood beside him, his freckled face grimed and soot-stained.

"Where's Carpenter?" he asked shortly.

"Search me," Payne returned. "Must be somewhere's about, though I haven't seen him since the racket began."

A sudden, inexplicable chill struck Garth to the heart. Was it possible—— He caught his breath swiftly. The bell! Who was it who had rung the alarm bell?

The next instant he stood at Frank's elbow, his face white as chalk and his black eyes like wells of fire.

"Who rang the bell, sir?" he asked, in a low voice which trembled a little in spite of his efforts to control it.

Frank looked at him in perplexity.

"I don't know," he returned quickly. "One of the boys, I suppose. What is the matter."

"Carpenter!" Garth gasped. "I can't find him. Nobody seems to have seen him. I thought——"

The look of horror in his tortured eyes finished the sentence. Frank's face turned a shade less brown and his lids narrowed.

"Here, take the hose!" he ordered swiftly.

But Tennant did not obey him.

"No, I'll go," he answered hurriedly. "They need you here. I'll find him."

He whirled about, and before Merriwell could stop him he had disappeared into the smoke and darkness. As he raced around to the front entrance, he snatched up a handful of snow and moistened a handkerchief which he found in his pocket.

With this pressed tightly over nose and mouth he plunged into the smoke-filled hallway and darted up the stairs.

The bell hung in a small tower which arose from the main portion of the building and was rung from a closet or loft opening out of the very corridor in which Tennant had rooms. He had passed that very door without thinking anything about it. And yet, all the time, the bell had been ringing furiously. Some one must have been there then.

"Oh, why didn't I think?" he moaned. "Why didn't I open the door? He's stayed too long, and now——"

Reaching the second floor, he deliberately drove his powerful fist through a window in the hall and thrust his head out to snatch a breath of air. Then he ran on to the next floor.

Without pausing to fill his lungs again, he raced to the door and flung it open. The interior was dark and silent.

"Eric!" he cried despairingly. "Oh, Eric!"

The next instant he dashed into the small, square
room, and, stumbling over something which lay on the floor, nearly fell.

A moment later he had the body in his arms and, lifting it as if it were a featherweight, stumbled out of the closet and staggered against the wall. The pungent, stifling smoke caught his throat in a smothering clutch until he felt as if he must reach the air or perish.

With a superhuman effort, he felt his way along the wall until his fingers touched a doorknob. It was the door to one of the rooms whose occupants had closed it after him. There would be less smoke in here. Opening it, he almost fell into the room, slamming the door behind him. After that it was but the work of a moment to reach the window and smash the glass.

Nothing he had ever known had felt so good as that breath of pure, cold air. It revived him instantly, and he lifted the limp form of Eric Carpenter so that it would blow directly on his face.

To his amazement, in another moment the lids quivered and then opened slowly, revealing the brown eyes gazing straight up into his own with an expression of astonished incredulity in them.

"Garth!" Eric murmured faintly. "You came?"

Tennant nodded. He could not have spoken a word to save his life. Something other than the smoke caught him by the throat and made him dumb.

There was silence for an instant. Carpenter's sensitive lips trembled.

"I thought it was the end of me," he said, in a low tone. "I stayed too long and coming down the steps I twisted my ankle. The door had been shut—I didn't know about the smoke. I managed to crawl back into the loft—there was more air there—and close the door behind me. After that—"

He stopped and a flicker of pain crossed his face as if the remembrance was not pleasant. The next instant the ghost of a smile curved the corners of his mouth.

"Then you came after me and saved my life," he finished abruptly. "I—we'll never forget that, will we, old fellow? We'll be friends always, now."

Garth did not speak, but the arm which was about Eric's shoulders tightened, and as he nodded a smile lit up his rugged face and made it actually handsome.

"And now," Eric went on coolly, "hadn't we better be thinking of getting out of this? I suppose where you came up we can go down again; but I'd a little bit sooner be safe outdoors than stop here much longer."

* * * * * * * *

They made the descent safely, thanks to Tennant's powerful muscle and indomitable will; for Eric's injured ankle made it almost impossible for him to walk, and he had to be half carried all the way.

Outside, they found that the village fire equipment had arrived, and with it almost the entire population of Bloomfield. Under Frank's direction they attacked the fire with a fresh vigor and to such purpose that toward breakfast time all danger was over.

The basement was a wreck and its contents totally ruined, but Frank cared little for that so long as there had been no loss of life.

