

Anstey F.

# Vice Versa: or, A Lesson to Fathers



F. Anstey

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## PREFACE

There is an old story of a punctiliously polite Greek, who, while performing the funeral of an infant daughter, felt bound to make his excuses to the spectators for "bringing out such a ridiculously small corpse to so large a crowd."

The Author, although he trusts that the present production has more vitality than the Greek gentleman's child, still feels that in these days of philosophical fiction, metaphysical romance, and novels with a purpose, some apology may perhaps be needed for a tale which has the unambitious and frivolous aim of mere amusement.

However, he ventures to leave the tale to be its own apology, merely contenting himself with the entreaty that his little fish may be spared the rebuke that it is not a whale.

In submitting it with all possible respect to the Public, he conceives that no form of words he could devise would appeal so simply and powerfully to their feelings as that which he has ventured to adopt from a certain Anglo-Portuguese Phrase-Book of deserved popularity.

Like the compilers of that work, he – "expects then who the little book, for the care what he wrote him and her typographical corrections, will commend itself to the —*British Paterfamilias*— at which he dedicates him particularly."

## 1. *Black Monday*

"In England, where boys go to boarding schools, if the holidays were not long there would be no opportunity for cultivating the domestic affections."

– *Letter of Lord Campbell's, 1835.*

On a certain Monday evening late in January, 1881, Paul Bultitude, Esq. (of Mincing Lane, Colonial Produce Merchant), was sitting alone in his dining-room at Westbourne Terrace after dinner.

The room was a long and lofty one, furnished in the stern uncompromising style of the Mahogany Age, now supplanted by the later fashions of decoration which, in their outset original and artistic, seem fairly on the way to become as meaningless and conventional.

Here were no skilfully contrasted shades of grey or green, no dado, no distemper on the walls; the woodwork was grained and varnished after the manner of the Philistines, the walls papered in dark crimson, with heavy curtains of the same colour, and the sideboard, dinner-waggon, and row of stiff chairs were all carved in the same massive and expensive style of ugliness. The pictures were those familiar presentments of dirty rabbits, fat white horses, bloated goddesses, and misshapen boors, by masters who, if younger than they assume to be, must have been quite old enough to know better.

Mr. Bultitude was a tall and portly person, of a somewhat pompous and overbearing demeanour; not much over fifty, but looking considerably older. He had a high shining head, from which the hair had mostly departed, what little still remained being of a grizzled auburn, prominent pale blue eyes with heavy eyelids and fierce, bushy whitey-brown eyebrows. His general expression suggested a conviction of his own extreme importance, but, in spite of this, his big underlip drooped rather weakly and his double chin slightly receded, giving a judge of character reason for suspecting that a certain obstinate positiveness observable in Mr. Bultitude's manner might possibly be due less to the possession of an unusually strong will than to the circumstance that, by some fortunate chance, that will had hitherto never met with serious opposition.

The room, with all its æsthetic shortcomings, was comfortable enough, and Mr. Bultitude's attitude – he was lying back in a well-wadded leather arm-chair, with a glass of claret at his elbow and his feet stretched out towards the ruddy blaze of the fire – seemed at first sight to imply that happy after-dinner condition of perfect satisfaction with oneself and things in general, which is the natural outcome of a good cook, a good conscience, and a good digestion.

At first sight; because his face did not confirm the impression – there was a latent uneasiness in it, an air of suppressed irritation, as if he expected and even dreaded to be disturbed at any moment, and yet was powerless to resent the intrusion as he would like to do.

At the slightest sound in the hall outside he would half rise in his chair and glance at the door with a mixture of alarm and resignation, and as often as the steps died away and the door remained closed, he would sink back and resettle himself with a shrug of evident relief.

Habitual novel readers on reading thus far will, I am afraid, prepare themselves for the arrival of a faithful cashier with news of irretrievable ruin, or a mysterious and cynical stranger threatening disclosures of a disgraceful nature.

But all such anticipations must at once be ruthlessly dispelled. Mr. Bultitude, although he was certainly a merchant, was a fairly successful one – in direct defiance of the laws of fiction, where any connection with commerce seems to lead naturally to failure in one of the three volumes.

