

EDWARD BENSON

DAVID BLAIZE

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E.F. Benson

David Blaize

CHAPTER I

There was a new class-room in course of construction for the first form at Helmsworth Preparatory School, and the ten senior boys, whose united ages amounted to some hundred and thirty years, were taken for the time being in the school museum. This was a big boarded room, covered with corrugated iron and built out somewhat separate from the other class rooms at the corner of the cricket-field. The arrangement had many advantages from the point of view of the boys, for the room was full of agreeably distracting and interesting objects, and Cicero almost ceased to be tedious, even when he wrote about friendship, if, when you were construing, you could meditate on the skeleton of a kangaroo which stood immediately in front of you, and refresh yourself with the sight of the stuffed seal on whose nose the short-sighted Ferrers Major had balanced his spectacles before Mr. Dutton came in. Or, again, it was agreeable to speculate on the number of buns a mammoth might be able to put simultaneously into his mouth, seeing that a huge yellowish object that stood on the top of one of the cases was just one of his teeth..

Of course it depended on how many teeth a mammoth had, but the number of a boy's teeth might be some guide, and David, in the throes of grinding out the weekly letter to his father, passed his tongue round his own teeth, trying to count them by the sensory quality of it. But, losing count, he put an inky forefinger into his mouth instead. There seemed to be fourteen in his lower jaw and thirteen and a half in the upper, for half of a front tooth had been missing ever since, a few weeks ago, he had fallen out of a tree on to his face, and the most industrious scrutiny of that fatal spot had never resulted in his finding it. In any case, then, he had twenty-seven and a half teeth, and it was reasonable to suppose that a mammoth, therefore, unless he had fallen out of a tree (if there were such in the glacial age) had at least twenty-eight. That huge yellow lump of a thing, then, as big as David's whole head, was only one twenty-eighth of his chewing apparatus. Why, an entire bun could stick to it and be unobserved. A mammoth could have twenty-eight buns in his mouth and really remain unaware of the fact. Fancy having a bun on every tooth and not knowing! How much ought a mammoth's pocket-money to be if you had to provide on this scale? And when would its mouth be really full? And how.. David was growing a little sleepy.

"Blaize!" said Mr. Dutton's voice.

David sucked his finger.

"Yes, sir!" he said.

"Have you finished your letter home?"

"No, sir," said David, with engaging candour.

"Then I would suggest that you ceased trying to clean your finger and get on with it."

"Rather, sir!" said David.

The boys' desks, transferred from their old class-room, stood in a three-sided square in the centre of the museum, while Mr. Dutton's table, with his desk on it, was in the window. The door of the museum was open, so too was the window by the master's seat, for the hour was between four and five of the afternoon and the afternoon that of a sweltering July Sunday. Mr. Dutton himself was a tall and ineffective young man, entirely undistinguished for either physical or mental powers, who had taken a somewhat moderate degree at Cambridge, and had played lacrosse. By virtue of the mediocrity of his attainments, his scholastic career had not risen to the heights of a public school, and he had been obliged to be content with a mastership at this preparatory establishment. He bullied in a rather feeble manner the boys under his charge, and drew in his horns if they showed signs of

not being afraid of him. But in these cases he took it out of them by sending in the gloomiest reports of their conduct and progress at the end of term, to the fierce and tremendous clergyman who was the head of the place. The Head inspired universal terror both among his assistant masters and his pupils, but he inspired also a whole-hearted admiration. He did not take more than half a dozen classes during the week, but he was liable to descend on any form without a moment's notice like a bolt from the blue. He used the cane with remarkable energy, and preached lamb-like sermons in the school chapel on Sunday. The boys, who were experienced augurs on such subjects, knew all about this, and dreaded a notably lamb-like sermon as presaging trouble on Monday. In fact, Mr. Acland had his notions about discipline, and completely lived up to them in his conduct.

Having told Blaize to get on with his home-letter, Mr. Dutton resumed his employment, which was not what it seemed. On his desk, it is true, was a large Prayer-book, for he had been hearing the boys their Catechism, in the matter of which Blaize had proved himself wonderfully ignorant, and had been condemned to write out his duty towards his neighbour (who had very agreeably attempted to prompt him) three times, and show it up before morning school on Monday. There was a Bible there also, out of which, when the Sunday letters home were finished, Mr. Dutton would read a chapter about the second missionary journey of St. Paul, and then ask questions. But while these letters were being written Mr. Dutton was not Sabbatically employed, for nestling between his books was a yellow-backed volume of stories by Guy de Maupassant... Mr. Dutton found him most entertaining: he skated on such very thin ice, and never quite went through.

Mr. Dutton turned the page... Yes, how clever not to go through, for there was certainly mud underneath. He gave a faint chuckle of interest, and dexterously turned the chuckle into a cough. At that sound a small sigh of relief, a sense of relaxation went round the class, for it was clear that old Dutton (Dubs was his more general nomenclature) was deep in his yellow book. When that consummation, so devoutly wished, was arrived at, any diversion of a moderately quiet nature might be indulged in.

Crabtree began: he was a boy of goat-like face, and had been known as Nanny, till the somewhat voluminous appearance of his new pair of trousers had caused him to be rechristened Bags. He had finished his letter to his mother with remarkable speed, and had, by writing small, conveyed quite sufficient information to her on a half-sheet. There was thus the other half-sheet, noiselessly torn off, to be framed into munitions of aerial warfare. He folded it neatly into the form of a dart, he inked the point of it by dipping it into the china receptacle at the top of his desk, and launched it with unerring aim, enfiling the cross-bench where David sat. It hit him just exactly where the other half of his missing tooth should have been, for his lip was drawn back and his tongue slightly protruded in the agonies of composing a suitable letter to his father. The soft wet point struck it full, and spattered ink over his lip.

“Oh, damn,” said David very softly.

Then he paused, stricken to stone, and quite ready to deny that he had spoken at all. His eyes apprehensively sought Mr. Dutton, and he saw that he had not heard, being deep in the misfortunes that happened to Mademoiselle Fifi.

“I’ll lick you afterwards, Bags,” he said gently.

“Better lick yourself now,” whispered Bags.

A faint giggle at Bags’s repartee went round the class, like the sound of a breaking ripple. This penetrated into Mr. Dutton’s consciousness, and, shifting his attitude a little without looking up, he leaned his forehead on his open hand, so that he could observe the boys through the chinks of his fingers. David, of course, was far too old a hand to be caught by this paltry subterfuge, for “playing chinks” was a manœuvre of the enemy which had got quite stale through repetition, and he therefore gently laid down on the sloping top of his locker the dart which he had just dipped again in his inkpot to throw back at Bags, and with an industrious air turned to his letter again.

The twenty minutes allotted on Sunday afternoon school for writing home to parents was already more than half spent, but the date which he had copied off his neighbour and “My dear Papa” was as far as the first fine careless rapture of composition had carried him. It was really difficult to know what to say to his dear papa, for all the events of the past week were completely thrown into shadow by the one sunlit fact that he had got his school-colours for cricket, and had made twenty-four runs in the last match. But, as he knew perfectly well, his father cared as little for cricket as he did for football; indeed, David ironically doubted if he knew the difference between them, and that deplorable fact restricted the zone of interests common to them. And really the only other event of true importance was that his aunt had sent him a postal order for five shillings. It would not be politic to tell his father about that, in case of inquiries being made as to what he had done with it, when he got home in a fortnight’s time for the summer holidays.

He would have eaten it all long before then, for it was strawberry-time. David bit heavily into his wooden pen-holder in his efforts to think of something innocuous to say, and found his mouth full of fragments of chewed wood. These he proceeded to masticate rather ostentatiously while he still sucked his inky lip, the joy of this being that old Dubs was still playing chinks, and would certainly, as a surprise, ask him before long what he was eating. This was stimulating to the mind, and he plunged into his letter.

“We are being taken in the museum, because they are building a new first-form class-room. There was dry-rot, too, in the wainscotting of the old one. We have been doing Cicero this week, as well as Virgil, and Xenophon in Greek, and Medea, and Holland in geography and James 2. I have got to division of decimals which is very interesting, and square-root which is most difficult, because some have it and others don’t – ”

David gave one fleeting blue-eyed glance at Mr. Dutton, and saw that the blessed moment was approaching. The chink had widened, and there was no doubt whatever that it was he who was being observed. Then he bent his yellow head over his letter again, and chewed the fragments of pen-holder with renewed vigour.

“It was very hot all this week, and I and two other chaps were taken to bathe at the Richmond bathing-place day before yesterday by – ”

“Blaize, what are you eating?” said Mr. Dutton suddenly.

David looked up in bland and innocent surprise.

“Eating, sir?” he asked. “My pen-holder, sir.”

A slight titter went round the class, for David had the enviable reputation of “drawing” his pastors and masters (always excepting Head) by the geniality and unexpectedness of his replies. But on this occasion the blandness was a little overdone, and instead of “taking a back seat” Mr. Dutton put down his yellow novel on his desk, back upwards, and came across the room to where David was sitting. The dart, with its wet, inky point lay there, and it was too late to draw his blotting-paper over it. But a more dramatic *dénouement* than the mere discovery of an inky dart, which might be assessed at fifty lines – or perhaps a hundred, since it was Sunday – hung in the air.

“Open your mouth,” said Mr. Dutton, not yet seeing the dart.

David had a good large useful mouth, and he opened it very suddenly to its extremest extent, putting out his tongue a little, which might or might not have been an accident. That unruly member was undoubtedly covered with splinters of common pen-holder, and nothing else at all.

“Sir-may-I-shut-it-again?” said David all in one breath, opening it, the moment he had spoken, to its widest.

Mr. Dutton’s eye fell on the inky dart.

“What is that?” he said.

David gave a prodigious gulp, and swallowed as much wood-fibre as was convenient.

“That, sir?” he said politely. “A paper dart, sir, inked.”

“Did you make it?” asked Dubs.

David’s face assumed an expression of horror.

“Sir, no, sir,” he said in a tone of wounded and innocent indignation.

Suddenly David became conscious that his impeccable scene with Mr. Dutton was arousing no interest or amusement among the audience, and his artistic feelings were hurt, for he hated playing to apathetic benches. He looked earnestly and soulfully at Mr. Dutton, but missed appreciative giggles. Nobody appeared to be taking the smallest interest in the dialogue, and all round were bent heads and pens industriously scratching. Then he saw what the rest of the class had already seen. Standing just outside the open window, his foot noiseless on the grass, was the Head, austere and enormous, and fierce and frowning. He had picked up from Mr. Dutton’s desk the yellow-backed novel that lay there, and was looking at it with a portentous face.

“Then who made it, if – I say, ‘if’ – you did not?” said Mr. Dutton, still unconscious of the presence of his superior.

“I suppose another fellow,” said David in very different tones from those in which his moral indignation had found dramatic utterance.

Mr. Dutton took up the dart, and inked his shirt-cuff, but David did not smile.

“Who made – ” he began, and turned and saw.

“Oh, jam!” said David under his breath.

The Head left the window with the yellow book in his hand, took two steps to the door, and entered the class-room. He was a tall, grizzle-bearded man, lean and wiry, with cold grey eyes. To the boys he appeared of gigantic height, and was tragedy and fate personified. Terror encompassed him: he scintillated with it, as radium scintillates and is unconsumed. But he scintillated also with splendour: he was probably omniscient, and of his omnipotence there was no doubt whatever. He had rowed for Oxford against Cambridge, and the boys wondered that Cambridge had dared to put a boat on the river at all that year. He had also got a double-first, which in itself was less impressive, and he was believed to be fabulously wealthy. How any woman had ever ventured to marry him no one knew; but, after all, if he had expressed a wish that way, it was equally inconceivable that it should not be gratified. Though there was not a boy in the school who did not dread his displeasure above everything else in the world, there was none who would not have taken an infinity of trouble to be sure of winning his approbation. One of his legs was slightly shorter than the other, which gave him a swaying or rocking motion when he walked, which David could imitate admirably. But he would nearly have died of astonishment if he had known that more than once the Head had seen him do it, and had laughed in his beard with twinkling eyes.

There was no twinkle or laughter there to-day. Still with the yellow volume in his hand, he came and stood before the skeleton of the kangaroo, and a silence fell that will perhaps be equalled for breathlessness on the day that the judgment books are opened, but probably not before. Then he spoke:

“Silence!” he said.

(There was not any more silence possible, so he had to be content with that.)

He addressed his lieutenant, who stood abjectly twirling a small moustache and trying to look tall. But what was the use of trying to look tall beside that Matterhorn, or to twirl an adolescent moustache when the Head’s hand clawed his beard? It was simply silly.

