

RALPH BARBOUR

CAPTAIN OF
THE CREW

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Ralph Henry Barbour

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INTRODUCTION

In this, as in the two preceding volumes of the series – *The Half-Back* and *For the Honor of the School* – an attempt is made to show that athletics rightly indulged in is beneficial to the average boy and is an aid rather than a detriment to study. In it, too, as in the previous books, a plea is made for honesty and simplicity in sports. There is a tendency in this country to-day to give too great an importance to athletics – to take it much too seriously – and it is this tendency that should be guarded against, especially among school and college youths. When athletics ceases to be a pleasure and becomes a pursuit it should no longer have a place in school or college life.

Many inquiries have been received as to whether Hillton Academy really exists. It doesn't. It is, instead, a composite of several schools that the author knows of, and is not unlike any one of a half dozen institutions which are yearly turning out hundreds of honest, manly American boys, stronger, sturdier, and more self-reliant for just such trials and struggles as in the present volume fall to the lot of Dick Hope.

To those readers who have followed the varying fortunes of Joel March, Outfield West, Wayne Gordon, and their companions, this book is gratefully dedicated by

The Author.

Philadelphia, *June 19, 1901.*

CHAPTER I

THE BOY ON THE BOX

“Hillton! Hillton!”

The brakeman winked solemnly at the group of boys in the end seats, withdrew his head, slammed the door and crossed the swaying platforms to make a similar announcement to the occupants of the car ahead. From the left side of the train passengers caught a glimpse of a broad expanse of meadow upon which tiny flecks of red flared dully in the winter sunshine; of a distant grand stand, bleak and desolate, against whose northern shoulder a drift of snow snuggled as though seeking protection from its enemy the sun; of two pairs of goal-posts gravely watching each other from opposite ends of a long field; of a bit of country road, a slowly rising hill, a little army of leafless elms, and, last of all, crowning a promontory below which the frozen Hudson sparkled, a group of old red brick buildings, elbowing each other with friendly rivalry in an endeavor to gain the post of honor and to be first seen of the outside world that traveled by train. That was Hillton Academy.

There was a long warning shriek from the engine, echoed back by the wooded slope of Mount Adam; a momentary reverberating roar as the train crossed the little viaduct; the whistle of air brakes; and then, as the train came to a stop, a babel of boys' voices. Some twenty youths of assorted ages and sizes, laden with every description of luggage, from golf bags and valises down to boxes of figs and caramels purchased from the train-boy and still uneaten, pushed and scrambled their way to the station platform. The last trunk was slid from the baggage car, and the conductor, portly and jovial, sang “All aboard!” and waved a smiling good-by to the boys.

“Good-by, Pop! See you later!” “Don't forget that anti-fat, Pop!” And then, when the train had gained speed, a slim junior danced along the platform waving a bit of pasteboard exultingly under the conductor's nose and just out of his reach: “Hey, Pop! You didn't get my ticket! Stop the train! Stop the train!” An old joke this, that never failed of applause. The conductor shook his fist in simulated wrath, and the next instant, with a farewell shriek of the whistle, the train was lost to sight.

Beside the platform waited the coach, from the box of which “Old Joe,” the driver, smiled a toothless welcome. Each year held three red-letter days for “Old Joe,” namely, the days preceding the commencement of the three school terms, when the students, refreshed by recess or vacation, returned in merry troops to Hillton – noisy, mischievous, vexing, but ever admirable to the old stage-driver – and taxed the capacity of the coach to the utmost, and “Old Joe's” patience to the limit. This was the first of the red-letter days of the present year, which was as yet but forty-eight hours old, and all day long the boys who had been so fortunate as to return to their homes for the Christmas recess had been piling from the trains to the stage and from the stage to the steps of Academy Building. And “Old Joe,” who loved the excitement of it all, and worshiped everything, animate or inanimate, that belonged to Hillton, was in his glory.

“Now, then, you young terrors, get aboard here. Can't wait all afternoon for you. This ain't no 'commodating train, and – ”

“Hello, Joe, old chap; how's your appetite?” “Still able to sit up and take your meals, Joe?” “Say, fellows, Old Joe's looking younger every day.” “Give me a hand up, Joe, and I'll show you how to drive those old plugs of yours.” “Please, Joe, you said I could sit on the box with you this trip, don't you remember?”

“Have to be next time, youngster; seat's full a'ready. How do, Mister Hope? Scramble out o' here, sir, an' give Mister Hope your seat. Oh, is that you, Mister Nesbitt? Well – ”

“No, I'll sit back here,” answered the boy addressed as Hope. “I can jump off quicker when we upset.”

“Hark to that,” growled the driver in pretended anger; “an’ me forty-two years on this road an’ never no accident yet. All aboard there! No, ye don’t, sir; no more room atop. Trunks’ll go up next trip, sir. All right now. *Tlk! Get ap!*”

The two stout grays, known popularly as “Spring Halt” and “Spavin,” settled into their collars, and the big stage, swaying comfortably on its leather springs, lumbered around the corner into Station Road. From the interior of the coach, where twelve youths had managed to pack themselves into a space designed to hold but nine, floated out a wild medley of shouts and laughter. On top, two boys had secured the much-coveted places beside the driver, while on the seat behind three others were perched. When the little stone station had been left the boy who occupied the other end of the driver’s seat, and whom “Old Joe” had called “Mister Nesbitt,” leaned across the intervening youth and addressed the driver:

“Now, Joe, let’s have the lines, old chap, and I’ll show you a bit of fancy driving that’ll open your eyes. Come now, like a nice old Joe.”

“Now, don’t be askin’ for the reins, Mister Nesbitt, sir. You know it’s agin the rules for the boys to drive.”

“What! Oh, rot, Joe! I never heard of such a rule. Did you, Williams?”

“Never,” replied the third occupant of the box. “Joe dreamed it.”

“Of course you did, Joe. Come on, now; just let me have them to the corner there. Don’t be a duffer, man. Why, I can drive a pair bang up.” “Old Joe” cast a deeply suspicious glance at the youth – and was lost. Trevor Nesbitt assumed a look of angelic innocence and sweetness and pleaded so eloquently with his blue eyes that the driver grudgingly relinquished the lines.

“Mind ye now, Mister Nesbitt, just to the corner you said.”

“Meaning around it, Joe, of course,” replied Nesbitt as he adjusted the lines knowingly between his gloved fingers. “Come, Spavin, cheer up, old laddie!” Williams, who had been holding the long-lashed whip, now handed it to Nesbitt, who sent the lash swirling over his head, and with a quick movement snapped it loudly a few inches from Spavin’s head. The result was instantaneous. The off horse snorted loudly and leaped forward, and the other followed suit. “Old Joe” snatched at the reins, but Nesbitt held them out of reach.

“Don’t whip ’em, sir,” cried the old man, “please don’t whip ’em; they ain’t used to it, sir.” Nesbitt laughed gaily.

“Don’t you worry, Joe, I’ll not hurt them. But we can’t put on side, old chap, unless we just touch them up a bit.”

Crack went the long lash again.

For several years the grays had traveled the road from station to school and thence to the Eagle Tavern without other persuasion than a cheery chirp or a sharp whistle from “Old Joe,” or, upon rare occasions, a half-hearted snap of the whip in no startling proximity to their ears. To-day there was plainly something wrong, and so, after a moment of bewildered consideration, they broke into a long ungainly gallop, to the joy of the boy with the reins and to the terror of “Old Joe.”

“By Jove, Williams, this is something like, eh?” Nesbitt sat up straight on the seat, tightened the lines and grinned delightedly at his companion. “Old Joe” was pleading excitedly for the whip.

“Please, sir, give me the whip now. I’m afeared for you to have it. You might hit ’em, sir, accidental, an’ there’s no telling what they’d do. Mister Williams, sir, just you hand it to me. *Stop him!*” But he had spoken too late. Nesbitt brought the lash down smartly on the broad back of the off horse, and the gallop changed to a plunging run, the coach swaying awkwardly from side to side. “Old Joe” reached forward desperately to wrest the lines from the boy, but Williams interfered.

“Hands off, Joe,” cried Nesbitt, “or you’ll have us over. Keep him quiet, Williams.”

From inside the stage came a babel of shouts, the exclamations of alarm half drowned by the noise of the beating hoofs and the protesting creaks of the leather springs. The horses with heads down, frightened at length by the unwonted use of the whip, galloped madly. Nesbitt, smiling and

cool, sat straight and handled the lines with skill, which at any other time would have won loud commendation from “Old Joe.” But just at present that worthy was too terrorized to appreciate aught but the fact that the grays were apparently running away. He had a frightful vision of an overturned coach, of mangled bodies, and of everlasting disgrace. Yet he recognized the fact that to take the lines away from Nesbitt by force, even had such a thing been possible, would be the surest way to bring about the very catastrophe he dreaded. And then he glanced ahead down the frozen road and saw the sharp turn but a short distance away.

The three youths on the seat behind had been watching affairs at first with amusement and now with apprehension. The boy in the center frowned and turned to one of his companions.

“Who is that chap?” he asked in a low voice.

“What! don’t you know ‘Is ‘Ighness’?”

“‘His Highness’? No, I don’t. Who is he; one of our class?”

“No; he’s an upper middle chap; Trevor Nesbitt’s his real name. The fellows call him ‘Is ‘Ighness’ because he’s English. He’s a good sort, all right, but I wish he’d let driving alone.”