He was an elderly gentleman, too, of irreproachable character and antecedents; no Damocles' sword of exposure was swinging over his bald but blameless head; he had no disasters to fear and no indiscretions to conceal. He had not been intended for melodrama, with which, indeed, he would not have considered it a respectable thing to be connected.

In fact, the secret of his uneasiness was so absurdly simple and commonplace that I am rather ashamed to have made even a temporary mystery of it.

His son Dick was about to return to school that evening, and Mr. Bultitude was expecting every moment to be called upon to go through a parting scene with him; that was really all that was troubling him.

This sounds very creditable to the tenderness of his feelings as a father – for there are some parents who bear such a bereavement at the close of the holidays with extraordinary fortitude, if they do not actually betray an unnatural satisfaction at the event.

But it was not exactly from softness of heart that he was restless and impatient, nor did he dread any severe strain upon his emotions. He was not much given to sentiment, and was the author of more than one of those pathetically indignant letters to the papers, in which the British parent denounces the expenses of education and the unconscionable length and frequency of vacations.

He was one of those nervous and fidgety persons who cannot understand their own children, looking on them as objectionable monsters whose next movements are uncertain – much as Frankenstein must have felt towards *his* monster.

He hated to have a boy about the house, and positively writhed under the irrelevant and irrepressible questions, the unnecessary noises and boisterous high spirits which nothing would subdue; his son's society was to him simply an abominable nuisance, and he pined for a release from it from the day the holidays began.

He had been a widower for nearly three years, and no doubt the loss of a mother's loving tact, which can check the heedless merriment before it becomes intolerable, and interpret and soften the most peevish and unreasonable of rebukes, had done much to make the relations between parent and children more strained than they might otherwise have been.

As it was, Dick's fear of his father was just great enough to prevent any cordiality between them, and not sufficient to make him careful to avoid offence, and it is not surprising if, when the time came for him to return to his house of bondage at Dr. Grimstone's, Crichton House, Market Rodwell, he left his father anything but inconsolable.

Just now, although Mr. Bultitude was so near the hour of his deliverance, he still had a bad quarter of an hour before him, in which the last farewells must be said, and he found it impossible under these circumstances to compose himself for a quiet half-hour's nap, or retire to the billiard-room for a cup of coffee and a mild cigar, as he would otherwise have done – since he was certain to be disturbed.

And there was another thing which harassed him, and that was a haunting dread lest at the last moment some unforeseen accident should prevent the boy's departure after all. He had some grounds for this, for only a week before, a sudden and unprecedented snowstorm had dashed his hopes, on the eve of their fulfilment, by forcing the Doctor to postpone the day on which his school was to re-assemble, and now Mr. Bultitude sat on brambles until he had seen the house definitely rid of his son's presence.

All this time, while the father was fretting and fuming in his arm-chair, the son, the unlucky cause of all this discomfort, had been standing on the mat outside the door, trying to screw up enough courage to go in as if nothing was the matter with him.

He was not looking particularly boisterous just then. On the contrary, his face was pale, and his eyelids rather redder than he would quite care for them to be seen by any of the "fellows" at Crichton House. All the life and spirit had gone out of him for the time; he had a troublesome dryness in his throat, and a general sensation of chill heaviness, which he himself would have described – expressively enough, if not with academical elegance – as "feeling beastly."

The stoutest hearted boy, returning to the most perfect of schools, cannot always escape something of this at that dark hour when the sands of the holidays have run out to their last golden

grain, when the boxes are standing corded and labelled in the hall, and some one is going to fetch the fatal cab.

Dick had just gone the round of the house, bidding dreary farewells to all the servants; an unpleasant ordeal which he would gladly have dispensed with, if possible, and which did not serve to raise his spirits.

Upstairs, in the bright nursery, he had found his old nurse sitting sewing by the high wire fender. She was a stern, hard-featured old lady, who had systematically slapped him through infancy into boyhood, and he had had some stormy passages with her during the past few weeks; but she softened now in the most unexpected manner as she said good-bye, and told him he was a "pleasant, good-hearted young gentleman, after all, though that aggravating and contrary sometimes." And then she predicted, with some of the rashness attaching to irresponsibility, that he would be "the best boy this next term as ever was, and work hard at all his lessons, and bring home a prize" – but all this unusual gentleness only made the interview more difficult to come out of with any credit for self-control.