“Mr. Dutton,” said the Head, when the silence had begun to sing in the ears of the listeners. “By some strange mischance – I repeat, by some strange mischance, – I have found this disgusting and licentious book on your desk. How it got there, how it happened to be opened at – at page 56, I do not wish to inquire. It is more than enough for me to have found it there. I am willing to believe, and to tell you so publicly, Mr. Dutton, before the boys whom you are superintending on this Sunday afternoon, I am willing to believe that some obscene bird passed over the museum and dropped from

its claws this stinking – yes, sir, stinking – carrion. Dropped it, sir, while your back was turned, on the very table where I see the Book of books, and also the book of Common Prayer. With your leave, with your leave, Mr. Dutton, I will do thus and thus to this unholy carrion.”

Then ensued a slight anticlimax, for the Head, though a very strong man in hand and arm, found it impossible to do as he had designed, and tear three hundred pages across and across. But the form generally, and Mr. Dutton in particular, were too stiff with horror to notice it. So, instead, the Head tore off section after section of the lightly sewn leaves, instead of tearing the pages, laid the dismembered carrion on the floor, and stamped on it, and then, with an indescribable ejaculation of disgust, threw the mutilated remains into the fireplace.

“You are excused, Mr. Dutton,” he said, “from the rest of this lesson, which I will take myself; but you will do me the honour to call on me immediately after evensong this afternoon.”

His fierce eye wandered from Mr. Dutton’s stricken face to David’s desk, where lay the inky dart.

“You are engaged now, I see, in some inquiry,” he said. “A paper dart, I perceive, on Blaize’s desk. I will conduct the inquiry myself, and wish you a good afternoon.”

He waited in tense silence till Mr. Dutton had taken his hat and left the room. Then he turned to David.

“Blaize, did you make that dart, or did you throw it?” he asked.

An expression of despairing determination had come into David’s face. He was conscious also of a large ink-stain on his lips.

“Neither, sir,” he said.

“Then who made it?” said the Head. “And also, for I perceive the point is blunted, who threw it?”

Dead silence on David’s part.

“Do you know?” asked the Head.

“Yes, sir,” said David.

“And do you refuse to tell me? I am not here to be bullied, I may remind you.”

David felt slightly sick, but he had swallowed a good deal of chewed pen-handle.

“Do you refuse to tell me?” repeated the Head.

“Yes, sir,” said David.

Then came one of those strange calms in the middle of cyclones, which sometimes puzzled the boys. But their conjecture, a perfectly right one, was that the Head, in spite of questions like these, did not like “sneaking.” Anyhow, for a moment his fierceness faded, and he nodded at David, just as one pal might nod to another in sympathetic assent.

“Quite right, my boy,” he said.

Then he turned to the rest of the class, holding up the bedraggled weapon.

“Name,” he said.

The miserable Bags stood up, without speech.

“Oh you, Crabtree,” said the awful voice. “And so Master Crabtree thinks that the calm and quiet of Sunday afternoon is made to give him leisure to forge these filthy weapons: that the paper you are given to write home on is designed to be desecrated to these foul usages, and the ink to supply filth to them. You will write out with the ink you have so strangely misused two hundred lines of Virgil in copper-plate hand, and eat your dinner at the pig-table, apart from your companions, for the next week.”

The pig-table, it may be mentioned, was a separate table in the dining-room without chairs, where boys detected in swinish habits had to take their meals standing for the period of their sentence. But poor Bags’s cup was not full yet, for the Head’s eagle eye fell on David’s inky mouth.

“I infer that the ink on Blaize’s lips was made by this weapon,” he said. “That is so? Then you will now beg Blaize’s pardon, and as soon as the Catechism and Bible-class is over, you will fetch a

basin of water and bathe Blaize's mouth with your own sponge, until it is pronounced clean by your matron. The hour for writing home is up. Sign your names, and direct your envelopes. Catechism!"

Now the Catechism-class had already been held, and the marks for it had been put down in the mottled-covered book which lay on Mr. Dutton's desk. But to suggest or hint this was not less inconceivable than to propose playing leap-frog. The more imaginative saw that there might be fresh trouble when Catechism marks were put down, and it was found that Mr. Dutton had already entered them in his neat small handwriting, but the idea of venturing to correct the Head when he was in this brimstone-mood was merely unthinkable. David, indeed, the boldest of them all, and, at the moment, with something of the halo of martyrdom about him, wondered what would happen if he did so, but quailed before the possible result.

So Catechism began again, and for a little all went smoothly. The Head, of course, knew that among small boys at school Christian names are held to be effeminate and disgraceful things, and so, omitting the first question, asked Stone, the head-boy, who had given him his name, and Stone knew. Ferrers also knew what his godfathers and godmothers then did for him, and David expressed himself accurately as bound to believe and to do what they had promised for him. The Commandments went smoothly, but trouble began when the boys had to explain what they chiefly learned from those Commandments. Any meaning that they might have possessed, any effort to attach rational ideas to them, was overshadowed by the fact that, primarily, this was a lesson that should have been acquired by heart in order to recite it faultlessly to that awe-inspiring presence that frowned at Mr. Dutton's desk. His duty towards his neighbour had already baffled David that afternoon, but for the moment, having recited the eighth Commandment, his turn was passed, and, troubles never coming singly, Bags was faced with this abstruse question. The first sentences went rightly enough, but then he began to falter.

"To honour and obey the King and all that are put in authority under her – "

"Her?" asked the Head.

Bags's Prayer-book, a comparatively ancient one, given him at his christening by a godmother, was a Queen's Prayer-book.

"Queen, and all that are put in authority under her," he quavered, getting confused.

"Next," said the Head.

"King and all that are put in authority under him," said Sharpe Major in a shrill treble. "To submit myself to all my governors, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters; to order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters; to – to honour and obey the King – "

"Next," said the Head, with ominous calm.

The dreary tale of failure went on: with that portentous figure sitting in the chair of the innocuous Mr. Dutton, consecutive thought became impossible, and memory took wings and fled. Boys who had got full marks earlier in the afternoon found themselves unable, when facing this grim mood of the Head's, to repeat their duty towards anything. The ground already covered was taken again, in order to give them a fresh start, and now the Creed itself presented pitfalls and stumbling-blocks. Already the normal hour for the class had been exceeded, and from other and happier classrooms the boys poured out into the field in front of the windows, or lay on rugs under the shade of the big still elms, and with linked arms and treble intercourse wandered across the sunny grass. And even when the Catechism was done, there was the Bible-lesson to follow, and before the Bible-lesson there was certain to be the discovery that the Catechism had already been put down. All this was that ass Dubs's fault for leaving his rotten French novel on his desk.

Worse than anything, the Bible-lesson, when it came, was that most inexplicable second voyage of St. Paul. Thyatira.. or was it Laodicea?.. or were they the seven churches of Asia.. and what exactly did underpinning the ship mean, or was that manoeuvre executed on the other voyage? Mr. Dutton always consulted the New Testament Maclear over this elusive cruise, whereas the boys had to shut

up that useful volume when they were questioned. It seemed scarcely fair. And even the Bible-lesson had not been arrived at yet; they were still sticking and bogged in the quagmires of the Catechism.

At last they stuck altogether: there was no more progression possible. It only remained to hear the sentence on their condemned heads. Everybody without exception was condemned. One had to write out the Creed, another the Commandments, and all their duty towards their neighbours.

“And I shall myself take the same lesson to-day week,” said the Head, “and if the form generally does not show a far better knowledge of the Catechism, I shall be unable to adopt the leniency with which I have treated their shortcomings to-day. Next Sunday, then, I shall hold the class in my study.”

The significance of this was not lost upon anybody. The study was a room of awful import, and the comfort of the low red morocco settee, the interest of the photographs of Oxford crews on the wall, in which the Head appeared with side-whiskers and no beard could not compensate for the uneasy knowledge that in the middle drawer of the knee-hole table at which he sat were a couple of canes. It was no rare thing for the Head to take a bunch of rattling keys from his pocket, which was the first step, and to fit one of them into the centre drawer. Sometimes, with rising voice, he turned it and opened the drawer, and if things still went badly the trembling victim was put through the farce of choosing which cane he preferred and then advancing the palms of his hands..

The Head paused after this prodigious announcement about the venue for the Catechism-class next Sunday and opened the mark-book. Mr. Dutton was scrupulously neat in his methods, and there in the first column of the marks for the new week was his list, headed “Catechism.” The Head scrutinised these in silence.

“The marks for to-day’s Catechism are already entered,” he said. “Stone, you are the head-boy of the class, why did you not tell me that Mr. Dutton had already heard you your Catechism? I will tell you why. You wanted me to waste my time and yours, so that we should not have so long for the Bible-lesson. Was that it, sir?”

“N-no,” said Stone.

“What was your reason, then, for not telling me?”

Stone looked at him in a sort of stunned despair.

“I don’t know, sir,” he said.

It was indeed a black afternoon. The Head, probably owing to his discovery on Mr. Dutton’s desk, was in his sternest and most awful mood. Already five o’clock had struck, whereas the lesson should have been over by half-past four, and outside the boys were beginning to gather up their rugs and books, and were strolling over the grass of the cricket-field to the school-buildings from which the warning bell for tea was invitingly clanging. It was maddening to think that all this time might have been saved, and all the impositions and the hour next Sunday in the dreaded study avoided if only, as it now turned out, Stone had had the courage to say that Mr. Dutton had already heard them their Catechism. But courage was not a quality that blossomed when the Head was in a poor temper, and every boy in the class knew that if he had been in Stone’s place he would have held his tongue. He might easily have been told not to “bully” the Head (a somewhat favourite expression) or have been witheringly requested to give him permission to conduct the class in the manner he preferred. Chapel was held at six, and when tea was to come in was difficult of conjecture. Yet even a tea-less chapel would be something of a relief, if only the three-quarters of an hour that intervened could be got through without storms. But before then they would have to embark on this missionary enterprise, which, if it was as dangerous for St. Paul, as it was likely to prove for the students of it, must have required a bold heart. And what added sting to it was that Stone had received a hamper from home only the day before, on which to-night his friends would have gorged sumptuously.

The minutes went by with paralysed slowness, for, if the Catechism had been trying, this was infinitely worse. The Head, who very likely wanted his tea too, but for the sake of discipline and education mortified his appetite as well as those of the boys, took a gloomier and gloomier view of them and their attainments. Collateral ignorance of the position of Iconium was seen to be a moral

crime of the deepest dye, and the dictionary was beggared of wounding epithets in order adequately to convey the enormity of not knowing its position as regards Lystra. If Ferrers Major had committed parricide under circumstances of unique horror he could not have been held up to blacker obloquy than was volleyed on him for his remarks about Thessalonica. None escaped the task of making a map with the names of the principal towns and the track of the journey itself in red ink; the less fortunate had to produce two maps by this time next week, and the only thing it was possible to be thankful for was that this nightmare of an hour had not been taken in the study. Else, it was felt, the function of the keys would not have been limited to mere rattling.

Already the field was beginning to be dotted over again with groups of boys who had come out of tea and were waiting for chapel-bell to ring. How earnestly it was possible to desire chapel-time to come David had never known before, but anything, even the Litany, or, as would happen to-day, the psalm for the fifteenth evening of the month, which had seventy-two verses, was better than this sulphurous divinity-lesson. The whole class was limp with heat and hunger and terror. Then the merciful relief of the querulous bell came, and the Head closed his Bible.

"The lesson has been disgraceful," he said. "I hope for all your sakes – I say, I hope – that next Sunday will not be a repetition of to-day. I am more particularly distressed when I think that some of you, like Blaize, are the sons of clergymen, and have therefore greater opportunities of studying sacred history."

He got up huge and towering, in his rustling silk gown, and immediately, as was the amazing manner of him, who never nagged however severe he might be, his mood completely changed, and his eyes twinkled as he observed the depressed class.

"There, my boys, that's over," he said; "and, like good fellows, try not to make me angry with you again. I hate finding fault: you may not believe it, but I do. And neither you nor I have had any tea, so, when chapel is over, you will all go to the housekeeper's room and ask her, with my compliments, to give you a real good tea."

He stalked out, rocking slightly as he went, and instantly, the oppression of his anger being gone, the spirits of the class rose sky-high.

"Jolly decent of him," said Ferrers. "Gosh, I'm glad he didn't take us in the study."

"I say, Blazes, I wouldn't have my mouth washed with Bags's sponge. It'll be fit to poison you. Why, do you know what he does with his sponge?"

Loathsome details, invented on the spur of the moment, followed.

"Fancy being washed by Bags at all," said Stone. "He don't know how to wash himself yet!"

"Stone, you fool, why the devil couldn't you tell the Head that Dubs had taken the Catechism?" This from Bags.

"Anyhow, I'm glad my father isn't a clergyman, like Blaize's. Do you do divinity with him in the study on Sunday afternoon in the holidays? Whack, whack. 'There, my boy!' 'Oh, papa, don't hit me!' Whack, whack! 'Oh papa!' " squeaked Sharpe Major.