“So do I,” responded the boy at the other end of the seat, “but” – a note of admiration creeping into his dubious tones – “he knows how, all right!”

“But, I say, Hope,” cried the previous speaker, “look there; we’ve got to go around that corner! Let’s say our prayers.” Hope’s brows contracted as he glanced ahead; then he slid from the seat, rested himself on his knee, clinging tightly the while, and leaned over the back of the seat ahead.

“Look here, can you get them around that turn?”

“Who’s that, Williams?” asked Nesbitt without looking around.

“Dick Hope; he wants to know – ”

“Tell him to shut up and sit down, Williams,” interrupted Nesbitt calmly. Hope flushed angrily, but said no more, crouching in his place between the seats with an idea of lending a hand in case of disaster, although in just what way he could be of use was far from clear. Nesbitt raised to his feet, propping himself firmly, the reins tight wrapped about his hands.

“Hold tight all,” he warned, “and bear to the right!”

With the turn but a few yards away he brought his weight to bear on the lines, swaying from side to side with the lurching coach, settling farther and farther back as the horses lowered their heads to the command of the tugging bits. Hope thought of “Old Joe” at that moment, and glanced across at him. The stage-driver was silent now, his cheeks white, his face drawn. Williams, too, was pale, and his rigid attitude told more plainly than words that the fun had ceased for him. Nesbitt alone of the three occupants of the box appeared at ease. Hope could see the warm color playing on his cheek, and —

“Easy, boys, easy!” Nesbitt called slowly, soothingly to the horses, and then – Well, Hope was clutching desperately at the boards in the grating; he saw the backs of the straining animals turn at an angle to the stage, heard the great wheels *slur-r-r* across the frozen ground, felt the body of the coach sway far to the left, as though it were on its way across the fence at that side, and opened his eyes again to find a straight road ahead of them, and to see Nesbitt settle himself into his seat once more. “Old Joe” muttered an exclamation of relief. Hope again leaned across Nesbitt’s shoulder.

“I think you’ve shown off enough for to-day,” he said. “Now pull those horses down – if you can.”

Nesbitt glanced back into the other’s face, an angry light in his blue eyes.

“Will you kindly attend to your own affairs?” he asked with suspicious sweetness. Hope smiled in spite of his anger.

“If you don’t think it’s my affair,” he replied, “maybe you’ll acknowledge that the gentlemen ahead have something to say about it.” Nesbitt looked up the road and whistled.

“Just my bally luck!” he murmured. “Professors!” With straining arms he bore back on the lines. Little by little the horses slackened speed, and at last dropped into a trot, but not before the

coach had swept by two very serious-faced Hillton professors out for a walk, whose sharp glances presaged trouble. Nesbitt handed over the lines and whip to “Old Joe.”

“My luck again,” he sighed.

“An’ serves you right,” grunted the driver.

Hope crawled into his seat again. His companions were busy explaining the course of events to the inhabitants of the interior of the coach, or as many of them as could get their heads out the doors, and ere the latter had run out of questions the stage turned into the academy grounds and crawled sedately up to the steps of Academy Building.

Hope leaped from the coach and hurried off to his room, while the other boys, laughing and joking, clustered about Nesbitt. “Wheels won’t do a thing to you,” one lad assured him with a grin.

“Well, don’t let it trouble you, Tommy,” he answered gaily. “But, I say, Williams, who was that meddlesome chap on the back seat?”

It was Williams’s turn to grin.

“The fellow you told to shut up, you mean?” Nesbitt nodded.

“Oh, no one much; just Dick Hope, captain of the crew.”

CHAPTER II

INTRODUCING DICK HOPE

The sun was almost out of sight as Dick Hope crossed the yard toward Masters Hall, and the shadows of the buildings, stretching far over the ground, seemed to harbor many little gusts of icy wind, and looked dark and dismal in contrast with the broad expanse of golden, sun-bathed marsh across the river. Dick pulled his coat closer about him, ran up the old, worn granite steps of the dormitory, and gained the hallway with a sense of comfort and homecoming.

Securing his key from the matron's room, he leaped up the first flight of narrow stairs and, half-way down the corridor, unlocked a dingy door which bore a big black figure 16, and, below it, a card with the inscription "Richard Fowler Hope." The room was filled with the mellow light of the setting sun, and here and there the rays were caught – by the glass doors of the bookcase, by the metal top of the inkstand, or, less sharply, by the silver and pewter mugs ranged along the mantel – and were thrown back in golden blurs that dazzled the eyes.

Dick laid aside his coat and cap, took off his gloves, and thrusting his hands into his pocket, surveyed the apartment smilingly. It was awfully jolly to get back, he thought happily, as his gaze took in the shabby, comfortable furnishings and the hundred and one objects about the room so intimately connected with three and a half years of pleasant school life. An array of worn and soberly bound books lined an end of the leather-covered study table, and he took one up and fluttered its pages between his fingers; it was a good deal like shaking hands with an old friend. With the volume still in his clasp he moved to the mantel and examined the knickknacks thereon, the cups and photographs and little china things, all cheap enough viewed from a money standpoint, yet to Dick priceless from long possession. He felt a momentary heart-flutter as his eyes fell on one pewter mug ornately engraved with his name.

As he looked the mantel and wall faded from sight, and he saw a stretch of cinder track, pecked by the spikes of runners' shoes; at a little distance a thin white tape. He saw himself, head back, eyes staring, struggling desperately for that white thread across the track. Again he heard the thud and crunch of the St. Eustace runner's feet almost beside him; heard, far more dimly, the shouts of excited onlookers, and again felt his effortful gasps as he gained inch by inch. The captain of the track team had been the first to reach him as the tape fluttered to the ground and he turned, half reeling, onto the turf. And he had thrown an arm about him and lowered him gently to the welcome sod and had whispered three short words into his ear, words that meant more than volumes of praise:

"Good work, Dick!"

The vision faded and the boy, with a sigh that expressed more happiness than a laugh could have done, turned away from the mantel. The crimson silk sash-curtains, drawn to the sides of the two windows, glowed like fire, but the shafts of sunlight had traveled up the walls to the ceiling, and the study was growing dim. In the fireplace a pile of wood and shavings was ready to light, and Dick, scratching a match along the mantel edge, set it ablaze and drew an easy chair to the hearth. With the shabby school-book in his hands, he settled comfortably against the cushions, and, his gaze on the leaping flames, let his thoughts wander as they willed.

There was plenty to think of. Before him lay five of the busiest, most important months of his school life, months that would be filled with plenty of hard work, much pleasure, and probably not a little worry, and which might be crowned with a double triumph for him, for his hopes were set upon graduating at the head of his class and upon turning out a crew which in the annual boat-race with Hillton's well-loved rival, St. Eustace, would flaunt the crimson above the blue in a decisive victory. To attain the first result many long hours of the hardest sort of study would be necessary, while the last would require never-flagging patience, tact, courage, and skill, and would demand well-

nigh every moment of his time not given to lessons. The outlook did not, however, frighten him. He had returned to school feeling strong and confident and eager to begin his tasks.

When, the preceding June, after a sorrowful defeat by St. Eustace, the members of the Hillton crew had met to elect a new captain, Richard Hope had been chosen because he above all other candidates possessed the directness of purpose, the gift of leadership, and the untiring ability for hard work requisite to form a winning eight from unpromising material; even the defeated candidates for the post, which at Hillton was the highest and most honorable in the gift of the school, applauded the choice, and, with a possible exception, honestly felt the pleasure they expressed. The possible exception was Roy Taylor, one of the best oarsmen at Hillton. Taylor had striven hard for the captaincy and had accepted defeat with far less graciousness than had the other three candidates, though he had tried to hide his disappointment under a mask of smiling indifference. The recollection of Roy Taylor was this evening almost the only source of uneasiness to Dick as he watched the mellow flames leap and glow.

Presently he pushed back his chair, lighted the drop-light on the table and drew the blinds. It was almost supper time. Throwing aside his coat, he unpacked his satchel, distributing several presents about the study. Then, with his toilet articles in hand, he opened the door into the bedroom and started back in surprise. Between the two narrow iron bedsteads stood a pile of luggage. A dilapidated tin trunk, painted in ludicrous imitation of yellow oak, flanked a handsome leather portmanteau, while upon these was piled a motley array of bundles and bags; a tennis racquet and two cricket bats were tied together with three brightly colored neckties; a battered golf bag fairly bristled with sticks; a pair of once white flannel trousers were tied about at the ankles with strings, and were doing duty as a repository for discarded shoes, golf, tennis, and cricket balls, and sundry other treasures. The improvised bag had fallen open at the larger end and had disgorged a portion of its contents in the manner of a huge, strangely formed horn of plenty. Crowning all was a soiled clothes bag, vivid with purple lilies on a yellow ground, whose contour told plainly that it held books.

Quickly following his first moment of surprise came to Dick a knowledge of what the presence of the luggage meant, and his grin of amusement was succeeded by a frown. The boy who had shared his quarters with him at the beginning of the year had left the academy in October, and Dick had held sole possession of the rooms until now. He had been told that with the commencement of the winter term he would have a roommate, but until that moment he had forgotten the fact. He wondered as he spluttered at the wash-stand what sort of a chap his future chum was, and drew ill augury from the queer collection of luggage. With towel in hand he walked around the pile and studied the labels and the initials that adorned trunks and bags. The former were numerous; plainly the owner of the yellow tin trunk had traveled, for a Cunard steamship label flanked a red-lettered legend "Wanted," and the two were elbowed by the paper disk of a Geneva hotel. The initials "T. N." told him nothing, save that the owner's name was probably Tom. Well, Tom was a good enough name, he thought, as he applied the brush vigorously to his brown hair, and as for the rest he would soon learn.