That night proved a turning point in Garth Tennant's career. Within a week there was scarcely a more popular fellow in school; but among all his new friends there was one who stood head and shoulders above the others in his estimation. And often in the quiet of their rooms—Eric insisting that Garth come in with him—they would find much interest and quiet amusement in talking over the time when the big, rugged New Englander had made that mistake in judgment which caused him so much pain and trouble and anxiety, but which now seemed so trivial and far away and unimportant.

THE END.

In next week's issue, No. 768, you will have a story brimming with mingled humor, pathos, and the spirit of adventure. Many and varied types of boys come to Frank Merriwell's great school, and in some cases the development of character, with its unfolding of good and evil tendencies, makes dramas and comedies which we are very fortunate in having put upon paper for us. This story is called "Frank Merriwell's Unknown; or, The Mysterious James Brown." You will be able to get it on December 31st.
THE NEW MAMMOTH CAVE.

The "mammoth cave of Europe," as the newly discovered series of subterranean chambers near Oberrauten, in Austria, is now called, is described for the first time by Hermann Bock, an engineer, who, with a small party of Alpine climbers, explored the cave, which is situated under the Dachstein, a mountain in Upper Austria 9,000 feet high. The entrance to the cave is at an elevation of some 4,500 feet. Italian road menders knew of the existence of a small grotto here where they had been looking for gold. Behind a great boulder at the end of this grotto the party discovered a natural tunnel which a powerful stream in earlier ages has hollowed out of the rock. At the bottom of this tunnel there was a six-foot-deep river bed, formed by what remained of the earlier stream. Here and there pools of crystal-clear water were found. The tunnel continued for 1,000 feet, and led to an apparently bottomless abyss. The party crawled along the edge of the precipice and up a gallery 150 feet high, also seared with the action of dried-up mountain torrents. At the top a narrow hole was found which led upward to a series of stalactite caverns and then narrowed down again to a curving passage leading downward for 1,500 feet. Suddenly the party came upon a vast hall leading portalike to another still larger dome 350 feet high. Here a cave-in had piled up a conelike heap of debris 250 feet high. From here radiated a maze of other halls, passages, and galleries, many of which ended precipitately in dark abysses. As food was running short, the party had to return.

FISH THAT SHOOTS FLIES.

In Queensland some of the most interesting forms of animal life are to be found. The duck-billed platypus—with the web feet of a duck, which lays eggs and suckles young—the lung fish, the walking perch, and many other queer creatures might be mentioned in confirmation of this.

A remarkable little fish is the rifle fish, which lives in the far northern rivers of Queensland. A full-grown specimen, writes a correspondent, measures about ten inches in length and averages one and a half pounds in weight. The rifle fish derives its name from the fact that it shoots its food. It swims leisurely about the stream a few inches below the surface, and is always on the lookout for flies and other insects that settle on the floating leaves and twigs or on the surface of water plants. On getting close enough to its victim it discharges a tiny jet or ball of water, which, if shot straight, knocks the fly into the stream, where it is instantly gathered in by the shooter.
Jim was obliged to light out hot foot. He hed a good critter with plenty o' bottom, an' he hed his own with ther red skunks, not keepin' no more.

"It was a stiff chase an' a long one. As it happened, Jim didn't know much 'bout this yere section, an' this canion can't be dis- 
vover till ye're right over it, so he never spected ther trap he 
was givin' ter til he got clean inter it.

"Notice the big gap through ther range thar? Waal, ther 
wind whirls through the place in ther stillest day, an' wen 
that's a storm it'll blow a mule off his feet any time.

"It happened that was a storm comin' up wen ther reds got 
atter Jim. Thar was some black clouds hangin' back o' that gap, an' 'bout ther time ther reds imps was yellin' with delight ter 
think they'd got a white man in a trap, a comfortable young 
cyclone came whoopin' through the gap an' cut across the open 
twixt hyer an' that like an express train runnin' wild.

"Jim saw it, fer he wuz lookin' back now an' then; but ther 
'Paches didn't look round, an' so they didn't see it at all. It wuz 
one o' them big funnel-shaped clouds that spins along with its 
lower p'int tethering ther yeart now an' then, an' now 'n' then 
jumpin' up inter ther air. What it titched it ripped things up 
generally, but sometimes it'd make a big jump an' skim along for 
a thousand feet 'bout gittin' down on the ground ag'in.