David, by a dexterous movement, got Sharpe's head in Chancery, rubbed his nose on his desk, pulled his hair, and hit him over the biceps.

"Any more remarks about papa?" he asked cheerfully. "Come on, out with them."

CHAPTER II

The others poured out into the sunshine, but David lingered behind with Bags and Ferrers Major, and began burrowing in his locker to find the box belonging to his two stag-beetles. They were male and female, as the lady's absence of long horns testified, and it was hoped that even in confinement she might some day be confined. Indeed, there were several bets on, as to which form the babies would take – whether they would be eggs or some sort of caterpillar, or minute but fully developed stag-beetles. The box in question was a small cardboard oblong, of cramped dimensions; but really it was no more than their saloon travelling-carriage, for they lived in David's washing-basin at night, since it had been ascertained that the sides of it were too steep and slippery to allow their escape, and at other times had the run of his desk in school-hours, and were allowed quantities of healthy exercise when their owner was unoccupied and could look after their wayward steps. But now, since after chapel David would not come back to the class-room, it was necessary to put them in their travelling-carriage, which was pierced with holes, so that such air as there might happen to be in David's pocket should penetrate to them. A few slips of grass and leaves would be sufficient to sustain them until they were regaled with bits of cake and a strawberry or two from the tea which was to be provided for the first form after chapel.

The lady was lying on her back, as good as gold, waving her legs slowly in the air, having probably fallen down on some climbing expedition about the roof of the locker, but the stag himself (called "The Monarch of the Glen") could not at once be found. But a little careful rummaging disclosed him sitting morosely in a crevice between a grammar and a geography book.

"I say, I don't believe the Monarch's well," said David.

"Shouldn't think so, living in your fuggy desk," said Bags, strolling out of the room.

Suddenly David perceived, as by a special revelation, that he must kick Bags. Bags had thrown an inky dart at him, and though, in the depression of the Bible-lesson, that had been forgotten, it started into prominence again in his mind. Further, Bags had added insult to injury by saying that his desk was fuggy. Certainly he must kick Bags, just once, judiciously, and call it all square.

David gingerly took the Monarch by the waist, so that his pincers nipped the empty air, and put him and his spouse into their travelling carriage.

"Come on, Ferrers," he said.

On their way across to chapel he paused a moment to pick a few leaves from the bright squibs of root-growth on the elm just outside the class-room, and took Ferrer's arm.

"Don't let's go too quick," he said. "I want to catch Bags up just as we get to chapel-door, and if I was alone he might suspect. Then you'll see: I'll give him one kick, just one, but a beauty. Let's seem to be talking."

Diabolically diplomatic, David managed his manoeuvre well, gradually gaining on his unsuspecting victim, and stalking him with infinite stealth and relish. There was no question of honour in coming behind him thus unaware, for Bags had launched a dart at him without provocation, and had also gone jauntily across to chapel after making that ill-advised remark about David's fuggy desk. Should Bags resent a good sound kick, which was a pretty just payment of the score, David would be perfectly happy to fight him afterwards if he desired it. It was quite all right.

David, sometimes lounging, sometimes hurrying, and all the time talking in a foolish, interested manner to Ferrers, came up close to the rear of the enemy just two steps outside chapel-door. They were the last of the boys to go in, and David had space to swing his leg. For the moment Bags was too much astonished to be hurt, and David passed him with a slight smile on his hopelessly seraphic face, went up the gangway to his seat in the choir just opposite the organ, knelt down, and covered a gratified face with his hands. He loved doing things neatly, and to kick Bags, just once, quite correctly like that, was as good as cutting a ball just out of reach of point.

The evening service began, psalms and canticles and hymns all to be sung. It was that terrible fifteenth evening of the month, and page after page of psalm must be gone through. Only that morning David and Ferrers had had an impassioned argument as to whether the Old or the New Testament was “the beastliest,” Ferrers maintaining that there was nothing in the New Testament that could compare with the Kings of Israel and Judah, while David (and his argument was strengthened after the last hour) affirmed that nothing b. c. could beat the missionary journeys, not if it tried with both hands. But as the psalm for the fifteenth evening (to a single chant too) went on, he felt that it was difficult to feel honestly that there could be anything beastlier, especially if you had not had tea. He hoped Ferrers would not adduce that as a crushing argument for the supremacy of the Old Testament. On it went, and, as an antidote to its interminableness, David began to think of other and more pleasant things. There was his eleven-cap and his twenty-four runs in the last match to muse upon as a resisting topic to the tedium of the children of Israel, and in especial one gorgeous pull for four he had made. Also he could feel on the side of his leg the slight vibration from the travelling-carriage of the Monarch and his wife, which showed they were moving about, enjoying, it was to be hoped, the fresh elm-leaves he had nipped off for them. It was in his left-hand trousers pocket that these were confined, a place to be felt stealthily and exteriorly, since hands-in-pockets was a forbidden attitude in chapel. Just below the box were the two half-crowns, the yet unchanged splendour of Aunt Eleanor’s gift. Also in anticipation was the thought of the tea that should succeed chapel, and in retrospect the remembrance of the beautiful kick he had given Bags. But the seventy-eighth psalm was a corker for all that, and if Ferrers Major brought it up, he would have to admit it.

The psalm began to show promise of ending, and it was already possible to count the remaining verses. Then suddenly there was something so delightful in it as a topical allusion, that Ferrers could no longer advance it as being beastlier than anything in the New Testament. And David’s contribution to the music swelled out at once more lustily, and he looked and beamed towards Bags as he sang, “He smote his enemies in the hinder part, and put them to a perpetual shame.”

Ferrers caught his eye and understood, but Bags did not, which was a pity. David felt he must have seen the appositeness of that verse, but he did not look up. Poor old Bags! perhaps he was much hurt. David had not meant to hurt him much; he had only wanted to kick him neatly and squarely and peacefully, ready to fight afterwards, if desired.

The senior boys of the first form read the lessons at these services, and it was the turn of Stone and Ferrers to “make asses of themselves” in the school phrase. The rest of the congregation, masters and boys, followed the reading in their Bibles, or at any rate found the place and meditated. Among the masters there was Mr. Dutton, looking peculiarly depressed, with whom, in spite of his general beastliness, David felt a certain sympathy, as he was commanded to honour the Head immediately afterwards on the subject of the yellow-backed novel. At the organ were seated the two Misses Acland, daughters of the Head, one to play, the other to turn over leaves for her sister and to pull out stops or put them in. She also poked away at the pedals and occasionally dropped books on the keys, producing the most Wagnerian effects. These two female figures, with plump backs turned to him, afforded David plenty of rather acid reflection. Goggles (so called for obvious reasons, but addressed as Miss Mabel) was the elder, and wasn’t so bad, though she had a woeful tendency to improve and console the occasion when any of the boys got into trouble, and was a kind of official dove with an olive-branch after the deluge. But Carrots (this concerning her hair, which otherwise belonged to Miss Edith) had lately shown herself altogether too beastly. It was a moral certainty that it was she who had “sneaked” to her father, when, last week, Ferrers had gone out of bounds, because he had seen her in Richmond, and so of course she had seen him and told the Head. It had been a whole-school day and all the other masters had been in their class-rooms, and it *must* have been Carrots. Ferrers had had the toothache, and was excused afternoon school, and, feeling better, had gone to Richmond. It wasn’t fair of the family to spy for the Head; he, of course, and the rest of the masters, were your natural enemies, and if you were caught by them that was the fortune of war. But if Carrots or Goggles and all the crew

were enemies also, they ought to be declared enemies. Instead they pretended to be friends, with their sisterly advice, and their olive-branches and their treacherous smiles... Oh, the Magnificat.

That was soon over, and again David's disapproving eye glanced up at Goggles and Carrots during the second lesson. This time they had turned round on their organ-bench and spread their Bibles on their knees, ostentatiously following the lesson as an example to the school. David was afraid they were hypocrites, and, having found his place, continued to meditate on them. Yes: there had been a first-form conference on the subject of Goggles and Carrots when Ferrers returned that afternoon from a short and extremely painful interview with the Head, and it had been settled that Goggles and Carrots must be cut. David had, at the time, been opposed to cutting Goggles as well as her sneaking sister, because Goggles wasn't such a bad chap, and there was nothing against her personally. But he and a small minority had been overruled; if Carrots had sneaked, Goggles might sneak next, and it was wiser to have no truck at all with the enemy's family. Though Goggles at this moment looked innocent enough, with the low sun shining through a stained glass window on to her spectacles and protuberant eyes, David felt that after all, it was wiser to err on the side of prudence than to be led into a course of mistaken kindness. But it was rather difficult: only yesterday she had congratulated him, with apparent sincerity, on his innings of twenty-four, and had offered him a visit to the strawberry-beds in the garden. He had been compelled, by the resolution passed by the sixth-form conference, to decline this temptation, and to say with a stony face, "Thank you, Miss Mabel, but I can't." Even that was not strictly in accordance with the vow: he ought really to have icily raised his cap, and said nothing whatever.

It was part of the career of Goggles and Carrots to make the service what is called "bright," which meant there was a good deal of singing. This presupposed, in order to ensure a proper performance, a certain amount of choir-practice. These practices were not allowed to take the place of other school-work, but were held in the less useful hours of play-time. In compensation, the members of the choir were rewarded with an extra half-holiday towards the end of term, if they had missed no practices, and before now Goggles had been known, when a boy had missed, say, only one practice, to falsify the register, and send up his name to her father as an unremitting attendant, which did not look as if she was a bad chap; but, on the other hand, she was sister to her sister, about whom there could be no doubt whatever. She *must* have sneaked; Ferrers had seen her in Richmond, and immediately on his return he had been summoned and dealt with. Probably all girls were dishonourable, and so it was best to cut Goggles too. And it was not as if Carrots was only a kid, who must be taught the proper ways of school-life; she was quite grown up, and, very likely, would never see fifteen again. Besides – oh, the Nunc Dimittis, though they were a long way off being dismissed yet.

A slight alleviation happened here, for the wind of the organ suddenly ran out with a wail and a wheeze, and was started again by the blower in so feverish a haste that the notes shook and trembled as he pumped. Soon after, in privacy of kneeling, David was able to peep into the stag-beetles' travelling-carriage, and observe with delight that the Monarch was browsing on elm-leaves. He appeared to have an excellent appetite, and was swiftly put away again as they rose for the hymn. Instead, "Anthem" was announced by the Head, without further particularisation, since there was but one. But it seemed scarcely credible that any one could have been so mean as to couple an Anthem to that unending seventy-eighth psalm. No doubt this was reprisal on the part of Goggles and Carrots. It must be duly considered afterwards.

David's mind had been pretty busy with these trains of thought, and his attention to the service, from a devotional point of view, intermittent and fragmentary. More than once he stole a glance at Bags as a general reconnoitring measure. It appeared from a certain gingerliness in Bags's movements, when he sat down or stood, that he was not quite comfortable, and, since accounts had been squared between them, David hoped he had not hurt him much; the kick in the main was meant to be symbolical, and he determined that unless Bags actually wanted to be nasty, he would make it up directly after chapel. David's cheerful and eager soul hated prolonged or nagging warfare, and, since

Bags had been paid for his injudicious behaviour during school that afternoon, David was quite ready to proclaim or assent to a cordial *pax*. Naturally, if Bags did not want *pax*, he should have as much *bellum* as he wished for, and during the prayer for Parliament, in which it was frankly impossible for a proper boy of thirteen to take any interest, David planned a raid or two. Bags was like a girl in some ways: he couldn't stand creeping things, so if he didn't want *pax*, he should find black-beetles in his bed without any more ado about the matter. These were easily procured; they lived in the water-pipes of a disused lavatory, and, by turning on a tap, horrible half-drowned specimens descended wriggling into the basin. He had put two in Bags's bed once before, with the splendid effect that Bags spent the night on the floor in his dressing-gown, rather than encounter them, whereas, when he had tried the same trick on David, David had smashed the intruders to death with his slipper, and slept soundly amid the mutilated corpses. Yes, they should be about Bags's path, and about his bed – particularly his bed – he should find them in his pockets and his boots, until he abandoned nagging warfare, and either came to blows and had done with it, or made peace like a gentleman. David had fought Bags once before, and Bags did not want any more on that occasion, and said so. David, as a matter of fact, did not want any more either, and his face for the next few days had been notably more lumpy than Bags's, but, by virtue of an extra ounce of grit, he had not said so. Therefore —

“Amen” sang David fervently, looking as if he had just come down from an Italian picture of singing angels. But he forgot that the last “Amen” went down, instead of remaining on the same note.