Drawing on his coat and lowering the light, he hurried across to Warren Hall and supper. The dining-room was well filled, and as he made his way to his seat at a far table he was obliged to return a dozen greetings, and had he paused in response to every detaining hand that was stretched out he would scarcely have reached his seat in the next half hour. It was pleasant to be back again among all those good fellows, he thought as he laughingly pulled himself free from the clutches of his friends, and pleasanter still to know that they were glad to have him back. His heart beat a little faster than usual, and his cheeks were a little more flushed as he clapped his nearest neighbor on the shoulder and sank into his chair, only to leave it the next moment and detour the table to shake hands with Professor Longworth, who had bowed to him smilingly across the board.

"Vacation seems to have agreed with you, Hope; you look as hearty as you please. You must let Mr. Beck see you before the bloom wears off; he'd rather see one of you boys looking fit than come into a legacy."

“I’m feeling fine, sir,” laughed Dick, “and I’m so glad to get back that even trigonometry doesn’t scare me.”

“Hum,” replied the professor grimly. “Just wait until you see what I’ve got ready for you.”

Dick was soon busy satisfying a huge appetite and listening to the veritable avalanche of information and inquiry that was launched at him.

“St. Eustace has chosen the negative side in the debate, Hope, and old Tinker’s tickled to death; says he’s certain we’ll win, because – ” “Dick, come up to my cave Saturday afternoon, will you? Burns isn’t coming back, and he’s written me to sell his stuff, and we’re going to have an auction; Smith junior’s going to be auctioneer, and we’re going to hang a red flag out the window, and – ” “Did you hear about that upper middle chap they call ‘Is ‘Ighness’? He nearly upset the coach this afternoon, they say, and Professor Wheeler’s going to put him on probation. Chalmers says he told Wheeler that – ” “We’ve got some dandy hockey games fixed, Hope; Shrewsburg’s coming down Monday next if the ice holds and St. Eustace about the first of Feb.” “You ought to’ve been with us, Hope, last Saturday. We went fishing through the ice, and Jimmy Townsend caught four regular whales; and we cooked them at the hut on the island and had a fine feast, only the silly things wouldn’t get quite done through, and tasted rather nasty if you didn’t hold your nose and swallow quick.” “Say, have you seen Carl Gray? He told me to tell you that he’d be up to your room after supper; wants to see you most particular, he says. Don’t forget I told you, ‘cause I promised I would.” “I’m going to try for the boat, Hope. When shall I report?” “When you make the crew, youngster, I’ll win a scholarship; and that won’t happen in a thousand years!” “Speaking of the crew, Dick, Roy Taylor says we’re goners this year.”

Dick helped himself generously to the blackberry jam.

“How’s that?” he asked calmly.

“Says we haven’t got good material.”

“If we had seven other fellows as good as Taylor we’d be all right,” responded Dick. “And as it is, we’ve turned out cracking fine crews before this from even less promising stuff. Well, I’m off. Never mind what Todd says, Jimmy; show up with the others and have a try. I only wish there were other chaps as plucky!”

And amid mingled groans of reproach and derision Dick pushed back his chair and left the hall. When he reached the second floor of Masters he saw that the door of Number 16 was ajar, and that some one had turned up the light.

“Gray’s waiting, I guess,” he told himself. “Wonder what he wants?” He pushed the door open, and then paused in surprise on the threshold.

In Dick’s big green leather armchair, his slippered feet to the blaze, a book in his hands, reclined very much at his ease the youth who had driven the stage-coach.

CHAPTER III “IS ’IGHNESS”

At the sound of the closing door the boy in the chair glanced up, laid aside his book, and pulled himself to his feet. Despite his annoyance at what he considered the other’s cheekiness in having taken possession of the study without explanation or apology, Dick was forced to a grudging admiration for the appearance of the boy who confronted him. He was such a healthy, wholesome-looking duffer, Dick thought, that it was a shame he hadn’t better sense. What Dick saw across the length of the study table was a broad-shouldered youth of sixteen years, attired in a ludicrous red dressing-gown, much worn and faded, which, despite the efforts of a knotted cord about the waist, failed by several inches to envelop his form. His face was somewhat square in contour, with a chin a trifle too heavy for beauty, but, as Dick reflected, undoubtedly appropriate to the rest of the features. The eyes were intensely blue and the hair was neither brown nor straw-colored, but of some indescribable shade between. The cheeks were full of very healthy color. For the rest, the youth was of medium height, sturdily built, and, save for an easy smile of unembarrassed greeting which annoyed Dick at the moment, was decidedly prepossessing.

During the moment of silence that followed the closing of the door, employed by Dick in a mental stock-taking of his future roommate, the latter’s eyes were not idle. He had been told that Richard Hope was the captain of the crew, a position of honor which he revered as devoutly as only an English lad can, and he was curious to see what manner of boy filled that important office at Hillton. He saw a tall youth, muscular rather than heavy, with shoulders that filled out the coat almost to the bursting point, and a fairly small head set well back. He saw a face with clean-cut features; a straight, sensitive nose, rounded and prominent chin, eyes rather far apart, and high cheek-bones that gave a look of thinness to the face. The eyes were brown, and the hair under the cloth cap was of the same color. Above the nose were two distinct short vertical lines, the result of a habit of drawing the brows together into something approaching a frown when anxious or puzzled. Just at present the lines were deep, and the general expression of the face was one of ill-concealed annoyance. It was the boy in the queer red dressing-gown that first broke the silence.

“I fancy you’re Hope,” he said smilingly. “My name’s Nesbitt, Trevor Nesbitt, upper middle; I’m to share your quarters, you know.”

“I’m very glad to know you,” answered Dick, without, however, much of delight in his tones. “I saw your luggage in the room before supper, although, of course, I didn’t know that it belonged to – er – ”

“To the beggar that was so cheeky on the coach, eh?” said Trevor. “I didn’t know it myself – that is, until I went to the office. They told me before recess that they’d put me in a room in Masters, but I didn’t know who I was to be with. I – ” He paused, with the slightest look of embarrassment. “Fact is, I want to apologize for what I said on the coach. I didn’t mean to be waxy, but those bally gees pulled so like thunder – and I didn’t know who you were, of course, and – ”

“It’s all right,” answered Dick. “I wouldn’t have interfered only I thought you were going to upset us, and, being a senior, it was my duty, you understand.”

“Of course, I see that,” responded Trevor earnestly. “You were right to do what you did, and you ought to have beat my silly head for me. You can now, you know, if you like.”

Dick smiled, and then was sorry. He had meant to maintain a lofty expression of hauteur, in order to impress Trevor with the fact that while he was willing to pass the other’s impertinence on the coach he could never bring himself to an approval of a youth who so needlessly endangered the lives of his companions in order to satisfy a selfish whim, and who had so stubbornly transgressed the Rules of the School (the latter suddenly appeared unusually sacred to Dick, and he mentally spelled

it with capital letters). But the smile had, he feared, somewhat spoiled his effort. He hastened to reassume his expression of calm disapprobation, and asked:

“Did Professor Wheeler learn of it?” He had thrown aside his coat and had seated himself before the hearth. Trevor perched himself on an arm of the big chair and smiled a trifle ruefully.

“Yes; I had a long talk with Wheels. I fancy he said some very good things, but I was so beastly hungry that I’m not certain. He told me to stay in the Yard for a couple of weeks; rather nasty of him, don’t you think?”

“Well, Nesbitt, under the circumstances, of course – ” began Dick. Then he paused as he saw, or thought he saw, a twinkle of amusement in the blue eyes before him.

“Oh, well, two weeks is soon over with, and I had lots of fun while it lasted.” Trevor smiled reminiscently.

“You had driven before, I suppose?” asked Dick with supreme indifference.

“Yes; the pater and I used to do a good bit that way at home – in England, you know – and then last summer at Richfield I kept a nag or two rather busy.”

“Have you been in this country long?” Dick really didn’t care, of course, but one had to make conversation.

“Four years; the pater came over here to look after his business and brought me with him; the manager died. Then we thought – that is, the pater did – that he’d better stay in New York and look after the American agency himself for awhile. And we’ve been here ever since. Last summer we decided that I’d better go to school somewhere. The pater wanted me to go back to the other side and enter Rugby, but I rather fancied staying over here; so I found out about American schools, and when some one told me that Hillton generally turned out the best eights I decided to go there.” Dick displayed interest.

“Do you row?” he asked almost eagerly.

“I’ve rowed a little when I’ve had a chance, which hasn’t been often. Americans don’t seem to do much that way. When I was a little chap I was a good bit of a wetbob, and was on the water a good deal. The pater taught me all I know when I was about twelve; he rowed stroke two years in the Cambridge boat.”

“Well, I hope you’ll try for the crew,” answered Dick, with kindly condescension. “We want all the candidates we can get; and even if you don’t make the varsity boat this spring, there’s the second; and you’d have a good show for next year.”

“Thanks,” replied Trevor calmly; “I’d made up my mind to have a try for it. I rather fancy I’ll make the varsity.”