Then downstairs, the cook had come up in her evening brown print and clean collar, from her warm spice-scented kitchen, to remark cheerily that "Lor bless his heart, what with all these telegrafts and things, time flew so fast nowadays that they'd be having him back again before they all knew where they were!" which had a certain spurious consolation about it, until one saw that, after all, it put the case entirely from her own standpoint.

After this Dick had parted from his elder sister Barbara and his young brother Roly, and had arrived where we found him first, at the mat outside the dining-room door, where he still lingered shivering in the cold foggy hall.

Somehow, he could not bring himself to take the next step at once; he knew pretty well what his father's feelings would be, and a parting is a very unpleasant ceremony to one who feels that the regret is all on his own side.

But it was no use putting it off any longer; he resolved at last to go in and get it over, and opened the door accordingly. How warm and comfortable the room looked – more comfortable than it had ever seemed to him before, even on the first day of the holidays!

And his father would be sitting there in a quarter of an hour's time, just as he was now, while he himself would be lumbering along to the station through the dismal raw fog!

How unspeakably delightful it must be, thought Dick enviously, to be grown up and never worried by the thoughts of school and lesson-books; to be able to look forward to returning to the same comfortable house, and living the same easy life, day after day, week after week, with no fear of a swiftly advancing Black Monday.

Gloomy moralists might have informed him that we cannot escape school by simply growing up, and that, even for those who contrive this and make a long holiday of their lives, there comes a time when the days are grudgingly counted to a blacker Monday than ever made a school-boy's heart quake within him.

But then Dick would never have believed them, and the moralists would only have wasted much excellent common sense upon him.

Paul Bultitude's face cleared as he saw his son come in. "There you are, eh?" he said, with evident satisfaction, as he turned in his chair, intending to cut the scene as short as possible. "So you're off at last? Well, holidays can't last for ever – by a merciful decree of Providence, they don't last quite for ever! There, good-bye, good-bye, be a good boy this term, no more scrapes, mind. And now you'd better run away, and put on your coat – you're keeping the cab waiting all this time."

"No, I'm not," said Dick, "Boaler hasn't gone to fetch one yet."

"Not gone to fetch a cab yet!" cried Paul, with evident alarm, "why, God bless my soul, what's the man thinking about? You'll lose your train! I know you'll lose the train, and there will be another day lost, after the extra week gone already through that snow! I must see to this myself. Ring the bell, tell Boaler to start this instant – I insist on his fetching a cab this instant!"

"Well, it's not my fault, you know," grumbled Dick, not considering so much anxiety at all flattering, "but Boaler has gone now. I just heard the gate shut."

"Ah!" said his father, with more composure, "and now," he suggested, "you'd better shake hands, and then go up and say good-bye to your sister – you've no time to spare."

"I've said good-bye to them," said Dick. "Mayn't I stay here till – till Boaler comes?"

This request was due, less to filial affection than a faint desire for dessert, which even his feelings could not altogether stifle. Mr. Bultitude granted it with a very bad grace.

"I suppose you can if you want to," he said impatiently, "only do one thing or the other – stay outside, or shut the door and come in and sit down quietly. I cannot sit in a thorough draught!"

Dick obeyed, and applied himself to the dessert with rather an injured expression.

His father felt a greater sense of constraint and worry than ever; the interview, as he had feared, seemed likely to last some time, and he felt that he ought to improve the occasion in some way, or, at all events, make some observation. But, for all that, he had not the remotest idea what to say to this red-haired, solemn boy, who sat staring gloomily at him in the intervals of filling his mouth. The situation grew more embarrassing every moment.

At last, as he felt himself likely to have more to say in reproof than on any other subject, he began with that.