"All to onct Jim saw the kind o' a trap he'd run inter. Ther 
cyclone was cut back above an' below, an' the reds hed spread out ter 
shut him off from turmin'. They howled with joy, fer they reck 
oned on his sleep.

"Wen Jim seen that wuz no way o' gittin' out o' ther trap, he 
jest rides full bent fer ther cahon, havin' made up his mind ter 
leap his boss over ther brink. Ther critter couldn't stop wen he 
got to the edge, an' with a terrible scream it jumped.

"Waal, tenderfoot, fer cyclone got half o' Jim an' his boss 
jest enough ter take 'em clean across the cahon an' set 'em down 
light as a feather on other side, an' it didn't seem then ther boss 
hroke his run at all. Off he went at a lope, with Jim settin' 
on his back as comfortable as you like. Jim he jest turned an' 
waved his old hat at the 'Paches an' gave a yell, then he rode on 
an' was out o' sight before long.

"Them redskins reckoned Jim wuz in league with the Evil 
One, an' sense then they've steered clear o' him as bad medicine.

His boss holds the record fer jerking up in Arizona, an' that's a 
fact.

I cast another reproachful and doubting look at the old guide, 
but he was busy filing his black pipe, and so he knew it not. He 
seemed to believe the story himself; the reader may believe it or 
not, as he pleases.

THE BOY SCOUT.

By ALTON HORACE.

A few miles from Winchester, Virginia, a scouting party, 
sent out from the Union camp, had improvised an encampment. 
The party consisted of one hundred and twenty-five men, com- 
manded by Captain Gere. While the fires were being built 
Captain Gere looked thoughtful.

"This is a surprised captain," said a lieutenant, throwing 
himself down with an air of relief. "I am as tired as a dog. I 
could go to sleep within five minutes, if I were not hungry.

"So could I," said the captain, "if I were not anxious about 
our prospects.

"What is the cause of your anxiety, captain?"

"I have reason to apprehend an attack from Mosby. He is 
certainly not far off, and it is not unlikely that he may have 
discovered our presence in this vicinity.

"You have no idea where he is?"

"No.

"Are you apprehensive of an attack to-night?"

"It is possible. Mosby likes to surprise his opponents.

"It is a pity we couldn't find out where he is, and what are his 
plans.

"I would give something to know.

"Don't detail me, captain, whatever you do, for I couldn't 
stand losing my night's sleep.

"I shan't inform you, lieutenant, a duty which I should 
myself be slow to undertake. Whoever is to go must volunteer.

"Here is your man," said the lieutenant, half jocosely.

Captain Gere looked up inquiringly, and his glance fell on a 
boy of fifteen, with a cocking box along on his back.

"Want your boots blacked, general?" asked the boy.

Captain Gere laughed.

"I am not a general, my lad," he answered.

"Then you ought to be, sir. You look like one.

"That boy will get on. He understands the potency of soft 
scourer," said the lieutenant. "What's your name, my boy?"

"Joe Berk.

"What are your polities?"

"I'm a Union man," answered Joe promptly.

"Are you Virginia born?"

"No; I was born in Pennsylvania.

"How do you happen to be here?"

"I wanted to come as a soldier, but they wouldn't take me be- 
because I was so young. So I came anyway, and I pick up a living 
by blacking boots, running errands, and so on.

The captain and the lieutenant looked at each other. The 
same idea came to each.

"Joe," said Captain Gere, "do you want to earn ten dollars?"

"You bet!" answered the boy quickly.

"There'll be no danger, except that you may be taken prisoner. 
The Confederates would burn a boy like you.

"I'll risk it," answered Joe. "What do you want me to do?"

"I want to find out where Colonel Mosby is quartered, and, if 
possible, what are his plans. If he means to attack us, I should 
like to be prepared.

"And you want me to find out?" asked Joe.

"Yes.

"I'll try it. When shall I start?"

"The sooner the better.

"All right, captain. Have you any instructions?"

"No; I trust everything to your own wit and judgment.

"All right, sir. I'll do my best.

Joe set off at an easy, swinging gait, carrying his blacking box.

Though apparently careless, he glanced quickly to the right or 
left at intervals, remembering his errand. He had walked perhaps 
three miles when he caught sight of half a dozen horsemen, 
evidently in the Confederate service.

"Now's my chance," thought Joe. "I may find out what I want."

As the boy trudged along he attracted the attention of the 
party.

"Hello, boy!" exclaimed one, in a voice of authority.

"What's wanted?" asked Joe inaudibly.

"Where are you going?"