Sermon-time afforded more opportunities for meditation, for he swiftly decided that he could not understand what the Head was driving at... There was another and most important cricket-match at the end of this week, and until that was over he would not be able to smoke at all, because he had made a vow that if he made more than ten runs in the last match, he would not smoke for ten days. This vow he had written out on a piece of paper, and buried it in a match-box below a certain tree. On the whole that had been rather a clever vow, since, to begin with, he did not like smoking at all, and only did it because just now it was the smart thing to do. But a vow of this importance, which he would have to tell the smoking club about when they met on Tuesday, would certainly be held sacred even by Stone, who was the dashing president of the club, and often smoked a cigarette right through without minding, though it was only incumbent on members to smoke half a cigarette at these meetings. But they had to do that without being sick, and if you were sick three times you were turned out of the club. Furthermore, as an additional cleverness in the vow, he had been told by a fellow at a public school that smoking was bad for the eye, and even when people were quite old, as at Oxford or Cambridge, they never smoked when they were in training. Again, if his vow was not accepted as a reason for abstention, he would have to resign, but that he really did not mind about, for it was stupid to put smoking before cricket. Also the secret of the smoking club had somehow leaked out, and now that the badge was no longer a mystery to those who did not belong, half the fun was gone. This badge was a piece of copper-wire bent into the shape of S. C., for Smoking Club, and when they were engaged in these sacred operations, it had to be worn in the buttonhole; otherwise there was a fine of a halfpenny, which helped to fill the coffers of the club, and was spent in cigarettes. But only last week Bags, who did not belong, happened to see his badge, and said casually, “Hullo, you belong to the Sick Club, do you?” This was annoying, because it not only implied a knowledge of the club, but darkly alluded to its rules. David had been ready enough on this occasion, and had answered smartly, “If you belonged to an S. C., it would be the Sneak Club,” and the shot had gone home, for Bags had sneaked once. Of course it was ever so long ago, the term before last, before Bags had become a decent chap, and the incident had been suitably buried. But the thought of its possible resuscitation made Bags extremely civil for several days.

Certain words, “the horror of sin, the infamy of evil,” caught David's ears at this moment, and he attended for a little. It seemed to him rather poor stuff, and why the Head should sway about and shout like that was impossible to conjecture. But it gave him a hint, and David, closely listening, intended to reproduce some of it in dormitory that night. A night-shirt made an admirable surplice, and a pair

of trousers hung over the shoulders would make a ripping stole. He himself would be the Head, as he had thought of it, and Stone and Ferrers should be stuffed with pillows to represent Goggles and Carrots, with his bed as the organ. David would march the whole way down the dormitory, after the matron had gone, with the Head's rocking walk and some cotton-wool for a beard, preceded by a small boy carrying a poker..

Then suddenly the Head's voice changed; it became extraordinarily solemn and beautiful, as it did sometimes when he read to them. And the words were beautiful, and they affected David in that puzzling, incomprehensible manner in which words did. Words and the pictures, dim and only half-conscious, that they produced in his mind, often had that effect on him; they gave him a sort of homesick yearning, and an ache, as if his mind was hungry. And it was clear that what he was saying moved the Head in the same sort of way; his voice shook and grew lower yet, reminding David of something he had felt once when he woke early and heard the chirruping of birds before daybreak..

"So prepare to be men," he said, "and when manhood dawns on you, let it dawn on you as on the clean dewy grass, with birds singing in your hearts, and innocence still looking from your eyes. Never contemplate evil, and the desire of it will fade from you. Run away from it, if by staying near it you would yield, and 'Whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, think on those things.' "

David gave a little gulp; not only were these beautiful words, but they meant something..

But the sermon was over, and it was impossible not to remember that in a few minutes now he would be having tea in the housekeeper's room, while the wretched Dubs was doing the Head the honour to wait on him. It had been "jam" to see the Head stamp on that yellow-covered book! And, with any luck, the fragments of it would be in the grate of the museum to-morrow. David determined to get up early, and see what it was about. It was in French, which was a bore, but it was worth while, even at the trouble of looking out heaps of words, to see what it was that had made the Head in such a wax... Or had it something to do with the things the Head told them they must run away from..

Rum old bird, the Head. But he did say jolly things sometimes.

CHAPTER III

The tea which (with the Head's compliments) Mrs. Lowe provided after chapel was an apotheosis of tea. The Head's dinner was going on simultaneously, and the most delicious remainders were brought in from it for the boys, ending with an ice pudding that at its entrance was practically untouched, though soon there was nothing left to touch. It had really been worth while to voyage at such peril over unknown seas and lands, if this was to be the eventful haven, and when, at the end, Ferrers proposed the health of Iconium, his toast was drunk with acclamation. Thereafter was a little quiet ragging, but David had not joined in this, for when he was seized by somebody he had said in plethoric tones, "For God's sake, don't bend me, or I shall be sick," and for fear of that untoward result he had been left alone. Bags also was not disposed to active exercise, and David had taken the opportunity to be agreeable, according to his resolution in chapel.

"I say, I hope I didn't hurt you, Bags," he said.

"You see I had to kick you just once to make it all square. Is it *pax*?"

Bags looked sideways at David, with his shallow, goat-like eyes before he answered.

"Oh, rather," he said. "It wasn't anything. You hardly touched me."

This was surprising, for David had the distinct impression in his toe and instep that this particular kick had been a juicy one.

"Right oh, then," he said. "I say, there's one piece of cake left. Shall we halve it?"

"Couldn't," said Bags, getting up.

Though he could not be bent, David thought that a cautious attack might defeat the one piece of cake, and strategically accomplished this. But it was funny that Bags should not have tried, too, and for a moment he had suspicions.

"It is *pax*, then?" he asked.

"Oh, rather," said Bags. "And your lip's all right, isn't it, Blazes? Quite clean, I mean. I think the Head only gassed about that on the spur of the moment. Will you swear I washed it, if necessary?"

"Oh, yes," said David. "Gosh, I'm full. And I'm going to preach in dormitory, night-shirt and trousers for a stole. I can remember lots of the sermon."

"Oh, may I come?" asked Bags.

"Right, but don't be sarcastic and spoil the show. It'll be in my cubicle."

"Rather not," said Bags, moving away. "May I be Goggles or Carrots?"

"Sorry; Stone and Ferrers have bagged them. But you might blow the organ, and let it go out with a squeak, same as it did this evening."

"Oh, thanks; that'll be ripping," said Bags, beginning to practise squeaking in a realistic and organ-like manner.

Now Bags's mater was, as all the world knew, a Jewess. Bags had volunteered that information himself on his first day at school, adding loftily that she was of the tribe of Judah. This, if it was meant to be impressive, had singularly failed in its object, and the only consequence was that, for his first term or so, Bags had been the butt of various embarrassing questions as to whether he was allowed to eat sausages, or observed other Levitical injunctions. David, as a matter of fact, had not joined in these painful catechisms, holding that it wasn't fair to consider a fellow responsible for his mater, but he had always secretly felt that this might account for there being something rather odd about Bags. For Bags had a retentive and vindictive memory, and was ever on the look-out to repay antique scores, though other people would have forgotten all about them. It was therefore not likely that he would have overlooked a scene so recent as this kick, and after Bags had gone, David said to himself that he was being "too infernally genial" – a jolly sounding word, which he had just learned – to deceive the wary. In fact, though Bags had definitely agreed that it should be *pax*, David was subconsciously a little suspicious of him, and this attitude was confirmed by Bags having said that

that one beautiful kick had hardly touched him. It absolutely must have: there was no mistaking the quality of the touch. But he did not dwell on it much; should Bags prove to be bellicose still, in spite of the treaty, he felt the utmost confidence that he could deal with him.

David woke next morning very early, with a sense of immense interest in things in general. It was still only the hour of faint and early dawn, and he lay quiet a little while, drawing his knees up to his chin, and clasping his legs with his bare arms in order to multiply the consciousness of limbs and body and life generally. Just behind him was the open window, through which the fresh breeze of morning came, coolly ruffling his hair, and on each side the varnished pitch-pine of the walls of his cubicle, gay with wonderful decoration. His face was turned to the partition close to his bed, and thus, the earliest object that his eye fell on was the school eleven cricket-cap which he had won last week, hung on a nail. On another nail beside it was his watch and chain, his father's birthday present to him on attaining the immense age of thirteen, and on the same nail, though not conjoined with this jewellery, the mystic badge of the Smoking Club. A little farther on was another gift of his father's, a small chromolithographic reproduction of the Sistine Madonna, by a "fellow" called Raphael, whose name somehow appealed to David, though the picture itself was "rather pi," and close beside that a photograph of Carrots, exchanged for one of his in those happier days before she sneaked. Now, Carrots's intelligent features were turned face to the wall, and David wondered whether she ought not to be deposed altogether. Anyhow, it had been Carrots who had asked him for his photograph, promising hers; the exchange had come from her side. Then there was a photograph of Ferrers Major, unframed, but tacked to the wall, and one of Hughes, David's great friend, who had left a year before, and gone to Marchester, where David hoped to follow him at the Michaelmas term... Hughes was altogether godlike, and David adored him. Then came a small fretwork bracket, homemade in the holidays, with a sort of petticoat of crimson silk hanging round the edge of its shelf, on which was placed a small china lamb lying down among amazing flowers, which David assured his friends was "jolly valuable."

He cuddled his knees for a little while, contemplating these precious things, and forbearing to turn round and look the other way, because even more agreeable objects (with the exception perhaps of the photograph of Hughes) would meet his eyes there, and the zest for them was to be sharpened by abstention. To begin with, there was the chair which last night had made so perfect a pulpit, and even the sight of his trousers now lying on it, which last night had made so lovely a stole, would make him giggle again at the thought of his highly successful sermon. There also was the photograph of the two elevens in last week's match, and, more precious still, a snapshot of himself standing at the wicket, which Ferrers's sister had taken, had developed, and had sent to him the very next day. "Jolly cute of her," thought David.

He longed to turn round and assure himself by ocular evidence of the permanence of these things, but teasing himself, went on with his enumeration of them. There was his cricket-bat and one right-hand batting glove which he had bought second-hand. Most people did not rise to gloves at all; indeed, Stone's glove was the only other one in the school, and for the moment the idea of staggering humanity by purchasing a left-hand glove also with Aunt Eleanor's five shillings flashed across him. Probably nobody at Helmsworth had ever had two batting-gloves before; fancy being snapshotted with two gloves! Then there was a pill-box filled with the yellow dust from the cedar-cones in the grounds, which he had collected and labelled "Cedar-sulphur"; and, lastly, there was his washing-basin in which, ever ineffectually trying to climb up its slippery steep sides, were the Monarch of the Glen and his spouse. David could resist that no longer, rolled round in bed, and got up.

"Good morning, Monarch," he said politely. "How – " And then he stopped. There were two or three elm-leaves in the basin and a half-eaten strawberry, but otherwise it was empty. There was no Monarch, there was no wife.

For the moment David could not believe it: he felt that they must be there, and that for some curious sleepy reason (although he was not sleepy) he could not see them. Again and again he turned

over the leaves, and looked underneath the strawberry (as if the Monarch had been made little by his meal, like Alice in Wonderland), but there was no sign of them. Then he searched about his cubicle, scrutinising the varnished walls, examining the floor, searching in his blankets in case they had strayed there. And all the time he felt the futility of this, for he was convinced in his own mind that neither the Monarch nor his lady could have climbed the glazed ascent of the sides of the washing basin. Often had he watched them attempting to do so; even the gradual slope at the base was beyond the adhesive power of their feet, and as for the precipice of the sides themselves, they were hopelessly incapable of surmounting it. They *could* not get out themselves: some one must have —

Then a sudden suspicion struck him, and he went softly and barefooted to the far end of the dormitory where Bags slept, and shook him awake. This had to be accomplished with silent caution, since no boy was allowed to leave his cubicle till the dressing-bell sounded.

"I say, Bags, have you taken my stags?" he whispered. "If you tell me you have, and give them up, I swear I won't do anything to you."

Bags sat up in bed and yawned heavily, to give himself time to think.

"Do you really think I would touch those filthy crawlers?" he asked.

"Doesn't matter what I think," said David. "I want to know if you did."

Bags was considerably astounded by David's having so instantly suspected him, considering that he had agreed to *pax* yesterday evening.

"Well then, I didn't," he said. "So that's flat. Where did you put them last night?"

"In my basin," said David.

Suddenly Bags saw the stout figure of the matron in the ante-room just outside the dormitory, while David, facing towards him, could not see her. If he could detain David in talk here for a minute, it was more than likely that she would hear voices, and find him out of his cubicle, in which case she would certainly report him to the Head. He had not forgotten about the incident as they went into chapel last night, and the temptation was too strong.

He laughed silently into his bed-clothes.

"What are you laughing at?" said David, raising his voice. "What's the blooming joke?"

Bags did not answer, and David repeated his question. At that Bags saw that the matron had heard the talking, and was advancing in her felt slippers up the dormitory. She was already past David's cubicle, and retreat was cut off. He sank back gently into bed. "Cave," he whispered, "there's Glanders coming! and stag-beetles can fly. Fancy not knowing that!"