Dick stared. Such confidence staggered him, and he tried to detect amusement on the other’s countenance. But his new roommate was staring seriously into the flames, for all the world, Dick thought, as if he were trying to decide whether to accept the place at bow or stroke. Trevor swung himself from the chair arm and tried to wrap his dressing-gown closer about him.

“Well, I fancy I’d better get that luggage out of the way. I didn’t want to unpack until you came and could tell me where to put the things. I’ve got a few pictures and some books, you know.”

“You can have either side of the study you want,” answered Dick. “I was alone and so I stuck my things all round. If you like I’ll take my stuff off that wall there.”

“Oh, but I say,” expostulated the other, “don’t do that. You’ve got the den looking so jolly nice it would be too bad to spoil it by taking anything down. I’ll just stick one or two of my chromo things where there’s room. I never was much at fixing up; my den always looks like a bally stable.”

He passed into the bedroom and Dick heard him pulling at knots and straps and between whiles whistling a lugubrious tune that sounded all flats. Dick spread his feet apart comfortably, thrust his hands into his pockets and smiled at the fire; Nesbitt’s cock-suredness was truly delightful! “He fancied he’d make the varsity!” Dick’s grin enlarged and he chuckled softly. He almost wished that it wasn’t necessary for him to dislike his new roommate; there was something about the boy, possibly

his placid assurance, that appealed to him. But – and Dick’s smile froze again – it wouldn’t do for him to even appear to countenance such escapades and – er – cheekiness as Nesbitt had indulged in that afternoon. The youngster – he was Dick’s junior by a year – must be taught that at Hillton fun is one thing and —

Dick’s reverie was interrupted by the subject, who appeared with a bunch of photographs in his hand.

“Do you mind if I put a couple of these on the mantel?”

“Certainly not; it’s half yours, of course.”

The tone was very chilly, and Trevor’s cheeks flushed slightly as he arranged the pictures behind the army of mugs. He started away and then came back again, and, taking a photograph from its place, looked hesitatingly at Dick, who was apparently supremely indifferent to his presence.

“That’s the pater,” he said finally, holding out the card, and speaking a little wistfully. Dick took the picture. It showed a middle-aged man, rather military looking, in riding clothes; a fine, handsome chap, Dick thought, and, having no quarrel with Trevor’s father, he said so:

“He’s awfully good-looking, Nesbitt.”

Trevor took the photograph and observed it a moment with smiling eyes ere he placed it back on the mantel. He was evidently monstrously proud of his father; but he only replied with elaborate indifference:

“He’s rather a good sort, the pater.” He took the rest of the pictures down and held them out. “Here’s some more if you care to see them.” Dick pretended to smother a yawn. “Thanks,” he said.

“I’m not boring you?” asked Trevor apologetically.

“No, indeed.” Dick was looking at the likeness of an elderly woman in a high lace cap. “Not your mother, is it?”

“No, that is my Aunt Grace; she lives in Manchester. I haven’t a picture of the mater here; we have only one, and the pater keeps that. She – she died when I was quite a youngster.”

“Oh,” said Dick softly. “I’m sorry. Mothers are – well, I wouldn’t want to lose mine, Nesbitt.”

“I fancy not. We – the pater and I – were awfully cut up when the mater died. That’s a cousin of mine; he’s at Rugby.”

The picture showed a stolid-looking boy with decidedly heavy features attired in flannels and leaning with studied carelessness on a cricket bat. It was typically English, Dick thought as he laid it aside. A photograph with “Maud” scrawled across the bottom in high angular characters showed a conscious-looking young lady of eighteen or nineteen years simpering from a latticed doorway. “That’s Cousin Maud,” explained Trevor; “she’s engaged to a lieutenant of engineers in South Africa; she’s a jolly nice girl.” When Dick had seen the last of the photographs Trevor rearranged them on the mantel, and while he was doing so there came a knock at the study door, followed by the entrance of a youth in a long ulster on which the snowflakes were melting.

“Hello, Earle, come in!” cried Dick, arising and shaking hands with the newcomer. “Where’s Carl?”

Stewart Earle, a slim, bright-faced boy of apparently fourteen years of age, shook the flakes from his coat and drew a note from his pocket.

“He couldn’t come over, Hope, so he asked me to bring this to you. I had to come over to the library. It’s snowing like all get out.”

Dick took the note and ran his eyes over it. The little creases deepened on his forehead as he tossed it onto the table. “Take off your coat, Earle, and sit down. By the way, do you know Nesbitt?” And as the two shook hands, “Nesbitt’s going to share these quarters with me.”

“Can’t stay,” answered Earle, “for I’ve got an hour’s work looking up some silly stuff about some silly Grecian war. You’re looking awfully fit, Hope.”

“So are you,” laughed Dick. “You don’t look at all like the pasty-faced little junior of two years back.”

“I don’t feel like him, either,” answered Stewart with a smile. “Shall I say anything to Carl?”

“Yes, tell him I’m awfully much obliged, and that I’ll look him up to-morrow if I don’t meet him at recitation. Good-night; sorry you won’t stay.”

When the door had closed again Dick took up the note and reread it.

“Dear Dick” (it ran), “Wheels has sent for me to go over to his house this evening; something about the indoor meeting. So I sha’n’t be able to see you to-night. What I was going to tell you was that Taylor’s been trying to raise trouble on the quiet with the crew fellows. He says we can’t turn out a crew that will stand any show of winning, and is trying to discourage the fellows. I’ll tell you more when I see you to-morrow. Stewart’s going to take this over to you.

“Yours in a hurry,

“Carl.

“P. S. – Somebody ought to punch Taylor’s head – hard.”

Dick smiled as he tore up the missive, and then frowned. It was what he might have expected of Taylor, he told himself, and yet it was a bit discouraging. However, there was no use in meeting trouble half-way. He got a book and settled himself to study. In the bedroom Trevor was still distributing his belongings, and still whistling his tuneless air. When bedtime came Dick was silent and preoccupied, a fact which Trevor noticed.

“Hope you haven’t had bad news,” the latter said.

“Oh, no,” answered Dick, “nothing to hurt.”

Trevor turned out the gas and climbed into bed.

“Good-night,” he said.

“Good-night,” answered Dick.

For a long time the latter lay staring into the darkness thinking of Carl Gray’s note, and of Roy Taylor, and of Trevor Nesbitt; a good deal of Trevor. And the more he thought, the less satisfied with himself he became. His last thought as he turned over on his pillow and closed his eyes was that he had behaved like a particularly disagreeable prig.

CHAPTER IV IN THE GYM

Trevor left the dressing-room and climbed the stairs to the running track. The gymnasium was quiet and filled with the twilight of a winter afternoon. It was but a few minutes after three, and, save for a youth who was heroically exercising with the weights, the building appeared deserted. But as he reached the head of the stairs the soft pat of shoes on the boards greeted him, and he stepped aside to let a lithe runner jog past. He recognized him as Stewart Earle, the boy who had brought the message to Dick Hope the night before, and when he next passed he nodded.

“Hello,” answered Stewart as he slowed down a little, “I didn’t recognize you. Awfully dark to-day, isn’t it?”

“Beastly,” responded Trevor. Then, with a glance at the big clock he started into a slow jog, lifting his feet high and stretching his muscles, that were somewhat stiffened by a week’s idleness. A flood of subdued white light bathed the track from the big north window, and as he passed he could hear the soft *swir* of the snowflakes against the glass. It had been snowing all night and all day, and showed as yet no sign of abatement. The broad skylights in the roof were covered deeply, and looked from beneath like sheets of lead.

The boy at the weights stopped and disappeared into the dressing-room. Perhaps he found it lonely work there all by himself. The pat of the runners’ shoes alone broke the stillness. Trevor took his pace from Stewart, and for some time the two circled the track. It was twenty-four laps to the mile, and when he had accomplished that distance Trevor went down and put in several minutes with the weights. Several other boys had entered meanwhile, and were changing outdoor clothing for gymnasium suits. When he had rubbed himself dry after a shower bath, Trevor took a seat by Stewart and began to dress leisurely.

“Do you run much?” he asked.

“Yes; that is, I try. I did a mile and a half to-day. I’m going to try for the two hundred and twenty yards at the indoor meet.”

“Why, so am I,” answered Trevor. Stewart grimaced.

“I guess it’s all up with me, then,” he said ruefully. “They say you’re a dandy sprinter.”

“Oh, I’m not much. I suppose there are lots of entries, eh?”

“Only about sixteen, I think. You’re one of the upper middle relay team, aren’t you?”

“Yes, I’m to run last, I believe. I hope we beat the seniors,” laughed Trevor.

“I guess I’ve got more reason to want to win than you,” responded Stewart. “My father and mother are coming up for the meet. We live in Poughkeepsie, you know; I’d like awfully to win that two-twenty, but I guess I won’t.”

“Well, I don’t think you need be afraid of me,” said Trevor; “I feel rather rusty to-day. Fact is, you know, I’m a bit too heavy on my legs for sprints, I fancy. I think I’ll chuck it after Saturday night; I’m going to try for the crew.”

“Are you?” said Stewart admiringly. “You look as though you’d make a cracking good oar. I sometimes think I’d like to try for the crew; perhaps I can year after next; Beck doesn’t want me to now, he says.”

“Doesn’t want you to? Do you mean he’s forbid you?”