"Nowhere in particular," answered Joe. "Do any of you gen- 
tleman want a shine?"

"Can you do your work while we are riding?"

"I'd rather not try.

"Are you a Yank?" asked another of the party sharply.

"What do you take me for?" said Joe, in well-assumed indig- 
nation.

"Good! I'm glad you are on the right side. Colonel Mosby, 
we ought to encourage this boy."

Joe turned quickly, and looked at the gentleman addressed. He 
had a curiosity to see the man of whom he had heard so much.

"Do you see yonder house, my lad?" asked Colonel Mosby, 
pointing to a house half a mile away.

"Yes, colonel.

"We are going to halt there for supper. Follow after us, and 
we will give you a job."

Joe touched his cap respectfully.

"I'll do it," he said.

He hastened his pace, and arrived soon after the caucade. 
The party swung off their horses and calling for a chair to sit 
down on, each submitted his boots in turn to Joe's professional 
skill. Joe's task was not easy, for they were considerably the 
war horse for Virginia miles.

"I am glad to look like a gentleman once more," said one of 
the party.

"How long will it last, Fairfax?"

"Long, but while it does, it is satisfaction. I wish we had 
the boy in camp."

"Why not?"

"Boy," asked Lieutenant Fairfax, "why don't you join us? We 
can give you enough to do, and you shall fare as well as any 
of us.

"I don't mind," said Joe earnestly. "Times are hard, and I 
reckon I may as well.

"All right. What do you say, colonel?"

"The boy can come."
Joe was secretly rejoiced. All things seemed working in furtherance of his plans.

"When shall I join you?" he asked.

"Come in and take supper with us," said Fairfax. "Afterward we will take you with us to the camp."

Joe was nothing loath, for he had not been accustomed to regular meals, and he felt hungry. After supper, Mosby and his officers held a council, at which they seemed quite oblivious of Joe's presence. His indignant report could not satisfy them.

The question was, when to attack Captain Gere's forces, of whose neighborhood intelligence had been brought by a scout.

"I am in favor of attacking to-night," said Fairfax.

"We don't know exactly where they are," objected another officer; "and in the darkness we should have little chance to find them."

"That is a pertinent consideration," said Mosby.

"What is your own view, colonel?"

"To make an early morning start," said the leader, "say at four o'clock. Then it would be light enough to help us, and we might yet surprise them."

To this view, eventually, the other officers came round.

Soon after supper they started for the camp. Joe was curious to know how far it was.

"Can you ride, boy?" asked Fairfax.

"I shouldn't know how to manage a horse," said Joe, who had ample reasons of his own for not caring to have it known that he was a daring horseman.

"Then I will take you on the saddle with me," said the good-natured lieutenant. "You look tired."

"You won't let me fall off?" said Joe, appearing nervous.

Fairfax laughed.

"Oh, I'll take care of you," he said.

Joe was lifted to the saddle, and the party rode on.

Joe was around the camp. It was in the shadow of the woods, in a place well selected both for convenience and secrecy. The force under Mosby was evidently considerably larger than the small detachment under Captain Gere. The sentinel saluted the leader, and the officers sought their quarters.

"Where am I to go?" asked Joe.

"Oh, you can bunk anywhere."

"Is there anything for me to do to-night?"

"Not; you can go to sleep as soon as you like.

The troops soon retired for the night. They were notified that they must be ready for an early start.

But one could not sleep. Joe felt fatigued, but important business was before him. He must apprehend Captain Gere of the intended attack. Could he find his way back to the Union camp? He felt that his life was at stake, but the distance was formidable. It was probably at least seven miles, and Joe, weary as he was, did not feel in a condition to undertake it.

Joe had been awake, but physical weariness was too much for him. He succumbed to it at last, and slept two hours. When he awoke it was still quite dark; all around him were asleep. Only one sentinel drowsily made his rounds.

"I can guess I can walk now," he said.

The first thing was to escape the vigilance of the sentinel. In the darkness he found this not difficult. He set out pluckily on his return walk, when, as good luck would have it, he came near running against a horse that had broken away from his tether.

Joe thanked his stars. He jumped upon the horse's back—luckily the saddle had not been removed—and set his face in the direction of Captain Gere's encampment. In an hour he approached the outpost.

"Who goes there?" asked the sentinel.

"A friend."

"Halt and give the countersign."

"I don't know it."

"Then you can't pass."

"Tell Captain Gere that Joe Bent wants to see him."

"The captain is asleep."