And he closed his eyes and sank apparently into a refreshing sleep.

David turned round. Glanders was coming straight up the dormitory, and had already seen him. Since there was no hope of concealment, he went out to meet his fate.

"Out of your cubicle before dressing-bell," said Glanders bleakly. "I shall report you, Master Blaize. Not the first time, either."

David got back into bed again in a very different mood from that in which he had awoke half an hour ago. The week was beginning just about as badly as it could, and the sight of his cricket-cap and batting-glove failed to console him in the least, or bring back the sense of his happy awaking. He had two maps of the second missionary journey to make, he had to stop in between twelve and one, when he should have been practising at the nets, to learn his Catechism, the Monarch and his wife had vanished, and he was to be reported for being out of his cubicle before the dressing-bell sounded. That was a serious breach of school-discipline, and Glanders might have gone further when she so feelingly reminded him that this would not be "the first time either," for it would not be the second either. On the last occasion the Head had told him precisely what would happen if it occurred again. The colours of the new cricket-cap had faded, the glove looked ridiculous, and the washing-basin was like the house of some one lately dead. He felt furious and exasperated against fate, and it was bitter to be reminded by Bags that stag-beetles could fly. In a general way he supposed he had known it too, but it had not occurred to him that the Monarch and his wife would dream of such a thing. Then

there was a good fine caning to look forward to: it hurt hideously at the time, and you couldn't hold a bat all day afterwards, because your hands were so sore. There was an awful legend, too, in the school that the Head had once broken a fellow's finger, and who knew that he would not repeat that savage feat to-day? First one hand, then the other, and the same bruised and smarting hands again, just in the same place, and blood-blisters rising there..

The dressing-bell sounded, and it was necessary to get up. It was just the sort of morning, too, that made a fellow wild with mysterious delight, if things were going well, but when things were black, it seemed an added insult that the sunlight and the sky were in such excellent spirits. There was the cricket-professional in the field outside, whistling as he put up the nets for practice, but there would be no practice for David to-day. Instead, from twelve to one he would be making maps and staring at the Catechism, and his hands would be tender and bruised and lumpy, and there were no stags to cater for..

He went down to his bath feeling utterly wretched and dispirited, with that completeness of emotion that only children know, who are unable to look beyond the present and immediate future, the happiness or misery of which possesses them entirely. Other boys were splashing about and throwing sponges at each other, and he was hailed with the derisive taunts indicating general good spirits and friendliness.

"Hullo, here's Blazes. 'What, reported again, Blaize!' 'Don't bully me, sir! The other hand, sir.' Whack, whack!"

"I say, Blazes, how's the Monarch? Flown away, Bags says. Dirty vermin anyhow, so what's the odds? Come and practise at No. 1 net at half-past twelve with me and Ferrers."

David chucked his sponge into his bath and kicked off his slippers.

"Can't. Catechism to learn, thanks to Stone."

"Oh, yes, so you have. I expect you wouldn't be able to hold a bat either. Never mind, buck up. All the same in a hundred years. Besides, Hughes was caned two mornings running last year, and he didn't blub even at the second helping."

The goat-like Bags entered at this moment.

"I say, rough luck," he said to David. "I warned you as soon as I saw Glanders. Found the Monarch yet?"

This was rather too much. David felt suddenly sure that Bags was at the bottom of all his misfortunes, and, already goaded by high-spirited sympathy, turned on him.

"No, I haven't," he shouted; "and I'm jolly well going to search your cubicle. I believe you stole him. Look here, you chaps, I believe Bags took the Monarch, and I believe he saw Glanders coming when I was talking to him, and didn't warn me."

Stone took his brown head out of the towel in which he had been rubbing it.

"Why? What evidence?" he asked.

"Unless you're too blooming omniscient to want evidence," said Bags.

"Because you're a sneak. Because I jolly well hurt you last night, and you said I hadn't to put me off the scent," said David with a sudden inspiration. "Why, you've got a bruise as big as a football," he cried, pointing to the injured part of Bags's anatomy, "and yet you said it didn't hurt. It must have hurt: it's all rot to say it didn't. And you said it was *pax* in order to put me off the look-out."

"Bosh: that's not evidence," said Ferrers, whose father was a K.C., and was much looked up to on points of school-law. "That's only your blooming guess."

"Well, it would be evidence if I found the Monarch in his beastly cubicle," said David. "Or perhaps you'd say that stags can fly, and that the Monarch had only flown there."

This was sarcasm of the deepest dye, and produced its due effect on all the boys who, in various stages of undress, surrounded the two, except Stone, who never could understand what sarcasm meant.

"Oh rot, Blazes," said he. "At that rate the Monarch may have flown to my cubicle, but I'm not going to have you search it and turn everything upside down for the sake of a sickly stag-beetle."

The man of law considered the points.

"I don't see why you shouldn't make a challenge out of it, Blazes," he said, disregarding the obtuse Stone. "If you're so certain of it, you can challenge Bags to allow you to search his cubicle, an' if you don't find the Monarch there, he gives you three cuts of the hardest with a racquet-handle and *pax* immediately afterwards."

David was standing in his bath, and, slipping, plumped down into it heaving out solid water.

"Sorry, you fellows," he said to those who were wettest. "Right then, I challenge."

Bags had moved away, in the general stampede caused by David's plunge, and on the instant, with fresh suspicions teeming in his head, David jumped out, and got between him and the door of the big bath-room.

"I say, Bags, you haven't had your bath," he said; "and were you going back without it? Aren't you going to have a bath? Not feeling dirty? Anyhow, I challenge. Do you accept it?"

Bags took off his dressing-gown.

"Oh, you thought I was going back to dormitory to put them in your cubicle again, did you?" he said. "It just happens to be my bath there by the door."

"Well, but do you accept?" cried David, executing a sort of Indian war-dance round him.

"No," said Bags. "I don't want to give you three with a racquet-handle, as we made it up last night. And I don't want you turning everything upside down in my cubicle."

Ferrers put on his dressing-gown with the solemnity of a judge assuming the black-cap.

"Then it simply proves the plaintiff's case, if you won't have your cubicle searched," he said. "It's all rot about your not wanting to whack Blazes because it was *pax* last night. He's challenged you: it isn't *pax* any longer. State of war!"

Ferrers was in his element, and it seemed to the court generally even as to him, that never at the Old Bailey had the net been woven in such impenetrable fashion round the most palpable criminal. Bags, too, felt that, but the net that really enmeshed him was of very different sort from what it appeared to be. Certainly he was in a hole, but not the hole that every one thought he was in.

The majesty of the law proceeded.

"If you don't accept the challenge," said Ferrers, "it proves you are guilty."

The plaintiff continued to dance.

"I'll let you give me six cuts, if I don't find the Monarch in your cubicle," he shouted. "You must be guilty, if you refuse six. Mustn't he, Ferrers?"

Ferrers tore his sock in trying to put it on to a wet foot.

"Not for a cert," he said. "Bags is beastly cunning. He may be running you up to a higher figure."

"Then I'll let him have twelve cuts," said David, feeling absolutely sure about it, "if I may search his cubicle and not find the Monarch. Oh, and search his dressing-gown, too," he added quickly, conjecturing a perfectly demoniacal piece of cunning on the part of Bags.

Bags stepped out of his bath with dignity, feeling there was no escape.

"Then I accept Blazes' challenge of three cuts," he said, "just to show I didn't want to run him up. If I did, I should take twelve."

"Done," said David. "I'll go and search at once; there's another quarter of an hour before school. I may as well search his dressing-gown first. No, not there. Oh, blow! what shall I say if Glanders finds me in his cubicle again? I know: Bags is in the bath-room, and wants his liniment. If Glanders doesn't think that likely, she can come and look at him."

Now Bags's dilemma, the net in which he was really involved, was this. He had lain awake for two hours last night in savage anger with David, whom, in secret boyish fashion, he adored, and who had been so beastly to him. Open vengeance was out of the question, because, if it came to a fight, David was more than his match, and thus his revenge for that infernal kick must be done stealthily. Plan after plan suggested itself to him, but none were suitable until he thought of the very simple one of taking the Monarch and his wife, which, as he knew quite well, lived in David's washing-basin

at night. That was accomplished very easily, without disturbing their owner. But a few hours later he was awakened by David himself, who had conceived the revolting suspicion that Bags had done precisely what he had done. Then at the same moment almost, while he was hot with indignation at being justly accused, he had seen the matron at the far end of the dormitory, and could not resist the temptation to get David into further trouble. This, too, had been successfully accomplished, and David would certainly be caned after morning school. And then Bags began to regret his success: his affection for David, whom no one could help liking even when he was being beastly, and his sense of his own meanness pointed the finger of scorn at him, and, having ensured David a caning, he wished he had not, at any rate, taken his beloved stag-beetles as well. So, lingering behind till the rest of the dormitory had gone to the bath-room, he induced the Monarch and his wife, who were scratching about in his soap-tin, to crawl on to his sponge, and, as he passed David's cubicle, he had shaken them off on to his bed.

Then had come the bath-room complication. He had been forced eventually by Ferrers's resistless legal acumen to accept the challenge, and he would have to whack David, for any one might search his cubicle till Doomsday and never find a stag-beetle there. And each one of those cuts would be unjust: he had taken the stag-beetles, and David was perfectly right. The fact of having put them back did not ease a troubled conscience.

David rushed upstairs again to his dormitory, and with clatter and publicity went straight to Bags's cubicle, and began a violent and intimate search. He searched in his pockets, he examined the lower tray of his soap-dish, he peered behind pictures, and ransacked the receptacle, usually called the synagogue-box, where Bags kept family-letters and such-like, but nowhere was there the faintest trace of the Monarch to be seen. These operations Glanders observed – and David observed that she was observing them – with her bleak and stony eyes, and just as he was very busy she approached.

“Do you want to be reported twice, Master Blaize?” she asked.

“Oh, certainly, if you like,” said David. “But Crabtree asked me to get his liniment.”

“And why can't Master Crabtree get it himself, then?” asked Glanders. “And why does he want liniment?”

“Oh, don't be tedious,” said David. “He can't get it himself, because he hasn't got any clothes on, and is afraid of shocking you, and he wants it because he has got a bruise, which you can see if you aren't afraid of being shocked. Anything else I can tell you?”

Muffled laughter sounded from various directions as Glanders sniffed, which was her congenital way of acknowledging the legality of doubtful proceedings, and David finished his search, turning over the pillows of Bags's bed without further hindrance. But there was no Monarch to be found, and he had to go back to the bath-room to report that he could find no liniment and had lost his challenge. This was depressing, because the beloved Monarch was still missing, also his wife, the hope of the race, and because the loss of the challenge meant three nasty cuts from Bags and his racquet-handle. And the Head was going to let fly at him first, and there was the missionary-map to be made, and the whole blackness of this dreadful Monday morning, dissipated for the moment by his certainty that he would find the Monarch, overcast the sky again.

On his way back he passed his cubicle, and, pausing to throw his sponge and towel down, his eye fell on his bed, and there on the blanket were two black blots of familiar shape.

David gave a great sigh.

“Oh Monarch and missus,” he said affectionately, “you little devils.”

The travelling-carriage of the royalties was to hand, and in a moment the black pair were safe again. How they had got on to his blanket he did not pause to think, and the three cuts due to him were “jolly cheap at the price.” He made but a couple of leaps down the stairs to the bath-room.

“I say, I've lost the challenge, Bags,” he said; “but I've found the Monarch. He was on my blankets, and so was she. And – I say, I'm sorry I suspected you. When'll you take your cuts?”

Bags's inconvenient conscience and affection gave him a nasty prod at this. If David had only not said he was sorry he suspected him, he would not have felt so "beastly." On the other hand, it was dangerous to try to stifle his internal beastliness by magnanimity, since this might lead to fresh suspicions on David's part. But magnanimity salted with sarcasm might serve his turn.

"Oh, I don't want to whack you," he said, "as you say you were sorry. As if I should have touched your filthy stags! Clip their wings, and take them to Marchester next half, and see if Hughes is proud of his pal who keeps vermin."

David stared in blank surprise. To forgo the pleasure of chastisement was not in the spirit of Shylock.

"Oh, well, thanks awfully," he said. "If you don't want to take your cuts, I'm sure I don't mind not getting them. But why don't you?"

Bags was struggling into his shirt, and speech was for the moment extinguished.

"Simply because the challenge was too silly for words," he said, as his head emerged.

The repetition of this silly reason did exactly that which Bags desired should not happen. Suspicion, vague and unformulated as yet, again sprang up in David's mind. Such magnanimity was simply childish.

"I think I'll take the cuts then, Crabtree," he said, to mark the complete severance of friendly relations.

That roused Bags: the rejection of his spurious, but highly superior, motives quite stifled the prods of his inconvenient conscience.