“N-no, he hasn’t forbidden me; but I always do as he tells me. You see” – Stewart paused in the middle of a struggle with a white sweater – “Beck’s done all sorts of things for me. Why, when I came here a year ago last fall I only weighed about eighty pounds; I was always tired, and didn’t have any – any ambition for anything; used to sit in my room and read. Of course there’s no harm in reading, but I didn’t seem to do anything else; Gray – I room with him over in the village – Gray used

to call me the 'White Mouse.' I guess I was a pretty poor-looking youngster. Well, Professor Beck got hold of me one day and induced me to take up a course of training; of course I'd been doing my two days a week here at the weights and things, but I always shirked and got tired, and it never did me any good, I guess. But Beck made me take walks, wouldn't let me eat anything but what was on a list he gave me, and put me at weights. Finally he got me to try jumping, and then running. I liked running right away. First thing I knew I couldn't get enough to eat, it seemed; used to be hungry every meal. Then I entered the four hundred and forty yards last winter at the indoor meeting and came in second. After that I couldn't run enough. I won the four hundred and forty at the handicap meet in the spring, and wanted to go to the Interscholastic Meet, only Beck said I'd better wait until this year. Of course I'm not a Samson yet, but I'm about two hundred per cent better than I was a year or so ago. And – and Beck did it. And that's why I do what he says."

"I see," answered Trevor. "Well, Beck knows his business. You look about as fit as any chap I've seen here, and I don't blame you for giving under to him. By the way, Gray's the baseball captain, isn't he? Rather tall, thin chap?"

"Yes, he's awfully smart, regular jack-of-all-trades. He used to do stunts for the fellows, like mend golf clubs and cricket bats, and mold golf balls and things, and made pretty near enough money last year to pay his board and room rent. But he got the Carmichael scholarship last winter, and so he doesn't do much of that sort this term. This is his second year as captain of the nine, and I guess he could be captain again if he was going to be here, but he goes up to college next fall. He – he's been a – he's been awfully kind to me – ever since I came here." Stewart glanced rather apologetically at Trevor, doubtful as to whether he would feel a schoolboy's contempt for the trace of feeling that he had unintentionally allowed to creep into his tones. But Trevor smiled understandingly.

"Must be a good sort," he answered sympathetically. "Hello, here's Hope."

Dick approached and nodded smilingly to the two. He had a slip of paper in his hand, and as he greeted them he glanced over the dressing-room as though in search of some one.

"Have either of you fellows seen Professor Beck?" Both replied in the negative, and Dick folded up the slip and placed it in his pocket. "I've been looking all over the place for him; wanted to see him about the crew candidates. By the way, Nesbitt, we want you to report here a week from Tuesday at four o'clock. I'm going to post the notices this evening. Carl tells me you're going to try for the two hundred and twenty yards, Stewart?"

"Yes, I'm down for it, but Nesbitt here says he's entered too, and I'm rather doubtful of my chances now."

"I didn't know you ran," said Dick, turning to Trevor.

"Oh, yes, I run a bit, now and then. I've been jogging round the track and feel as stiff as a poker."

"That'll wear off all right. I was stiff myself to-day – at recitations."

"I should say so," exclaimed Stewart. "I honestly didn't know a thing. I think they ought to give us a day after recess to get caught up with things; a fellow can't do any studying the night he gets back to school. I went to the library last night and almost fell asleep over an encyclopedia."

"Well, you did better than I did. I scarcely looked into a book."

"Ditto," said Trevor. "'Turkey' gave us fits; there wasn't a chap in the English class knew what the lesson was."

"Well, I'm going to have a go at the weights," said Dick. "See you two later."

"And I guess I'll go back to the room," said Stewart. "If you haven't anything better to do, Nesbitt, you might walk over that way."

"Thanks, but Wheels is rather careful of my health just now, and doesn't want me to leave the grounds; he's afraid I might get my feet wet, I fancy; so I'll come over and see you some other time. I have half an idea to do some studying, just to be queer."

The two went out together, and Dick, opening his locker, proceeded to attire himself in his gymnasium clothes. The room had filled up with boys, and he was kept busy answering questions

about the crew. A big youth in a blue-and-white striped sweater entered, and, seeing Dick, made for him at once.

“Say, Hope, is it so that we’re not going to have any crew this spring?”

“No, it’s not so. We’re going to have the best crew that we ever put into the water,” answered Dick. “Who told you such rot as that?”

“Blessed if I know who did say it, but I’ve heard one or two fellows talking about it. I’m glad there’s no truth in it, old chap; I didn’t think there was, you know. When are we going to work?”

“Report a week from Tuesday at four, will you? I guess we’ll start the trouble about the fifteenth. And say, Crocker, if you hear any one talking nonsense about no crew or poor material, just call them down, will you? There’s nothing in it, and it’s hard enough anyhow to get the fellows to turn out without any rumors of that sort.”

“All right.”

Crocker swung himself off, and Dick went into the gymnasium and set to work at the weights. With the cords over his shoulders and the irons sliding rhythmically in the box, he began to go over in his mind a conversation he had had a half hour before with Carl Gray. Carl’s information had not been encouraging, and Dick was more worried than he liked to own even to himself. Carl had stayed at the academy during the recess, as had Roy Taylor – the first for financial reasons, the latter because his home was half-way across the continent. According to Carl, Taylor had been very active for a week past in predicting a failure for the crew among the old men and the possible candidates. He could have but one end in view, to discourage the fellows, and render it difficult, if not impossible, for Dick to get enough good men to form a winning eight. The worst of it was, he reflected, that Taylor’s manner of creating discouragement was so artful that it was out of the question to charge him with it. Even during his loudest talk about the uselessness of trying to form a good crew, he never failed to announce his intention of reporting for practice and of doing all in his power to avert the impending defeat. And now, as evidenced by Crocker’s remark a few minutes since, he had even managed to gain circulation for the report that there was to be no crew at all!

Dick changed his position, pulling the grips with half-arm movement to his shoulders, and frowned wrathfully at the wall. Carl was right, he told himself; Taylor deserved to have his head punched! That, however, was the last remedy to be considered, if only for the reason that to lose Taylor from the boat meant almost certain defeat. For the big Nebraskan was without any doubt the best man at Number 7 that a Hillton crew had had for many years – strong, a hard worker, and an excellent oar. Plainly the last thing to do was to antagonize him. Besides, he was popular among quite a lot of the fellows, and his word undoubtedly had weight; another reason for making almost any sacrifice to retain his good-will. If there was only another man to take his place at Number 7, thought Dick, tugging the cords viciously, he’d mighty soon spoil his game, but – he ran quickly over the fellows who by any possible stretch of the imagination might be considered material for Taylor’s position in the boat, and sighed. There was no one. It might be that there was one among the newer candidates who, by dint of hard work, could be fashioned into a good Number 7, but to lose Taylor for such a possibility was risky work. No, the only course was to apparently know nothing of Taylor’s underhand work, to undo it as best he could, and to at all hazards keep him in the crew. For a moment Dick wished that Taylor had been made captain.

“Hello, Hope!”

Dick turned to find a big, good-looking youth of eighteen with a rather florid complexion and black eyes and hair smiling broadly upon him. He was dressed in knitted tights and jersey that showed an almost perfect form, and swung a pair of boxing-gloves in one hand.

“Hello, Taylor,” answered Dick, forcing himself to return the smile. “How are you?”

“First-rate. Glad to see you back. Some one said you were in here, and I thought I’d look you up; wanted to ask about crew practice. When are the fellows going to report?”

“Tuesday week.”

“All right; I’ll be on hand. Rather a tough outlook, though, I expect.”

“Oh, I don’t know; we’ve enough of last year’s fellows to make a good basis for the new crew. I think we’ll do pretty well.”

Taylor shook his head sadly, then looked up and smiled brightly.

“Well, never say die, eh? We must all do our best. You can count on me, you know, old fellow. In fact, I’ve been drumming up trade already; persuaded quite a bunch of chaps to report. The trouble is that they don’t seem to think it’s worth while; seem to be cock-sure that we’ll be beaten.”

“Do they? I haven’t heard anything of that sort. There isn’t any good reason for it, anyhow.”

“Oh, come now, Hope, you’ll have to own up we’ve got a hard row to hoe. I wouldn’t say so to any one else, you understand, but just between ourselves, I don’t think we’ve got the ghost of a show.”

“Well,” answered Dick smilingly, “all the more reason for hard work. And for goodness’ sake, don’t let the fellows hear you talking that way.”

“Me? I guess not,” protested Taylor. “I know better than that, I hope! Well, I’m going to have a bout with Miller; see you again.”

As the other turned and crossed the floor, Dick became possessed of an almost overwhelming desire to follow him and call him to account; to have it out with him then and there, and, if necessary, to – to – His fists clenched themselves and he set his teeth together. He was glad when Taylor passed from sight. Turning again to the weights he seized the cords and for many minutes the irons bumped and banged up and down in the slides as though – well, as though some one thereabouts was hopping mad.