"Then wake him up. I have important news."

Joe's positive tone impressed conviction upon the sentinel, who ventured to awaken the officer in command.

"Joe Bent?" repeated Captain Gere. "Oh, yes, I remember. It is my boy scout. Bring him in."

Joe was conducted into the presence.

"Well, Joe, what is your news?" asked the captain.

"You are to be attacked early in the morning by Colonel Mosby."

"How do you know this?" asked the captain in surprise.

"I have just come from Mosby's camp."

"Is it possible? Where did you get your horse?"

"I don't know."

"Forewarned is forearmed!" said Captain Gere. "You have done us a great service."

He awakened his chief officers, and held a hasty council of war. The result was that when Mosby approached he found his enemy on the alert, and decided not to attack. His force was superior, but it was not politic, he thought, to make an open attack.

Captain Gere not only rewarded Joe as he had promised, but authorized him to keep the horse, which, with its accoutrements, was of considerable value.

Joe disposed of it to advantage, and returned in triumph with the proceeds to his native village, regretting that he was too young to enter the regular service.

IN THE VALLEY OF SNAKES.

Some years ago my health required that I should seek the climate of the tropics during the winter months. I went to the genial Windward Islands—that fringe of rocky, half-submerged mountains that guards the Caribbean Sea from the assaults of the Atlantic.

From Barbados I went to Port of Spain, Trinidad, and hired a little steam yacht that was about the size of a torpedo boat. I was master of the craft; as soon as the charter was made; but I had a captain, and the rest of the crew consisted of a mate, three deck hands, an engineer and his two helpers, and the cook, who was steward, waiter, and general man of all work, besides.

The passenger would see, we were leg souls in all, on board.

The passage across the Gulf of Paria was accomplished safely, and in two days after leaving Trinidad we were ascending the broad current of the Orinoco; steamimg all day, and tying up to the shores at night.

Of all the animal life that the tropics luxuriate in, the snake is the most characteristic; and I hate a snake as thoroughly as ever did any descendant of Mother Eve.

Toward the close of our first day's run up the Orinoco, the captain told me it was about time to look for a good place to tie up. He explained that it was unsafe to attempt to navigate the river in darkness.

The method of tying up was this: The captain steamed out into the stream about one hundred and twenty feet, and dropped a steam anchor. Then, keeping a line on board, he steamed astern, where a stout cable was fastened securely to one of the feet of a huge mahogany tree.

Then the shore cable was paid out until the anchoring place was reached; and when required the line was hauled on board, the little craft swung close by the anchor with the shore cable pulled almost taut by the strength of the current.

During the night following our third day's trip up the river, we anchored near a little village, and swung our hammocks under the awnings that were spread over the gangways alongside the deck house.

About half-past three in the morning, while it was still dark, all hands were awakened by the shouts of the deck hand on watch, who excitedly shouted:

"Wake up! Wake up! De'y's a big snake comin' right on board!"

The negro's cry awakened me thoroughly. I saw, in the dim light cast by our lantern, a huge anaconda creeping along the shore cable, and nearing the side of the craft.

All my mates were awake by this time, and they, like me, went at once inside the deck house, and hauled in and fastened the wooden shutters that were fitted to keep the sea from breaking the glass in heavy weather.

Nothing must have incensed the reptile. It may have been his disgust at finding that we had all secluded ourselves. At any rate, he proceeded at once to make as much of a disturbance as possible.

He swept down along the starboard gangway to the stern, and then along the port side back to the bow; and then we heard him thrust his head up through the lashings of the awnings to the top of the deck house.

As he went past the little wheelhouse forward, Captain Thomas opened out the wooden shutter, and fired his revolver at our pirate.

The bullet did not hit, but the noise of the explosion of the
pistol apparently hurt the snake’s feelings, for he proceeded at once to thresh about the deck violently.

Hoping to come in contact with the shore line, he took a couple of turns round that, and another about the “bitts” to which the “home” end was fastened.

In his contortions he twisted the rope squarely loose from its hold, so that the yacht swung straight out into the stream from the anchor.

When my readers remember that the winter months under the equator are about the same in temperature as a hot July or August in England, they may realize what it was for us to be packed closely within the deck house of this little steamer, and just over the boiler, too, in which there was still a good deal of heat.

Meantime the anaconda was careering about the deck in absolute command. Captain Thomas and I, took chances and fired shot after shot at the intruder.