"All right, then, you shall," he said. "Gosh! I'll let into you. I'll put beef into them, Blaize. I've got a racquet-handle that'll do nicely. I bet I break it. You'll want some liniment afterwards."

The ten-minutes bell sounded at this moment, and the boys ran upstairs again to finish dressing and say their prayers. For the last five minutes of these ten they were bound to be on their knees at their bedside, while Glanders patrolled the dormitory. But with care and discreet peeping through fingers it was possible to get through some neglected dressing during the devotional five minutes, and David, who was a good deal behindhand, buttoned his collar, put on his tie, and laced one boot without being detected.

Mr. Dutton was in an unusually docile mood during this hour from seven to eight, and it wanted little penetration on the part of his pupils, when they remembered the visit he had done the Head the honour to pay him last night, to guess the cause of that. David felt chagrin at the fact that he had been detained in the bath-room, and had not been able to take the dismembered yellow-back from the grate, to find out what made the Head so waxy, but there was no doubt that it was the Head who had made Mr. Dutton so mild. Indeed, it had often been a debated question as to which was really the worst, a caning or a proper "jaw" from the Head, for the hardest were reduced to unwilling tears by the Head's tongue, when he really chose to apply it, so convincing and dismal a picture could he paint of a boy's satanic iniquity, and the inevitable ruin that such courses fashioned for him in this world and the next. But it was a point of honour not to cry at any application of the cane after you were twelve; kids might cry, but not elderly persons. The cane might break your hands, and make you set your teeth, but it was not allowable to let it break your spirit. But a "jaw" broke your spirit into smithereens, and no doubt that disintegrating process had happened to old Dubs. Anything in the way of construing was sufficient this morning, and the grammatical questions were mere child's-play.

It was already ten minutes to eight, and the school sergeant, a whiskered veteran, who visited the different class-rooms during early school, with orders from the Head, and summonses for boys who had been reported, had already passed the museum door without coming in, and David's heart rose. If Glanders had reported him, it was quite certain that the sergeant would have conveyed the summons that he was to go to the Head after chapel, to his class-room, and yet he had passed without delivering it. From time to time these remissions happened. Glanders occasionally forgot to report, even when she had promised it; sometimes even in the act of complaining, the stoniness of her bosom

relented. Then, with a sinking of the heart, proportionally greater owing to its premature uplifting, there was a tap on the door, and the sergeant entered, saluting.

“Beg your pardon, sir,” he said to Mr. Dutton, handing him a small slip of blue paper; “but I forgot this as I went by.”

Mr. Dutton glanced at it.

“Blaize to go to the Head after chapel,” he announced, and David thought he detected a faint smile showing the malicious glee of a fellow-sufferer.

Chapel, usually tedious, was not long enough that morning, and the psalms, the lesson, the hymns, and the prayers passed in a flash. Ferrers, as they went out, administered spurious consolation.

“If you stick your hands in cold water,” he said, “it’ll numb them a bit. I remember, last winter, I held mine in the snow for five minutes, and it didn’t sting nearly so much.”

“And there’s such a sight of snow about in July, isn’t there!” said David bitterly.

Ferrers shrugged his shoulders.

“All right, then,” he said, feeling slightly hurt. “And you’ve got your three cuts from Bags, too, haven’t you? I bet Bags lays on.”

A minute afterwards he was in the awful presence. Even as he entered he heard the jingle of keys, and when he advanced to the table, where its occupant was looking vexed, he saw that the fatal middle drawer was already open. That it could have been opened for any other reason did not strike him; he supposed that his case was already judged.

For the moment the Head seemed unaware of his presence, and continued to read the letter that apparently annoyed him.

“Pish!” he said at length, in a dreadful voice, and, looking up, as he tore it in fragments, saw David.

“Ah, Blaize,” he said, “I sent for you – yes, I want you to answer me a question or two.”

This looked as unpromising as possible. The drawer was already open, but it seemed that a “jaw” was coming first. Why couldn’t he cane him and have done with it, thought the dejected David.

The Head rapped the table sharply.

“Question one,” he said. “Is it the case that my daughters have incurred the wrath of the first form?”

David’s head reeled at the thickness of the troubles.

“Yes, sir,” he said.

“Good. Question two, which you need not answer if any sense of honour forbid you. Why have they deserved this – er disgrace? And why do you join in inflicting it?”

David drew a long breath; there was no sense of honour that would be violated in telling the Head, but to do so was like taking a high header into unknown waters, when it required all the courage you were possessed of to go off a low board into four feet of familiar swimming-bath.

“Please, sir, it’s quite obvious that Car – ”

He had begun with a rush, and the rush had carried him too far.

“Carrots,” said the Head suggestively.

(Lord! how did he know? thought David.)

“Please, sir, we felt sure that Miss Edith had got Ferrers into a row, because she saw him in Richmond week before last,” said David.

“And – and sneaked to me?” suggested the Head.

“Yes, sir, told you.”

“I dare say Miss Edith saw him,” said the Head, “but I haven’t the slightest idea whether she actually did or not. I saw him myself. Miss Edith had nothing to do with it. Kindly tell your friends so.”

“I’ll tell them,” said David. “They’ll be awfully glad, sir.”

“Why?” asked the Head.

Again David dived off the high header-board into dark waters.

“Because nobody wanted to think she was a sneak, sir,” he said. “We always thought she was a good chap – young lady, I mean, sir.”

The Head nodded, and for the next half-minute busied himself with the reports that had come in this morning.

“I think there was something else I wanted to see you about,” he said. “Yes: here it is. You are reported for being in Crabtree’s cubicle before dressing-bell this morning. Any explanation?”

“No, sir,” said David.

“You knew it was against the rules?”

“Yes, sir.”

The Head drew a large and dreaded book towards him, which contained a list of all the boys’ names, and against each the number of times they had been reported for any misconduct during the current term. Next the name of Blaize was that of Bellingham, and, glancing at it hastily, he credited David with Bellingham’s stainless record.

“I see you have not been reported before this term,” he said.

The moment he had spoken he saw his mistake; on the line below was David’s record, showing that lie had been reported twice. But he waited for David’s answer. He had not considered what he should do if David accepted the statement, but he believed, and wanted to prove to himself, that David would not.

A joyful possibility whirled through David’s mind; it was conceivable that previous reports against him had not been entered. And then, not really knowing why, he spoke.

“No, sir, I have been reported before,” he said.

“For the same offence?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Once before?” asked the Head, feeling that his test stood firm.

“No, sir, twice,” said David, squeezing his hands together.

The Head closed the book. He put it in the middle drawer and closed that also.

“Thank you for telling me the truth,” he said. “And now I want you, as a personal favour, to make an effort to keep school-rules. They are made for that purpose. Good-bye, my boy. Ah, you are late for breakfast, so come and have breakfast with me. If you are late for school afterwards, explain to Mr. Dutton.”

David was joyfully late for school, and not only explained briefly then, but categorically afterwards to his form in the interval at half-past ten.

“Sausages,” he said, “and poached eggs and bacon, and sloshy buttered toast and strawberries. Gosh, the Head does himself well. He has breakfast like that every day, I expect. Didn’t I tuck in? Oh, and another thing: Carrots didn’t sneak at all, it was the Head himself who saw Ferrers in Richmond. He told me so.”

“Don’t believe it,” said Ferrers, who had misogynistic tendencies.

“Well then, you’ve got to. The Head never lies, and so Carrots is all right. And the Head’s my pal.”

“Can’t think why he didn’t whack you, though,” said Ferrers. “Perhaps he knew you were going to catch it from Bags. He’s been binding his racquet-handle, too, to get a firm grip.”

This was slightly malicious on Ferrers’s part, but what with special tea last night, and special breakfast this morning, and the recovery of the Monarch, and the remission of a caning, he thought David a little above himself. But even this information about Bags did not appear to depress him, and he cocked his yellow head on one side, like a meditative canary, and half-shut his eyes, as if focussing something.

“Blow it, if I hadn’t forgotten all about Bags,” he said. “Ferrers, there’s something rummy about Bags’s show. Why did Bags not want to take up my challenge, if he knew the Monarch wasn’t in his cubicle? And why didn’t he take a dozen cuts at me? It’s all rot of him to say that he didn’t care

about whacking me. Any decent chap's mouth would water to lick a fellow who had accused him of stealing."

The two boys had wandered away in this half-hour's interval between schools to a distant corner of the field below the chestnut-tree. There David lay down flat, and Ferrers flicked the fallen flowers at his face. But he stopped at this.

"You see, I caught him a juicy hack, too, last night," continued David. "And he's a revengeful beast in a general way."

"Perhaps it's the Day of Atonement or something," suggested Ferrers.

David sat up.

"No, that can't be it," he said. "Else he'd want to make me atone. Hallo, here he comes across the field, racquet-handle and all."

He suddenly gave a shrill whistle through his broken front tooth.

"I say, will you back me up whatever I say?" he asked. "I've thought of something ripping."

Ferrers peered short-sightedly across the field. He did not often wear his spectacles, since they were supposed to give him a resemblance to Goggles, which was the rise of intolerable comment. So they seldom graced his freckled nose.

"Yes, here he comes," he said. "I'll back you up. But, what is it?"

"Oh, you'll see," said David.

Bags made a truculent approach, swinging his racquet-handle. He had done all that could humanly be done in the easing of his conscience, and since he had been literally unable to get out of the rôle of executioner with honour, he had wisely determined to dwell on the bright side of it, and hit as hard as he could in the same place.

"I'll lick you now if you like," he said brightly.

David turned a cold face on him.

"Thanks, awfully," he said, "but we settled it for twelve. You see, a good deal may happen before twelve. Ferrers and I were just talking it over. Wasn't it a pity that Ferrers Minor slept so badly last night?"

This remark seemed slightly to disconcert Bags, but he carried it off with fair success.

"The point?" asked Bags politely, slapping his leg gently with the racquet-handle.

"Oh, thought you might see it," said David. "The point is that he didn't go to sleep before – when was it, Ferrers?"

"He heard the clock strike one," said Ferrers, at a venture.

A shade of relief crossed Bags's face, which the Machiavellian David noticed.

"I still don't see the point," said Bags.

David pursued his ripping plan.

"No, you've mixed it up, you goat," he said to Ferrers. "Your minor told me he awoke and heard the clock strike one, and lay awake till dressing-bell. Bang, wide awake, like – like toothache."

"Sorry, of course it was," said Ferrers, backing his fellow-conspirator up.

Bags shrugged his shoulders, and began to walk away.

"Afraid I can't see the point," he said. "So I'll whack you at twelve, Blazes."

David lay down again with complete unconcern.

"Right oh," he said. "But, of course, if you've got anything to say about it all, you might be wise to say it yourself, and not let – well, somebody else say it for you. Ferrers Minor hasn't told anybody yet, except his major and me. Not yet, you know," he added.

Bags appeared to take no notice of this, unless he strolled away rather more deliberately than before. Then David turned quickly to Ferrers and whispered in his ear.

"Go and find your minor," he said, "and don't let Bags talk to him. I'm going to stop here. I shouldn't wonder if Bags came back."

"But what on earth is it all about?" asked Ferrers.

David's eyes sparkled with devilish intrigue.

"Can't explain now," he said. "Just go and stick on to your minor, and don't let Bags question him. There's something up."

Ferrers obeyed the bidding of the master-mind, and by a rapid flank march got in front of Bags, who called to him. But he took no notice, and presently David saw him lead off his minor like a policeman. At that his habitually seraphic face grew a shade more angelic, and any one who did not know him must have been surprised that wings did not sprout from his low slim shoulders. The Machiavellian device which he had practised had come to him like an inspiration: if Bags's conscience was clear, he would not mind a scrap for the wakefulness of young Ferrers, and David was morally (or immorally) sure that Bags's conscience was not immaculate. He had had something to do with the disappearance of the stag-beetles, though exactly what David had no idea. Then he gave a little cackle of delight, for he saw that Bags had stopped in his indolent stroll with the racquet-handle; then that he turned and was coming back towards him. David lay down at full length and whistled in an absent manner. Without looking, he became aware that Bags was standing close to him.

"I say, Blazes, I want to tell you something," said that conscious-stricken one at length.

David sat up with an air of great surprise.

"Hallo: that you?" he said. "Tell away then, if it won't take too long."

"Well, it's private. You must swear not to tell any one."

David shook his head.

"Oh, I couldn't do that," he said.

"Why not?"

David turned on him an indulgent glance.

"Oh, I expect you know," he said. "It's partly because I know already what you're going to tell me, and partly because you're a swindling, stealing liar, and the sooner other chaps know that the better."

Bags made a swinging blow in the air with his racquet-handle.

"Well then, I don't care," he said. "I'll give you three of the jolliest cuts you ever had at twelve."

"Will you? After Ferrers Minor has told his story?" asked David.