CHAPTER V

THE INDOOR MEETING

The gymnasium was brilliantly lighted, and the seats that had been placed under the balconies were well filled, for, despite the inclemency of the weather, the town folks had turned out in force for the indoor meeting. The floor had been cleared of standards and bars, while ropes, rings, and trapezes had been relegated to the dim recesses of the arching roof. A running track had been roped off on the main floor, with inclined platforms at the corners of the hall to aid the runners at the turns, while the regular track above was turned into a temporary gallery from which the fellows who were not going to compete – and there were about a hundred and fifty of them – viewed the fun, leaning far over the railing, laughing, shouting, and singing excitedly. The four classes had gathered each to itself as far as was possible; the seniors on the left, the upper middle class on the right, the lower middle at one end of the hall and the juniors at the other. In front of them long draperies of class colors festooned the railing, and class challenged class with cheers and songs, and the Hillton band struggled bravely with a popular march.

The trial heats in several of the events had already been run off, and in the middle of the floor a number of contestants were putting a canvas-covered twelve-pound shot with varying success when Stewart Earle, accompanied by Trevor Nesbitt, left the dressing-room, and pushing their way through the narrow aisles between the rows of chairs, at last reached the former's father and mother, who, in company with a tall and slender boy of sixteen, occupied seats next to the improvised barrier that divided audience from running track.

"I want you to know Trevor Nesbitt," said Stewart. "Nesbitt, my mother and father. And that little boy beyond there is Master Carl Gray." Trevor shook hands with a small, middle-aged gentleman in sober black, who peered upward at him in a manner that suggested near-sightedness, and with a lady somewhat younger than her husband, whose plain but kind face and sweet voice at once won his heart. As Gray was quite beyond reach of his hand, he merely accorded that youth a smiling nod. Stewart was still talking.

"You remember, mother, I told you that Nesbitt was going to run in the two hundred and twenty yards, don't you? Well, the funny part of it is that we ran a dead heat in the first trial! I guess I'm a goner already." He ended with a smile that only partly concealed his uneasiness.

His mother smiled from him to Trevor.

"Then you two boys will run together?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am," answered Trevor. "There's five of us left for the final."

"That's very nice," she replied, "for if Stewart is beaten he will not feel so badly if you are the winner, will you, dear?"

Trevor muttered something about there being no danger of his winning, while Stewart answered gaily: "But you're leaving the other three chaps out of the game, mother; perhaps one of them will beat us both."

"No fear," said Carl Gray; "Dunlop's a stiff, Wharton isn't in your class, Stew, and as for Milkam, well, I think you can beat him out all right at a hop; so it's between you and Nesbitt, and may the best man win."

"That's right," said Mr. Earle, nodding his head approvingly. "If your friend is a better runner than you, Stewart, he should win, of course. When do you race?" He held a program up to his eyes and scowled in an endeavor to decipher the lines.

"In about twenty minutes, I guess. Let me see, father." Stewart took the program. "Twenty-yard dash, junior; twenty-yard dash, senior; putting twelve-pound shot; running high jump; one-mile run; pole vault; sixty-yard hurdle; eight-hundred-and-eighty-yard run; two-hundred-and-twenty-yard

dash; relay race, one mile, lower middle class versus junior class; relay race, one mile, senior class versus upper middle class.' Well, you can't tell by this, I guess; they'll just pull off the events when they feel like it."

"All out for the eight hundred and eighty yards," cried a voice across the building.

"There, see?" said Stewart. "That event's down after the hurdles; you can't tell much by the program; you never can. I wish they'd call the two hundred and twenty now, though."

"Getting nervous, Stew?" asked Carl Gray.

"A little, I guess. There they come for the half mile. Look, there's Keeler of our class; he's one of our relay team; isn't he a peach?"

"A what, dear?" asked his mother.

"A – er – well, I mean isn't he fine?" stammered Stewart, while Carl and Trevor exchanged grins.

"Is he? He looks from here dreadfully thin," answered Mrs. Earle.

"That's partly what makes him a good runner," explained Stewart. "He's all muscle, scarcely any weight to carry."

"Well, dear, I do hope you won't get to looking like that."

"Humph, I should hope not." This from Stewart's father. The bunch of ten runners had left the mark, and had begun their long series of tours about the track, cheered from the gallery by their fellows. "Go it, Keeler!" shouted Stewart as a youth with ludicrously long legs ambled past, almost the last of the group. A quick glance and a fleeting grin from a queer, good-humored, and very freckled face answered Stewart's cry, and the runners swept by, their feet pounding loudly as they took the inclines at the turns. The shot putting was over and the victor, a dumpy-looking boy with the lower middle class colors across his shirt, had been clamorously hailed as he walked off with superb dignity, and the vaulting standards were being put in place while a group of half a dozen youths trod gingerly about looking very serious and important. Finally the bar was up, with a white handkerchief across it, and one after another of the contestants, with the long pole in their hands, ran lightly forward, rose till their white-clad bodies swung out from the staff like pennants, and dropped across the bar.

"Why, how easily they do it!" cried Mrs. Earle admiringly, and Stewart's father clapped his hands vigorously.

"Huh," said Stewart, "that's nothing; they haven't begun yet; just wait until they get that bar up to about nine feet."

"Nine feet! Why, how high is it now, dear?"

"Bout seven foot eight, I should think; eh, Carl?"

"There it goes to the even eight," answered Carl, as the judges raised the bar.

"Is – is there any danger of their falling, Carl," asked Mrs. Earle.

"Not a bit, and if they do they'll hit the mattress. I say, Stew, look at Keeler."

The runners had completed half the distance, and as they again swept by the freckled-faced and long-legged lower middle class boy left his place near the rear of the procession, and with an easy spurt placed himself in the first group. The three boys added their applause to that which thundered down from the far end of the gallery.

"I wouldn't be surprised if he won," said Trevor. "He's running easy and has lots more spurt left, to look at him. But, of course, Manning is a pretty tough proposition, I fancy."

"Manning isn't what he cracks himself up to be," said Carl decidedly. "And I'll just bet you that Keeler wins out easily."

A bell clanged warningly, and the tumult in the gallery increased. "Last lap, fellows! Last lap!" "Go it, Freckles!" "Brace up, Manning! Come on, come on!" But Manning couldn't "come on" to any great extent, and the lower middle boys, leaning perilously over the edge of the gallery, fluttered their colors frantically and shouted incoherent advice, entreaty, and triumph as Keeler, his long legs working like a well-lubricated machine, his freckled face overspread with an easy and confident smile,

swept superbly by the exhausted Manning and two other runners and crossed the line, as Carl had predicted, an easy winner.

When the tumult had subsided to some extent the trial heats in the senior twenty-yard dash were begun, the track being diagonally across the floor, and bunch after bunch of white-clad youths raced like the wind toward the tape. The pole vaulting came to an end with a record-breaking accomplishment of nine feet two inches by a member of the upper middle class, and the running high jump began. Then, "All out for the two-twenty, and hurry up!" came the command from somewhere, and Stewart and Trevor struggled through the throng toward the dressing-room to throw aside their wraps.

A minute or two later five boys stood on their marks awaiting the report of the starter's pistol. Trevor found himself by the side of Dunlop; then came Stewart, Milkam, and Wharton. There was a golden haze of floating dust in the air, and the faces of Stewart's father and mother and of Carl Gray were indistinct across the building.

"Ready!"

"Get set!"

There was an intense silence about the starting-line, but from above came a deep sound of lowered voices, subdued laughter and the tramping of restless, excited feet.

"*Bang!*"

And ere the report had wholly died away the five runners were a quarter-way about the track on the first of the three laps constituting the two hundred and twenty yards.

As they passed under the left side of the gallery the seniors leaned over in an endeavor to catch sight of them and urged their two heroes, Wharton and Milkam, with eager cries. Then the turn was made, and Trevor, glancing upward fleetingly, saw a long row of faces peering down with open mouths from which came shouts of "Nesbitt! Nesbitt!" "Dunlop! Dunlop!" A long banner of upper middle class colors writhed serpent-like above him, and then he was under the gallery, running swiftly. Now and then he caught a blare of a merry two-step from the hard-worked band. He glanced aside. Stewart was even with him, his face anxious and somewhat pale. Wharton, Milkam, and Dunlop were strung out behind, but all well in the race.

Up in the gallery, on the left, sat Dick Hope among the seniors. Beside him were Williams and a stout, red-faced youth whose real name was Todd, but who was more generally known as "Toad." Dick watched the runners circle the end of the building.

"First lap's done," he said. "That roommate of mine, Nesbitt, seems to be something of a runner."

"Sure," answered Todd, "Is 'Ighness is all right, if he *is* a bloody Englishman."

"I'd rather be English than Dutch, Toad," grinned Williams.

"Shut up, you; I'm no more Dutch than you are. Here they come! *Brace up, Wharton!*" and Todd leaned over the railing and waved his cap wildly in air.

"You might as well save your breath, I guess," said Dick. "Wharton's out of it, and so's Milkam. The race's between Nesbitt and young Earle. And as we can't win it, I hope Earle will. He's a decent, plucky youngster; and – well, anything to beat upper middle, you know."

"You're not very loyal to your chum," grinned Williams.

"He has no business being in the upper middle," responded Dick calmly. "By Jove, look there!"

Across the gymnasium the runners were speeding down the back-stretch, Trevor and Stewart, side by side, leaving the other three farther and farther behind at every step. Wharton and Milkam were practically out of it; Dunlop was ten yards to the bad, but running strongly and apparently still capable of retrieving his lost ground. At the turn Trevor hugged the inside of the track and Stewart, smaller, lithier, and speedier-looking, snuggled in close behind him. Dunlop, head back, a look of grim determination on his face, spurred until he had gained a position but a scant two yards behind Stewart.