A dozen pistol shots had been fired without apparent success, except further to enrage the huge snake, when at last Thomas muttered:

“Pistol bullets won’t settle that fellow; I’m going to give him a dose of buck shot. Half of these bullets must have gone through him, but he only gets more furious with each shot.”

Thomas got my Remington breech-loader, and slipped in a couple of buck-shot cartridges, opened the shutter a little, he waited until the reptile came forward again in his circuit around the craft.

I stood close by his side to aid, if need be, in closing and fastening the shutter.

We heard the rapslike sound of the reptile crawling along the deck just outside. It was not until the little window with the barrel of the gun just protruding outside, when suddenly the great head of the snake appeared in the opening, and made us both start back.

The head came inside a few inches, but Captain Thomas recovered himself at once, and fired both barrels.

Both charges of shot took full effect in the neck, as we found out afterward; but the creature plunged forward and landed inside the wheelhouse, right among us, for his death struggle. As he came in, I confess I was more thoroughly frightened than I had ever been in my life.

When all was over the little place looked as if a cyclone had visited it. The wheel was wrenched from its fastenings, and the stool the pilot used was splintered to kindling wood.

Captain Thomas had a broken arm, and I had been violently thrown down into the hold through the narrow door behind, and bruised so that I was lame for more than a week afterward.

When we recovered from the scare and began to clear up, the intruder was hauled outside; and then we measured him. He was more than ten feet long, and must have been of the size of the specimen that most of our pistol shots had taken effect, though they had made no difference to the creature’s vigor.

AT THE RIFLE RANGE.

Some Territorials were recently mustered at the rifle range to fire their course of musketry. All went well till Private Murphy came under the sergeant instructor’s eyes. The sergeant put him in various positions, but all his shots went wide, and he was told to try again. Just as he got his rifle to his shoulder a fly happened to settle on his forehead, and Murphy seemed to be indifferent to the fly’s audacity. So the irate sergeant exclaimed:

“Keep that fly off your forehead, you bump.”

But Murphy answered as cool as could be:

“Oif right, sergeant; I be looking through his hind legs.”

HE GOT SHOT.

The Smart Man burst into the room.

“Heard the news about Dickinson getting shot?” he roared, red in the face.

Club members dropped their papers and sprang suddenly to life.

“No!” they cried. “When?”

“Bout half an hour ago!” gasped the Smart Man. “I was there and saw it.”

“Where did he get shot?” broke in another.

“Down at the ironmonger’s!” exclaimed the Smart Man, slipping into the best chair. “He bought two pounds of it!”

WHO WILL EXCHANGE POST CARDS?

This is my first letter to “Tip Top,” the king of weeklies, and I hope this will escape the waste-basket, rubbish pile, and bonfire where most no-good letters go. There is quite a little bit of business connected with my letter. I am something of a “Tip Top.” I was visiting a school chum of mine this summer, and shortly after I got settled in my room I picked up what I thought to be a good-for-nothing nickel novel. I looked at it, and I didn’t like it, so I read the whole book; then I called my chum and asked him if he had any more. Said he had, disappeared, came back in a few minutes with about ten. Right then and there we sat down and read until supper time, then went up to the room until midnight. The next day we went to the store where my chum gets his “Tip Top” during the summer, and could only get a score of back numbers, so I had to be content with what I could get. Read all of these and all I could lay my hands on during my stay. “Tip Top” deserves its name, and anybody who does not agree with me will have to settle with, because it is the best and grandest weekly in the all the world. Since I have come home I have written for you to send “Tip Tops” as soon as you could. I expect to be in very soon to get some more, and I expect to get all the “Tip Tops” from the time Dick enters Yale to the present time. Of all the characters I like Dick, and June, and Brad best; then come Frank, Bart, Elsie, Inza, Chet, and of the new fellows, Fritz, Rudie Rose, and Teddy Baxter. I hope and think Dick will get June. Am I right? If any of the boys or girls who take “Tip Top” would like to exchange picture post cards with me, I give you my word of honor that I will exchange card for card as fast as I receive them. Closing with three cheers and a tiger for Burt L. Street & Smith, and “Tip Top” remain a loyal Tip-Topper forever.

Upper Montclair, N. J.

EDWARD E. CARY, JR.

GOOD ADVICE FROM “TIP TOP.”

I wish to express my thoughts in regard to your famous weekly, “Tip Top.” Having read this weekly for about two years, I can truthfully say it is the finest book printed of its kind for the upbringing of the American youth, all have received very good advice from reading it, and would highly recommend it to everyone. Wishing “Tip Top” a long life, I close with three cheers for the king of weeklies.