"Well, I tried to get out of it," said the unhappy Bags.

"There was an awful bright moon last night, Crabtree," said David thoughtfully. "But about what you want to tell me. It might make a difference if you told me voluntarily."

Bags capitulated.

"Well, then, I took your beastly stag-beetles, and put them back on your bed when you had gone to your bath."

"Oh, that was the way it was?" said David. "Pretty cute. But then, you see, I was cuter. Ferrers Minor didn't lie awake a minute, as far as I know. But I saw you had a bad conscience. Can't think why you didn't accept my challenge straight off. Why didn't you?"

He looked at the dejected Bags, and his funny boyish little soul suddenly grew perceptive.

"What's the row, Bags?" he asked.

Bags sat down on the grass by him.

"I feel perfectly beastly," he said. "You're always horrid to me, and – and I like you so awfully. You kicked me fit to kill last night, just because I threw an ink-dart at you. I only did it for a lark, just because I felt fit. And after I had taken your stags I was sorry, and I tried to get out of your challenge, though I knew you would lose it."

David ceased to sit in the seat of the scornful. Whatever Bags had done (and he really had done a good deal) he had blurted out that "he liked him so awfully." It was no time to inquire whether he had seen Glanders and not warned him, or to examine further into "the bally show." What Bags had said in all sincerity took rank over anything Bags might have done. And with that he wiped the whole affair clean off his mind, and held out a rather grubby hand.

“I bet we get on rippingly after this,” he said hopefully.

CHAPTER IV

David was swaggering about – neither more nor less – in the new school blazer and eleven-cap on the morning of the cricket-match against Eagles School, which was the great event of the entire year. But, as a matter of fact, this swagger was but a hollow show, and though he was completely conscious of being an object of envy and admiration in the eyes of the small boys, or, indeed, of anybody who was not in the eleven, he did not envy himself in the smallest degree. To begin with, he had that which in later life is called an attack of nerves (though at present it came under the general comprehensive head of “feeling beastly”) which made his mouth dry and his hands damp and his inside empty but not hungry. And, to make this worse, his father had announced his intention of coming down to see the match. That might not sound tragical, but to David it was the cause of awful apprehensions, which require a true sympathy with the sensibilities attaching to the age of thirteen fully to appreciate.

To begin with, his father was an Archdeacon, and since he wore a shovel-hat and odd, black, wrinkled gaiters even when, as during last summer holidays, he climbed the hills in the Lake District with a small edition of the poems of Wordsworth in his pocket, from which he read aloud at frequent halting-places, David had not allowed himself to hope that on the present inauspicious occasion he would be dressed like any other person, and so escape the biting criticisms that his curious garments would be sure to call forth. But there was much worse than this, for his father was going to stay with the Head over Sunday, and was to preach in school chapel in the evening. That had occurred once before, and the thought of the repetition of it made David feel cold all over, for his father, among many other infelicitous remarks in the course of an infliction which had lasted over half an hour, as timed by the indignant holders of surreptitious watches, had alluded to the chapel and the services there as the central happiness of school-life. David had barely yet lived down that fatal phrase; everything connected with chapel had been rechristened: the chapel bell had been called “the central happiness bell”; it was time for “central happiness”; one was late for “central happiness.” The school had been addressed as “lads in the springtime of hope and promise”; it was the most deplorable affair. And he might easily, in this coming trial, give birth to more of these degrading expressions, which David felt to be a personal disgrace.

But it was not even his father’s dress nor his possible behaviour in the pulpit that David dreaded most: it was the fear that he would again, as he had expressed it before, “take part in their school-life.” On that lamentable occasion he had had dinner with the boys, not sitting at the masters’ table, which would have been bad enough, but side by side with David at the table of the sixth form. As ill-luck had it, there was provided for dinner that day beefsteak pudding, otherwise known as “resurrection-bolly,” since it was firmly (though mistakenly) believed that it was composed of all the scraps left on the plates during the last week. This tradition was beyond all question of argument and conjecture; it was founded on solid proof, since Ferrers had distinctly recognised one day, in his portion of resurrection-bolly, a piece of meat which he himself had intentionally left on his plate four days previously. Consequently, however hungry you might be, it was a point of etiquette never to eat a mouthful of resurrection-bolly; and David’s misguided parent had not only eaten all his, but, like *Oliver Twist*, had asked for more, and unlike him had obtained it, and eaten that as well with praise and unction. Of course he could not be expected to know that he had been eating scavenged remains (so much justice was done him), but he had remarked on the excellence of it, whereas it was popularly supposed to “stink.” Clearly, then, that was the sort of food which Blaize was regaled on at home in the holidays, and witheringly sarcastic pictures were drawn of Blaize’s pater in gaiters collecting scraps from the dustbin in his shovel-hat, and gleefully taking them to the kitchen.

These miserable forebodings, well founded on bitter experience, were interrupted by the arrival of the team from Eagles School, and the home team took the visitors off to the dormitories to put

on their flannels. It fell to David's lot to be host to a boy called Ward, of trying deliberation in the matter of dress, who parted his hair four times before he arrived at the desired result, and looked, with a marked abstention from comment, at the decorations in David's cubicle. Consequently, when they got down to the field again, the rest of the two elevens were practising at the nets, the grass was dotted over with groups of boys whose parents had misguidedly determined to visit their sons, while the happier class, unhampered with the dangers and responsibilities attaching to relations, were comfortably dispersed on rugs in the shade of the elms. David cast an anxious glance round to see if his own responsibility had yet arrived, when his eye fell on the figures at the nets, and the appalling truth burst upon him.

There was no possibility of mistake. Mingled with the crowd at the nets on the other side of the field was a figure in gaiters and a shovel-hat just taking off his coat and betraying – an added horror – a brown flannel shirt. He held up a cricket-ball to his eye a moment, in the manner of fifty years ago, and, taking a short stodgy run, delivered it. His hat fell off and the ball was so wide that it went, not even into the net for which it was intended, but into the next adjoining.

David's companion saw (for that matter, David felt that all Europe saw) and laughed lightly.

"I say, look at that funny old buffer in a flannel shirt!" he said. "He bowled into the wrong net. I wonder why he wears such rummy clothes."

David felt his heart sink into the toes of his cricket-boots, and leak out. But there was no help for it: his father was perfectly certain to kiss him when he joined the fellows at the nets, and the truth might as well come out now.

"Oh, that's my pater," he said.

"Oh, is it?" said Ward politely, with a faint suppressed smile. "But I expect he's – he's awfully clever, isn't he? My guv'nor played cricket for England one year, and made fifty."

Just then David was beyond the reach of human comfort. At any other time it would have been a glorious thing to be walking with the son of a man who had made fifty for England, but just now such glory was in total eclipse. There, fifty yards away, was his own father putting his shovel-hat on again: he wore gaiters and a flannel shirt, he bowled into the wrong net, he would preach to-morrow, and perhaps again eat twice of resurrection-bolly. But a certain innate loyalty made him stand up for this parody of a parent.

"Oh, my father doesn't know a thing about cricket," he said, "but he's frightfully clever. He writes books about" – David could not remember what they were about – "he writes books that are supposed to be jolly good. He took a double-first at Oxford, too."

The Archdeacon had seen his son, and, to David's great relief, did not bowl any more, but came towards him. There were bad moments to follow, for he kissed him in sight of the whole school, at which Ward looked delicately away. Also he had turned up the sleeves of his brown flannel shirt (as if brown flannel was not bad enough) and revealed the fact that below it he wore a long-sleeved Jaeger vest. How hopelessly impossible that was words fail to convey. Nobody ever wore vests in the summer: you had your coat, waistcoat and shirt, and then it was you. It was "fuggy" to wear a vest in the summer unless you had a cold, and everybody would see that he had a fuggy father. And, oh, the idiocy of his attempting to bowl! It was pure "swank" to try it, for at home he never joined in his children's games, but here the deplorable habit of "joining in the life of the place" asserted itself. The same habit made him, when at the seaside, talk knowingly to bewildered fishermen, before whom he soon exposed his ignorance by mistaking a mackerel for a herring, or, when in Switzerland in summer holidays, to walk about the milder slopes of the Alps with a climber's rope about his shoulders and a piece of edelweiss stuck into his shovel-hat. If he would only stick to the things at which he was "frightfully clever," and not go careering about in these amateur excursions!

Presently the field was cleared for the match; the home side won the toss, and poor David, who was going in fifth wicket, endured the tortures of the lost. His father sat next him on a bench in front of the pavilion, still with his coat off, and continued to enter into the life of the place by pouring

forth torrents of the most dreadful conversation. There were crowds of boys sitting and standing close round them, every one could hear exactly what was being said, and every one, David made no doubt, was saving it up for exact reproduction afterwards.

“And Virgil,” he said, “you wrote to me that you were reading the story of Dido, *Infandum regina jubes*— but we must attend to the cricket, mustn’t we? Ha! There’s a fine hit! Well played, sir; well played indeed.”

The fine hit in question was accomplished by Stone. To any one who knew the rudiments it was perfectly plain that he intended to drive the ball, but, mishitting it, had snicked it off the edge of his bat through the slips, where it should have been caught. Instead of which it went to the boundary.

“Four, a fine four,” said the Archdeacon enthusiastically. “Ah, butter-fingers! The wicket-keeper should have fielded that.”

“It was only being thrown in to the bowler,” said David.

“Ah, but if the wicket-keeper had fielded it, he might have stumped the batsman,” said his father knowingly, suddenly and pleasantly recalling fragments of cricket-lore long since forgotten. “The batsman was yards out of the – the popping crease.”

Quite without warning a small boy standing close behind where they sat burst into a bubble of irrepressible giggling, and walked rapidly away, cramming his handkerchief into his mouth. Otherwise just close round them was dead silence and attention, and David looked in impotent exasperation at the rows of rapt faces and slightly quivering mouths, knowing that this priceless conversation was being carefully stored up. He was aware that his father was being gloriously funny, that if it had been anybody else’s father who was enunciating those views, he would have listened with internal quiverings, or, like Stephens, would have found himself compelled to move away from politeness. But, agitated and nervous, waiting for his innings, he could see nothing funny about it. Wearily he explained that you could not be stumped off a hit to the boundary, that you were given four runs without running for them; but his father thought it an arguable point, and argued..

Two wickets fell in rapid succession after this, and David began putting on his pads. Aunt Eleanor’s five shillings had been spent in a left-hand glove, and even at this dark and anxious moment it afforded him a gleam of consolation. But the donning of these protective articles awoke further criticism.

“Why are you putting all those things on, my boy?” asked the Archdeacon. “You shouldn’t be afraid of a knock or two. Why, we never thought anything of a shooter on the shins when I was a lad. And gloves: surely you can’t bat in gloves.”

Firm, fixed smiles illuminated the faces of those round. David had rubbed the second glove in, so to speak, rather profusely during this last week; the school generally had heard a little too much about it. But David was hearing a little too much about it now.. and a shooter on the shins! how could a shooter hit your shins? Blazes’ pater was talking through his hat, that very odd hat.

“Oh, every one wears pads, and gloves, if they’ve got them,” said David rather viciously.

“Well, well, I suppose we were rather too Spartan for these days,” said his father. “Ah, well blocked; well blocked, sir.”

Things were going badly for the home-side; four wickets had fallen for thirty, and David was feeling colder and clammier every moment. This was far the most important match of the year, and he knew quite well that it largely lay on him to stem the tide of disaster. He knew, too, even more keenly, that he did not like the look of one of the bowlers in the very least. The wicket was fiery, and he was bumping in the most nerve-shattering manner. He himself was, primarily, a bowler; but, owing to the twenty-five runs he had made last week, was put in fifth wicket, instead of being reserved for the tail, when, the sting being taken out of the bowling, he would have been quite likely to make runs. But this morning the sting had not at all been taken out of the bowling; it was still detestably steady, and he saw, in the agonised period of waiting for the next wicket to fall, that he ought to play a careful game, and wait for opportunities of scoring instead of running any risks. On the other hand,

with his nerves in this condition, he felt that nothing could give him confidence except one or two proper slogs. With them duly accomplished he thought he could wipe off the paralysing effect of his father's presence and conversation. Then came a shout of "How's that?" from the field, and Stone was out, caught at the wicket.

There were three more balls in that over, to be delivered, not by the bumping terror, but by a slow bowler, and, as David walked out to the pitch, he abandoned prudence, and determined to hit out, if possible, at once, and so get the confidence he needed. He looked carefully round the field; and stood to receive his first ball.

If he had been able to choose, he would have selected no other ball than that. It was a half-volley, clear of his off-stump, the very ball to smite at. He did so, and in the very moment of hitting he heard that he had mistimed it. Somehow or other he got right underneath it, and it soared and soared almost straight up in the air. As he ran, he knew the feverish clapping of one pair of hands, and his father's voice shouting, "Well hit, well hit, David."