“Good boy, Dunlop!” shouted Williams, while from across the building came a wild cry of joy from dozens of throats.

“I guess that’s his last spurt,” muttered Dick; “he’s showing the pace.”

And so it proved. The bell rang warningly, and the shouting from excited partisans increased in volume as the last lap commenced. Trevor, still ahead, increased his speed. Stewart accepted the challenge promptly, and Dunlop, after a brave but futile effort to keep his place, was left behind. Milkam and Wharton plodded along easily a full half lap in the rear until the latter, spying Dunlop’s predicament, suddenly spurred, and entered the lists with him in a contest for third place, leaving Milkam, bewildered, hopelessly last.

At the second turn Trevor had given place to Stewart. When the two entered the back-stretch Trevor drew alongside his rival again, stayed there for an instant, and then drew ahead. The gymnasium was a babel of voices. The last lap was half run, and Trevor had put two yards of track between him and Stewart. Many yards behind Dunlop and Wharton were having a hot race of their own wholly unnoticed, for every eye followed the two youths whose flying feet were now pounding the incline at the third corner.

“Is ’Ighness wins easily,” said Todd, shouting to make himself heard above the shrieks of his neighbors. Dick nodded. He was sorry to see Stewart beaten, but surprised to find himself suddenly experiencing a sensation of pride in the work of his roommate. After all, he had run a great race and deserved to win; and really, when he came to think about it, Nesbitt was handicapped by greater weight, and —

“Earle’s closing up!” cried Williams.

And so it was. With the contest almost over, the younger boy had forged ahead, and at the last turn secured the inside of the track. Trevor was wobbling! Twice he swerved unsteadily, but as the home-stretch was reached appeared to pull himself together with an effort, and gallantly strove to pass Stewart. But the latter, running steadily and seemingly untired, not only held his own, but tacked another two yards onto his gain and breasted the tape an easy winner! And how lower middle did yell!

Dunlop and Wharton fought it out to the end side by side, the former securing third place by the smallest of margins.

“Well, what do you think of that!” exclaimed Williams in deep disgust as soon as he could make himself heard. “Why, ’Is ’Ighness had the race in his pocket!”

“I think —” Dick hesitated.

“What do you think?” Dick smiled.

“I think Nesbitt was beaten,” he answered.

Williams viewed him in painful disgust.

“I think you’re nutty,” he growled. “Don’t you suppose I can see when a man’s beaten?”

“Not always, I guess,” replied Dick enigmatically.

Whereupon Williams begged Todd to bathe Dick’s head, and in the fracas that followed the amazing result of the two-hundred-and-twenty-yard dash was for the time forgotten.

CHAPTER VI

THE RELAY RACE

That evening was destined to be one of triumph for Stewart Earle and the lower middle class. In the relay race that followed the two-hundred-and-twenty-yard dash the juniors had never a chance from first to last, and lower middle's fourth man cantered home almost in time to tag the junior's last runner ere he left the mark. Stewart and Trevor viewed the contest squatting on the floor beside the seats occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Earle and Carl Gray.

Stewart's mother had welcomed victor and vanquished with impartial favor, although her pride and pleasure in her boy's success was patent to all. Stewart's father smiled near-sightedly at Trevor, and assured him that he had made a remarkable race, but his words didn't disguise for a moment the fact that he had expected Stewart to win, and that he was somewhat surprised at Trevor's thinking for a moment that he (Trevor) stood any chance of victory. Even Stewart appeared uncomfortable at his father's tone, and strove to change the subject lest Trevor should feel hurt. But the latter was genuinely glad that Stewart's parents had witnessed a victory for their son and had never a thought of disappointment or envy. As to the reason for his sudden and unexpected giving-out, however, Trevor had little to say, and when Carl suggested that perhaps he had insufficient training since the recess he eagerly acknowledged that that might have had something to do with it.

"But I never had a hope of winning," Stewart had cried, "after the second round! I just kept on going because – well, you know – just to make as good a showing as I could. When you fell behind I was so surprised that I almost stopped."

The sixty-yard hurdle-race proved of exciting interest to Mr. and Mrs. Earle, and every one else, for that matter, and was won in the closest kind of a finish by a senior class fellow in the remarkably good time of eight seconds. The one-mile run followed, but failed to awaken much enthusiasm from the audience, who were impatient for the final event, the senior-upper middle relay race. When the mile run was half over Trevor shook hands with Mr. and Mrs. Earle, and, encouraged by their hearty wishes for his success, hurried off to the dressing-room. Kernan, captain of the upper middle team, took him aside and questioned him anxiously.

"I'm afraid you're not very fit, Nesbitt. I was going to run you last, but I guess I'll let Chalmers have the final and put you second. How do you feel?"

"Spiffin!" answered Trevor heartily, "never felt better. Don't get it into your noddle that I'm done up, old chap, and don't change the order on account of that two-twenty dash. That was judgment more than anything else –"

"Judgment!" ejaculated Kernan. "I didn't see much judgment in it!"

"That's your stupidity, Kernan. Can't stop to explain now; but just you go ahead and let me run last, like a good fellow, and I promise you you won't regret it." Kernan frowned hesitatingly; then his face cleared and he slapped Trevor on the back.

"All right, Nesbitt; run last you shall. I don't pretend to understand that two-twenty, but I'll trust you to do your work. We've got a stiff race, I guess, but we're not beaten yet. The seniors will put Taylor last, I expect; he's a good man, all right, but if we can hold onto them until the last round I think you can down him. What do you say?"

"I say you give me a fairly even start with Roy Taylor, and I'll beat him out!" answered Trevor doggedly.

"That's the stuff! Of course, I can't promise the even start, but I'll do my best, Nesbitt; and you'll do yours, I know, and –"

"Ready for the relay! All out, fellows!"

Trevor, Kernan, and the other two members of their team, Chalmers and Johnston, hurried to the starting-line, followed by four very proper-looking boys wearing the senior colors. The band, hidden from sight by a fringe of shouting juniors at the end of the gallery, played for all it was worth. The seniors and upper middle fellows were cheering the members of their teams individually and collectively, and the uproar was tremendous.

Professor Beck, athletic director, and at present that court of last appeal, the referee, gave the instructions in quick, clear tones as the first two contestants stood on their marks. The professor was a short man who wore glasses, who always dressed faultlessly, whether for a principal's reception or an afternoon on the campus, whose slightest turn of the head or crook of the finger bespoke authority, and whose voice, ordinarily low but incisive, could swell into a very fair imitation of a speaking-trumpet on short notice. For the rest, he understood boy nature from A to Z, and beyond, and could turn a good track athlete out of anything except a wooden post, given the opportunity. Hillton fellows, when graduated from the narrow prejudices of the junior year, worshiped two local deities – Professor Wheeler, the principal, and Professor Beck; and there was a well-defined notion prevalent that should some beneficent Fate remove from the academy all the rest of the faculty things would not only continue undisturbed, but would run better than ever.

I have dealt at some length on Professor Beck because he is a person of much importance. When he dies – may the day be far! – his portrait will hang beside those of the founder and past principals in the chapel, to be outwardly geyed and inwardly revered by succeeding generations of loyal Hilltonians.

“Now, get them off quickly,” commanded the professor. The starter cried his perfunctory “On your marks! Get set!” and then the little pistol barked with all the ferocity of a toy spaniel, and the great event of the meeting, the senior-upper middle one-mile relay race, was on.

Johnston, for the upper middle, and a youth named Cummings, for the seniors, shot off together, and began their quarter mile as though they had but one lap to accomplish instead of six. The pace was too good to last, and every one knew it, including the runners, and so, when they had made the first round of the track, they slowed down as though by mutual consent, and went at the contest in businesslike style. Seniors and upper middle classmen cheered their respective candidates, and hurled taunts across the hall.

“The U. M. is a stupid pup
Who laps his milk from out a cup;
He may have sense when he grows up
And gets to be a Senior!”

To this chanted aspersion the upper middle fellows replied with howls of derision, and started upon their own poetic catalogue of the deficiencies of the rival class, the first verse of which ran as follows:

“Said the Prof. unto the Senior:
‘You must alter your demeanor,
For such ways I’ve never seen; you’re
Quite as awkward as a hen;
Your walk is most unsightly, sir;
Pray place your feet more lightly, sir,
And always bow politely, sir,
To the Upper Middle men!’”

There were five more verses to it, and while it lasted the seniors, led by Dick and Todd, could only cheer incessantly and stamp their feet in a hopeless endeavor to drown the song.

Meanwhile the first quarter of the race was nearly over, and Johnston and Cummings, the former leading by a scant ten yards, were spurting along the back-stretch. Then the senior runner reached the line, touched hands with the next man, and dropped from the track tired and breathless just as Cummings came up and Chalmers took his place in the race.

As Johnston crossed the line Dick slipped his watch back into his pocket. "Fifty-seven and four fifths seconds!" he bawled into Williams's ear. "Johnston ought to have done better by three fifths." Williams nodded. "We've got the start of them, however," he answered.

On the second lap Clark, the senior runner, increased the lead to a good fifteen yards, and from there on to the finish, Chalmers, try as he might and did, could not close the gap, and the second quarter was finished in the good time of fifty-seven and one fifth seconds. Kernan, the upper middle team captain, entered the race with set, determined face, and ere the first lap of the third quarter had been reeled off had raised the flagging hopes of his classmates by a wonderful burst of speed that put him on equal terms with the senior runner, Morris. At the third corner he secured the inside of the track, and kept it during the whole of the second, third, and fourth laps, although Morris tried hard to reach him.