SCOTT WOODBURY.

Woodstock, N. H.

BEST WEEKLY FOR ATHLETICS.

In order to express my opinion in as few words as possible, I would like to state that this is “Tip Top.” And for the others, “The Boy Who Saved Hand; or, The Boy Who Was Saved” one of the best books ever written for the “Tip Top” Library. I, as one, always will consider “Tip Top” the best book for the athlete on the market today. I have always found the book very interesting; the baseball, football, and basket ball stories being of especially intense interest.

Yonkers, N. Y.

OBRIN SHURTLE.

CANNOT WAIT TILL FRIDAY.

My brother always used to get the “Tip Top” every week, and after he had finished them I used to read them, but he always used to scold me because I was too young, as he said, to read novels. But now, as I am older, I cannot wait till Friday to get the “Tip Top.” The stories I like are about baseball, and football. The characters I like best are Dick, Frank, Brad, Elsie, Inza, June, Chester Arlington, and Fritz. Hoping Mr. Standish will always write stories of clean and good nature as he always has done, I remain,

Newark, N. J.

H. KOCHEER.

FROM A GIRL READER.

I have been a reader of “Tip Top” for over three years, I take pleasure in writing to you. I think it is one of the finest books for the American youth. Mr. Standish must certainly be a great man to write such fine stories. One of their best characters is a girl. I am a reader, I was very sorry to hear of the sad misfortune which befell poor Jack Ready. Let us hear some more about little Frank and the girls. I wish Mr. Standish would have a reunion at Frank’s ranch, and the all of Frank’s old friends there, I hope Dick gets June. What has ever become of dear little, true-hearted Felicia? NELLIE OWENS.

Perry, Okla.

APPLAUSE.
So many inquiries reach us from week to week concerning the various manuals on athletic development, which we publish, that we have decided to keep a list of them standing here. Any number can be had by mail by remitting 10 cents, and 8 cents postage, for each copy, to the publishers.

Frank Merriwell's Book of Physical Development.
The Art of Boxing and Self-defense, by Prof. Donovan.
U. S. Army Physical Exercises, revised by Prof. Donovan.
Physical Health Culture, by Prof. Fourmien.

Frank Merriwell's Training.

PROF. FOURMEN: Many a time have I read in "Tip Top" that Frank Merriwell is always in training. What I fancy it to be, is that he is always ready for anything from a sprint to a long-distance run, etc. If this is the case, what kind of training should one take up in order that he should always be in training? I know your reply would correct many of your worthy reader's method of training, for from what I myself see in the park many "Tip Top" readers, in attempting to keep in training, are most assuredly overdoing themselves.

New York City. Milton Kowsarsky.

It is hard for the average young man to obey the strict rules of training all the time. If a strong-willed man sets out to control his habits, diet, etc., and follow a vigorous system of exercise, he can be always in perfect training as well as Frank Merriwell. Extremes are always bad: overtraining is more injurious than undertraining. A large supply of reason and common sense is one of the most important factors in an athletic life.

Two Well-developed Cousins.

PROF. FOURMEN: My cousin and I have been readers of "Tip Top" for the past two years. We take the liberty of sending you our measurements. The following measurements are my cousin's: Height, 5 feet; weight, 150 pounds; chest, 30 inches; calves, 12 inches; thighs, 16½ inches; waist, 26 inches; age, 12 years. Will you kindly explain his faults and how to remedy them? The following measurements are mine: Height, 5 feet; weight, 150 pounds; chest, 29 inches; calves, 12 inches; thighs, 16½ inches; waist, 26⅛ inches. Kindly explain my faults and how to remedy them. We both play baseball, football, and basketball, and run, swim, and box. Are we up to the average of 12 years of age? Wishing success to "Tip Top," and thanking you in advance, I remain A LOYAL "TIP-TOPPER."

Yonkers, N. Y.

You and your cousin are apparently very well-trained and developed lads. Keep up the good work. Your waists might well be a couple of inches smaller, and that can be brought about by careful exercise of the abdominal muscles.

Becoming a Writer.

PROF. FOURMEN: As a reader of "Tip Top," I take the liberty of asking your advice on certain things. I believe that I possess, to a certain degree, the gift of writing fiction. I can think up a rattling good story, but don't know how to write it; that is, I do not know how to express it. I believe if I had an education I could write well. I mean to get one. What would you advise me to do?