Then the ball was easily caught by cover-point, and David was sure that never till the end of his life would he be able to get over what had happened. He was out, first ball, off a simple half-volley in the match of the year. Everybody, from Jessop downwards, would know and would despise him. And it was the boy whose father had made fifty for England who had caught him.

It is falsely said that the serious troubles of life only begin when manhood is reached. There was never anything so grotesquely untrue. When manhood is reached, on the contrary, the apparently irremediable nature of most events almost ceases. The man, though bitterly disappointed in one direction, has the power of seeing that there are other directions; he knows also that, though he is acutely unhappy at the moment, his misery will be alleviated not only by his own efforts but by the mere passage of time. But to any boy whose keenness and enthusiasm promises well for the future, no such alleviation is possible. He has no knowledge of the healing power of time in these crucial years, no realisation that other opportunities will come; his misery, like his happiness, is exclusive of all other considerations. The moment to David was completely horrible: he was out on this monumental occasion without scoring, while his hopeless father, though with no sarcastic intention, had shouted "Well hit, David." And there was this added sting in that simple phrase, that now every boy in the school would know what his Christian name was. For Christian names at Helmsworth were hidden secrets: if you liked a boy very much you might tell him what your Christian name was, but to have it publicly shouted out, so that every one knew, was quite horrible. And as he walked back to the pavilion the world contained no more for him than that he was out first ball, and that his name was David. All sorts of stories from the book of Kings, which, most unfortunately, was being read just now at morning chapel, would be treasured up against him. They would ask after Jesse, and as likely as not his stag-beetles would be known as Bathsheba and Uriah.

The innings of the home-side proceeded disastrously. The whole team was out before lunch for seventy-two, and Eagles made twenty before the interval without loss of a wicket. David, at present, had not been put on to bowl, and was fielding deep, near where the Archdeacon was sitting talking to Goggles and Carrots, who were apparently instructing him about the disposition of the field, while the Archdeacon, in his manly way, deplored the fact that the wicket-keeper wore gloves and pads. Also he thought that boundaries were an effeminate institution; in his day everything had to be run out ("and a jolly lot of running you had to do," thought David). But with optimistic hospitality, Helmsworth hoped that lunch would worry the batsmen, though Helmsworth howling apparently did not, and were assiduous in filling their visitors' plates and glasses. David's acquaintance of the morning, who had made fifteen out of the twenty runs already scored, proved himself as distinguished at table as he was at the wickets, and ate lobster-salad in perfectly incredible quantities.

During the last fortnight, friendship had prospered, as David had thought probable, between Bags and himself, and Bags, who did not, so to speak, know a bat from a ball, and so was not called upon to defend the honour of Helmsworth, had a wise thought that day. He had been of the group

that had listened retentively to the Archdeacon's preposterous conversation, and had seen David's inglorious and fruitless innings. Then came the wise thought: "it must be jolly difficult to play cricket if your pater is making an ass of himself," and directly after lunch Bags proceeded to tempt the pater away from the field. He got hold of the key of chapel, listened with sycophantic interest to legends about the saints in the windows, and managed to inveigle him into a long stroll round the grounds. There was something heroic about this, for, though Bags could not play cricket, he wanted to watch it, and in especial to watch David. For when he was nice, he was, in Bags's unspoken phrase, "such an awfully fetching chap." He had all that one boy admires in another: he was quick and ready of laughter, he was in the eleven, which was an attraction, he was very good-looking, which was another, and in point of fact, at that portentous moment when it was made matter of common knowledge that Blaize's Christian name was David, Bags would have rather liked it if some one had proclaimed that his own name was Jonathan. But, as it was only George, it might as well remain a secret.

Now David was a bowler of the type known as "wily." In other words, he bowled balls apparently so slow and stupid and devoid of all merit that a batsman who did not know quite all about them felt insulted and tried to do impossible things with them. So, the score having risen to thirty without the loss of a wicket, Stone said, "Try an over this end, Blazes."

David had seen the departure of his father with Bags from the field, and felt enormously better. Another opportunity in a new direction, had come, and as he took up the ball his fingers tingled with possibilities. He had a few practice-balls, sauntering up to the crease, and pitching them slow and high without any spin. Then epical matters began.

He took an enormous prancing run at top speed, and delivered a ball of surpassing slowness. Ward, who received it, suspected there was something funny about it (which there wasn't), and, as it was clearly off the wicket, he left it alone. The next one was a slow, straight half-volley which he very properly hit for four; so also was the next, with which he did likewise. Then came the wile: David's fourth ball, for which he did not take nearly so long a run, was considerably faster than the other two. Ward completely mistimed it, and was bowled. Off the last ball of his over, a really fast one, he caught and bowled the incomer.

This was better, though still bad. Two wickets were down for thirty-eight, whereas none had been down for thirty. Then ensued an hour of tip-top excitement, at the end of which nine wickets were down for seventy, of which David had taken seven. As it was a one-day's match, it was to be decided on the first innings, if there was not time for two, and at that rose-coloured moment David was probably the most popular person in Surrey.

It was his over again. His first two balls each narrowly missed the wicket, the third was gently spooned into his hands, and he promptly dropped it. The fourth was hit for four, and Eagles had won by one wicket. With his next ball David captured the remaining wicket; but he had already lost the match for them by dropping the easiest catch ever seen.

Two exultant batsmen and eleven miserable fielders went towards the pavilion. Stone, with spurious consolation, slipped his arm into David's, as they walked.

"By Jove, well bowled, Blazes," he said. "You took eight wickets for about thirty. Jolly good for your average."

"Oh, blast my average," said David. "As if I didn't know I lost the match."

David's comment was more in tune with the popular verdict than Stone's. It was quite certain that Helmsworth would have won had not that ass Blazes (David Blazes) dropped the "pottiest" catch ever seen. Exactly as in the world afterwards, his achievement in having so nearly won the match for them by his bowling was entirely wiped out by his subsequent mistake. Criticism, in fact, had nothing to argue about; it was all so clear. And, as tea was in progress in the tent, Bags and the Archdeacon, in a state of high animation, appeared on the lurid scene. They were instructed as to the result.

"Somebody caught you; you couldn't catch him?" said David's father playfully.

“Yes, just that,” said David, wanting the earth to open.. he could have caught that ball with his eyes shut..

The Archdeacon found himself next Goggles, who had told him that morning the difference between point and short-leg.

“I have been seeing the chapel-organ,” he said, “my young friend Crabtree tells me you will play to-morrow. A noble instrument. And now we have returned to see some more cricket. I am afraid the Blaize family have not helped you much to-day, but to-morrow we will try again. David is in the choir, is he not? One of us in the choir, the other in the pulpit. Tea? Thank you, a cup of tea after the excitement of the match would not be amiss.”

David felt as if he was being publicly insulted, though all that was really at fault was his father’s friendly adaptability. He had been markedly interested in cricket, when cricket was predominant, but, the excitement of that being over, he transferred his mind to the next engrossing topic, which was Sunday, when the Blaize family would make another effort. But he erred in not adapting himself to the age and outlook of those with whom he strove to identify himself, and in thinking that it was possible for a boy in the school eleven who had nearly won and then quite lost the match for his side to treat a tragedy like that lightly, or feel the smallest interest in pulpits or choirs.

An hour of cricket succeeded tea, but, since it was impossible to arrive at a finished second innings, this was but a tepid performance, and, after the Eagles eleven had been speeded with cheers, in which David’s father joined with wavings of his curious hat, he turned to more serious concerns again, and took David off for a stroll in the grounds to have a paternal talk to him. There was comedy in some of these proceedings, for when they had put a hundred yards or so between them and the cricket-field, the Archdeacon took out a cigarette-case.

“I should not like to be seen smoking,” he said, “by any of your companions, but I think we are unobserved now.”

David nearly laughed, but managed not to. As luck would have it, his father had stopped on the very spot which was sacred to the meetings of the Smoking Club.

“The Head smokes,” he said encouragingly. He saw, too, that his father’s brand of cigarettes was that preferred by the Smoking Club.

Then ensued the serious talk. Cricket was commended in moderation, but as an amusement only, not as an end in itself. David’s school-work was gone into, and he gave again the information he had put into his Sunday letter a few weeks ago. Then, it appeared, his father had heard a boy swear as he watched the cricket-match, and hoped that such a thing was a rare if not a unique occurrence, and David, with the barrier of age rising swiftly and impregnably between them, hoped so too. Transitionally, noticing the blue of the July sky, the true meaning of the Latin word *caeruleus* was debated, and David cordially agreed that it probably meant grey and not blue. Then his prayers were touched on, which, as a rule, were not very fervent performances. This morning, however, he had said one prayer with extreme earnestness to the effect that Helmsworth should win the cricket-match which they had just lost, and David, after the views that had been expressed on the subject of cricket, felt it better not to give details on this subject. Take it altogether, the talk was hardly a success, David’s father feeling that the boy was not “being open with him,” which was perfectly true, and David feeling that his father didn’t understand anything at all about him. This happened to be true also; at any rate, his father had no conception of what it felt like to be thirteen, any more than David had any conception of what it felt like to be forty-five. Then came the one bright spot.

“The Head is very well satisfied with you,” said his father as they turned.

Instantly David’s eye brightened.

“Oh, is he really?” he asked. “How awfully ripping. Even after – ”

He stopped, knowing that his father would not understand.

“Even after what?” said he.

David blushed.

“Oh, it was nothing,” he said. “I only was going to say after missing that catch. But – but I suppose he would think that didn’t matter. Though, of course, he’s awfully keen for the school to win the Eagles match.”

He left his father at the Head’s house, and walked back across the field to the museum classroom, where he was already late for preparation, as the lock-up bell had sounded ten minutes before. He knew quite well that his father was fond of him, and was anxious about his well-being, but somehow the serious talks froze him up, and he could not feel all the things he knew he was expected to feel. It was so odd not knowing that fellows swore when they jammed their fingers in doors, or were suddenly annoyed at anything. Probably grown-up people did not, but that was because they were grown-up. He was afraid it was a distinct relief that the “jaw” was over, and on the top of that, in a way that he did not understand, he was sorry he was glad. And then suddenly he swept all those puzzling regrets off his mind, and he became alertly and absolutely thirteen again.

Walking across the field towards him came Mr. Dutton, who, on his approach, as David’s extremely observant eye noted, put something in his coat-pocket in an interesting and furtive manner. Without doubt he had been smoking his pipe, as he came from common-room, a thing which all the school knew was forbidden to masters in the school precincts, for fear of the bad example to the boys. This was interesting; it might lead to something; and David, knowing that the fact that he had been walking with his father neutralised all possible penalties for being late for lock-up, advanced timidly, as if he thought he was detected in some breach of rules.

Mr. Dutton had just come out of meat-tea with the other masters, and was feeling autocratic. He called David in a peremptory and abrupt manner.

“Come here, Blaize,” he said.

Now Mr. Dutton was not at all a nice young man, and his unpopularity in the school was perfectly justified. He had favourites, usually pink, pretty little boys, whose misdoings he treated with leniency, while those who were not distinguished with his regard he visited with the hundred petty tyrannies which his mastership gave him the opportunity of exercising. He also had an effective trick of sarcastic speech which is an unfair weapon to employ to those who are not in a position to answer back. And of all those under his charge there was none whom he so cordially disliked as David, who returned the aversion with uncommon heartiness. Mr. Dutton was often not quite sure whether David, under a polite demeanour, was not “cheeking” him (though he need not have had any doubt whatever on the matter), and he was also aware that all the impositions which he set the boy did not make him in the least an object of reverence. However, in a small way, he could make himself burdensome.

“It’s after lock-up, Blaize,” he said. “What are you doing out?”

“Only walking about, sir,” said David.

“Did you know it was after lock-up?”

David looked guilty and shifted from one foot to another.

“Ye-es, sir,” he said.

“Then you will write out two hundred lines of the fourth ‘Æneid’ and bring them to me on Monday evening. I suppose you thought that your heroic performance to-day, that splendid innings of yours which came to an end a little prematurely, perhaps, and the wonderful catch you so nearly held, entitled you to place yourself above school-rules.”

This was excellent Duttonese, cutting and insulting, and impossible to answer without risk of further penalties for insolence. For the moment David’s face went crimson with anger, and Mr. Dutton rejoiced in his mean heart, and proceeded to pile up irony. He had forgotten the pipe in his pocket, the smoke of which curled thinly up. But David had not forgotten it, nor did he fail to see that the Head was coming up across the field towards them with his swift, rocking motion, and a vengeance of a singularly pleasant kind suggested itself to him. Had not Dubs made himself so gratuitously offensive, he would not have dreamed of taking it; if he had even only stopped there, he might not

have done so. But the disgusting Dubs, intoxicated with his own eloquence, and rejoicing to see David writhing under it, did not stop.

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