The shouting from the upper middle seats was wild and continuous, and the swirling banners waved riotously over Kernan as, with head back and bare legs twinkling, he sped along, every instant now lengthening the space between him and the pursuer. And then suddenly the cheers and shouts of acclaim were changed to cries of alarm and dismay. There was the sound of a fall, and a white-clad form plunged to the floor and rolled over and over. Kernan at the third corner had tripped on the incline.

Morris, racing along but a few yards behind, leaped over the rolling body, stumbled, recovered himself after a few strides, and went on. Half a dozen fellows hurried toward Kernan, but he was on his feet again before they could reach him, and, although he was plainly bruised and sore from his fall, took up the running pluckily, amid cheers. But his task was a hopeless one. Morris had used the misadventure to good purpose, and now between him and the upper middle captain a third of a lap stretched. Kernan, with white face, tried desperately to make up the lost ground, and even succeeded in doing so to some extent, but Morris's lead was too great, and that youth swept breathlessly over the line, nearly a quarter of a lap to the good, and, touching the impatient, outstretched fingers of Roy Taylor, sank exhausted to the floor.

Trevor, poised for a quick start, heard Taylor's feet resounding over the first incline as Kernan, staggering by, touched his hand for a fleeting instant and toppled over. With a dash Trevor took up the running. A quarter of a lap was more than he had bargained for when he had professed his ability to beat Roy Taylor, but he was not discouraged. He knew Taylor well; knew that that youth was a fast and steady runner at quarter- and half-mile distances, but knew also that, while a spurt at the finish was quite within Taylor's powers, a series of fast dashes had the effect of worrying and exciting him. Trevor laid his plans accordingly. He realized intuitively that he was in better condition than his rival for hard and fast work; he had run in the two-hundred-and-twenty-yard event, while Taylor had not been on the track before that evening; a fact which, in Trevor's present good physical shape, worked to his advantage; his former race, despite his defeat, had served to put him into excellent condition for this one. He ran easily, maintaining the distance between Taylor and himself, and at the commencement of the second of the six laps constituting the last quarter of the race he was still a quarter of a lap behind.

"That's good work, Nesbitt," cried Kernan, who, sprawled out on a mattress, was at last beginning to find his breath once more. The band was almost vainly striving to make its brazen notes heard above the shouting of the students, while pennants of class colors writhed serpent-like in the air, and seniors and upper middle classmen hurled defiant cheers at each other across the intervening

space. The lower middle boys and the juniors cheered indiscriminately, although there was a tendency among the latter class to uphold the seniors. Dick, Williams, Todd, and their companions leaned over the railing and watched the contest excitedly. Trevor and Taylor had begun the second lap, the former with eyes intent upon the youth ahead, the latter running with a great show of style, and with an easy and confident smile upon his face.

“Taylor runs just as he does everything,” grumbled Todd, “with one eye on the gallery.”

“He does like to show off,” assented Williams. “Hello!”

A roar went up from floor and balcony, and Roy Taylor, just mounting the second incline, turned his head to see Trevor coming up on him like a whirlwind. Instantly he leaped away, and the seniors, for a moment dismayed, gave voice to their relief and approval. Trevor settled down into his former pace, well satisfied, for by that unexpected spurt he had taken off nearly a half of the distance that had separated him from his opponent. Taylor, as soon as he saw the danger over, settled back into his former even but not extraordinary pace, and finished the second lap running well within himself. The third lap began with more encouraging prospects for the upper middle class.

CHAPTER VII

TREVOR'S VICTORY

"I don't like Taylor's letting 'Is 'Ighness creep up on him that way," objected Williams. "He was napping; and he'll need every foot he can get before the race is over."

"Nesbitt's doing some head-work," answered Dick, with a note of admiration in his voice, "and I wouldn't be surprised to see him get the best of Taylor yet. If he can keep up – Look there!"

Trevor was at his former tactics. Just as Taylor reached the second corner the upper middle boy fairly threw himself forward, and ere the senior runner had taken alarm had closed up with him until a mere six yards intervened. The upper middle fellows howled with delight, and the seniors, striving to hide their dismay, cheered lustily. Taylor's face wore a scowl as he increased his speed and strove to regain his lost lead.

But Trevor held what he had taken, took his pace from Taylor, and with never a look to right or left, kept doggedly at the other's heels. The fourth lap started in a veritable pandemonium. Taylor was now but a scant ten yards in the lead, and those who saw Trevor's calm, intent gaze fastened upon the other boy's shoulders realized that, barring a mishap such as had fallen to the lot of Kernan, he would, if he did not actually win, at least finish so close behind Taylor as to make the race one of the closest ever witnessed at Hillton, indoors or out.

This time Taylor was on the lookout, and when Trevor spurted was ready for him and so held his advantage. Trevor was well satisfied, for he had no wish to pass Taylor at that time, but only to tire and worry him. His spurt lasted until the line was again crossed. And now Taylor took the initiative and increased his speed, for, as Trevor had expected, the short spurts had made him nervous. But shake off his pursuer he could not, and with the lap half run but five yards lay between the two.

"He's a silly chump!" shouted Todd angrily, glaring across at the speeding senior runner. "Why doesn't he keep that for the last lap; can't he see he's begun to spurt too early?"

"I have an idea that Trevor Nesbitt's got him scared," answered Dick.

"You just bet he has; he's worried to death!" This from Williams, who was scowling blackly. "He deserves to lose it."

"And Nesbitt deserves to win it," said Dick.

"Humph! You seem to have changed your tune!"

Dick accepted the gibe good-naturedly.

"I have; I think Nesbitt's the headiest youngster I've seen in a long while, and as for Taylor – "

The bell clanged loudly, announcing the beginning of the last lap, and every fellow in the balcony was on his feet in the instant. As he took the first turn Taylor glanced hurriedly back and met the unwavering and, as it seemed to him, relentless stare of Trevor, and putting every effort into his work again increased his pace. Everybody was shouting now, but as the two runners passed under the seniors' balcony one voice sounded more loudly than all:

"Good work, Nesbitt!"

And Trevor heard it and recognized Dick Hope's voice, and for an instant a smile crossed his face. Then the second incline was under his feet, and he had to use care lest he trip. But he got safely over, and now the time for his final effort had come. Into the back-stretch he sped, and the watchers held their breath, for foot by foot the lost ground was being eaten up by his flying feet. Then a burst of applause shook the rafters and Taylor, running despairingly, heard the other lad's feet at his side, strove to goad his wearied limbs into faster strides, and found with dismay at his heart that he had reached his limit.

At the third corner Trevor with a final effort leaped into the lead, hugging the inside of the track. At the last corner he was a yard to the good, and from there down to the finish line, where

Kernan and Chalmers and Johnston leaped frantically about the floor, he held his vantage, and so toppled over into eager, outspread arms, aching, breathless, and weak, but winner of the race. And as he stretched himself gratefully on the mattress he heard the timekeeper announce:

“Last quarter, fifty-seven and one fifth; the mile, three forty-eight and two fifths.”

When Trevor reached his room he found Dick seated in front of the fire, a Latin text-book face downward in his lap, his arms over his head, and his eyes closed. The fire was almost out, and the room was chilly. Trevor as silently as possible placed another log in the grate, and, disappearing into the bedroom, came out again with his dressing-gown, which after a moment's hesitation he spread over the sleeper's knees. Then he doffed his coat and cap, and standing by the fireplace held his chilled hands to the blaze and looked down at Dick. And as he looked he fell to wondering why it was that he and his roommate got on together so badly. It was not *his* fault, he told himself; he had tried every way he knew to thaw Dick's indifference. It was now ten days since the winter term had commenced, and the two boys were as much strangers to each other as they had been after Trevor's burst of confidence on their first night together. Trevor often regretted that confidence; he sometimes thought that he had bored Dick with his family photographs and history, and remembered with a flush that his roommate had never responded in like manner. Of course, his cheekiness on the stage-coach during that unfortunate drive had been the primary cause of Dick's dislike; and Trevor couldn't blame the latter for taking umbrage; only – well, he had apologized and explained, and it seemed that the other ought to be willing to forgive. It was not that Dick was nasty; he treated Trevor with good-humored politeness; fact was, Trevor reflected dubiously, Dick was altogether too polite; his politeness was of the sort which he imagined a judge might display toward the prisoner in the dock. He wished that Dick would throw a boot at him so that they could have it out and come to an understanding.

Dick moved restlessly and opened his eyes. His gaze encountered Trevor's and he smiled sleepily and stretched himself. Then he sat up and looked about him perplexedly.

“Well, if I didn't go to sleep!” he said. “What time is it?”

Trevor glanced at the battered alarm-clock on the table. “Ten minutes of twelve,” he answered.

Dick yawned and suddenly spied the dressing-gown. He pulled it toward him and looked at it in astonishment.

“What – ?”

Trevor flushed as he answered hurriedly: “It was so bally chilly here when I came in, you know; and I thought that maybe you'd catch cold. So I threw that over you. Just pitch it on the floor there.”

“Thanks,” said Dick. “I expect it was chilly. I was going to put another stick on the fire, and while I was thinking about it I suppose I fell asleep. It's pretty late, isn't it? Well, to-morrow's Sunday.”

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