Belmont Frizzelle.

Detroit, Mich.

An earnest, sincere ambition to write is thought by many to be the only thing necessary to literary success. If your ambition is genuine you will get the education, and train yourself in the proper way. The road is a long one, and infinite patience and industry are required, but the rewards, to the true lover of letters, are very great. You should acquire a thorough knowl-

edge of English grammar and rhetoric, and read all the good literature you can get hold of.

Too Light in Weight.

PROF. FOURMEN: I am 16 years and 2 months old; height, 5 feet 9 inches; weight, 135 pounds; chest, 32 inches; waist, 20 inches. How are my measurements? Am I too light for my measurements?

J. F. D.

Whitewright, Texas.

You are about twenty pounds under weight, and your chest should be increased by systematic breathing exercises.

An Admirer of Dick Merriwell.

PROF. FOURMEN: As Annapolis is a rather difficult place to obtain information about, I decided to write you about a boy going there. In the first place, I am not ready to go there, as I expect to go to college about two years first. I want you to tell me what things have to be studied to go there. Also of the tutoring you have to have after getting there. I also want to ask you if, by keeping myself in proper physical condition, I could enter physically. I am almost 15 years old; chest, 31 inches; height, 5 feet 2 inches. Am I not subject to sickness of any kind. I once had typhoid fever, but the doctor seemed to think that after it was over I was better off than before I had it. Do you think it can affect me after I get older? Some people seem to think so. I would give anything in the world to be like Dick Merriwell. What do you think of him as a character? I am asking you this out of mere curiosity, and hope you will answer it. I am very fond of the stage, and always have. Do you think I will take it as a profession? I delight in taking parts in amateur performances. What is generally the outcome of a pack of amateurs traveling in States with a good show? This may seem foolish, but I want you to tell me this. With a show that is very good it seems that in the summer a good amateur troupe could do very well traveling, when the professional season is dull.

John Mayfair.

Greensboro, Ala.

If you prepare for college and spend two years there, you will have no difficulty with the Annapolis examinations. A good, industrious student needs no tutoring there. If you keep yourself in good training, you will certainly have no difficulty with the physical examination. Typhoid, properly treated, rarely reappears in any form. We would all like to be like Dick Merriwell. As a perfectly balanced, manly, Christian fellow, we consider him very near the ideal. You are wise in regarding the stage as a diversion rather than a profession. A good amateur troupe can pick up quite a bit of money on a short trip, and have no end of fun.

Baseball as a Profession.

PROF. FOURMEN: Being an old "Tip-Topper," and seeing that you pass your opinion on jobs and trades in your page of "Tip Top," I would like you to give me your opinion of baseball as a profession. I am a young man and very clever at the game, and would like to know if I could make a livelihood.

John Butell.

Nashville, Tenn.

There is a great demand for clever ball players among the professional teams, and very large salaries are paid to desirable men—salaries much in excess of a mere livelihood. As a career, baseball cannot be said to be a very high ambition, but any honest, earnest ambition is worthy and creditable. You must decide for yourself whether you love the sport enough to make it your life work.

Mending a Broken Nose.

PROF. FOURMEN: Could you advise me as to how a broken nose could be fixed, and where such treatment could be had? Have been a reader of "Tip Top" for about two years. Anxiously waiting your reply, I am, Roland Simpson.

Norfolk, Va.

By all means go to a reputable, trustworthy surgeon. The great danger in such cases is from the false treatment of the various quacks advertising to work wonders with the human features. Consult the best surgeon in your locality and have faith in his counsel.
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TIP WEEKLY

THAT CAN NOW BE SUPPLIED


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If you want any back numbers of our weeklies and cannot procure them from your newsdealer, they can be obtained direct from this office. Postage stamps taken the same as money.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79 Seventh Ave., New York City
A few years ago, we were obliged to disappoint thousands of boys who wanted the early adventures of Frank and Dick Merriwell which were published in TIP TOP, because we did not have copies of the numbers that contained them. It was impossible for us to reprint TIP TOP WEEKLY, so we made the stories up in book form and published them in the NEW MEDAL LIBRARY at intervals of about four weeks beginning with No. 150. Here is a list of these splendid books which contain Nos. 1 to 501 of TIP TOP WEEKLY. Our experience with these books has taught us that thousands of boys are overjoyed at this opportunity to secure their favorite stories in a more permanent form. PRICE, FIFTEEN CENTS.

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