"There's one thing I want to talk to you about before you go," he began, "and that's this. I had a most unsatisfactory report of you this last term; don't let me have that again. Dr. Grimstone tells me – ah, I have his letter here – yes, he says (and just attend, instead of making yourself ill with preserved ginger) – he says, 'Your son has great natural capacity, and excellent abilities; but I regret to say that, instead of applying himself as he might do, he misuses his advantages, and succeeds in setting a mischievous example to – if not actually misleading – his companions.' That's a pleasant account for a father to read! Here am I, sending you to an expensive school, furnishing you with great natural capacity and excellent abilities, and – and – every other school requisite, and all you do is to misuse them! It's disgraceful! And misleading your companions, too! Why, at your age, they ought to mislead *you*– No, I don't mean that – but what I may tell you is that I've written a very strong letter to Dr. Grimstone, saying what pain it gave me to hear you misbehaved yourself, and telling him, if he ever caught you setting an example of any sort, mind that, *any* sort, in the future – he was to, ah, to remember some of Solomon's very sensible remarks on the subject. So I should strongly advise you to take care what you're about in future, for your own sake!"

This was not a very encouraging address, perhaps, but it did not seem to distress Dick to any extent; he had heard very much the same sort of thing several times before, and had been fully prepared for it then.

He had been seeking distraction in almonds and raisins, but now they only choked instead of consoling him, and he gave them up and sat brooding silently over his hard lot instead, with a dull, blank dejection which those only who have gone through the same thing in their boyhood will understand. To others, whose school life has been one unchequered course of excitement and success, it will be incomprehensible enough – and so much the better for them.

He sat listening to the grim sphinx clock on the black marble chimneypiece, as it remorselessly ticked away his last few moments of home-life, and he ingeniously set himself to crown his sorrow by reviving recollections of happier days.

In one of the corners of the overmantel there was still a sprig of withered laurel left forgotten, and his eye fell on it now with grim satisfaction. He made his thoughts travel back to that delightful afternoon on Christmas Eve, when they had all come home riotous through the brilliant streets, laden with purchases from the Baker Street Bazaar, and then had decorated the rooms with such free and careless gaiety.

And the Christmas dinner too! He had sat just where he was sitting now, with, ah, such a difference in every other respect – the time had not come then when the thought of "only so many more weeks and days left" had begun to intrude its grisly shape, like the skull at an ancient feast.

And yet he could distinctly recollect now, and with bitter remorse, that he had not enjoyed himself then as much as he ought to have done; he even remembered an impious opinion of his that the proceedings were "slow." Slow! with plenty to eat, and three (four, if he had only known it) more weeks of holiday before him; with Boxing Day and the brisk exhilarating drive to the Crystal Palace immediately following, with all the rest of a season of licence and varied joys to come, which he could hardly trust himself to look back upon now! He must have been mad to think such a thing.

Overhead his sister Barbara was playing softly one of the airs from "The Pirates" (it was Frederic's appeal to the Major-General's daughters), and the music, freed from the serio-comic situation which it illustrates, had a tenderness and pathos of its own which went to Dick's heart and intensified his melancholy.

He had gone (in secret, for Mr. Bultitude disapproved of such dissipations) to hear the Opera in the holidays, and now the piano conjured the whole scene up for him again – there would be no more theatre-going for him for a very long time!

By this time Mr. Bultitude began to feel the silence becoming once more oppressive, and roused himself with a yawn. "Heigho!" he said, "Boaler's an uncommonly long time fetching that cab!"

Dick felt more injured than ever, and showed it by drawing what he intended for a moving sigh. Unfortunately it was misunderstood.

"I do wish, sir," said his parent testily, "you would try to break yourself of that habit of breathing hard. The society of a grampus (for it's no less) delights no one and offends many – including me – and for Heaven's sake, Dick, don't kick the leg of the table in that way; you know it simply maddens me. What do you do it for? Why can't you learn to sit at table like a gentleman?"

Dick mumbled some apology, and then, having found his tongue and remembered his necessities, said, with a nervous catch in his voice, "Oh, I say, father, will you – can you let me have some pocket-money, please, to go back with?"

Mr. Bultitude looked as if his son had petitioned for a latch-key.

"Pocket-money!" he repeated, "why, you can't want money. Didn't your grandmother give you a sovereign as a Christmas-box? And I gave you ten shillings myself!"

"I do want it, though," said Dick; "that's all spent. And you know you always *have* given me money to take back."

"If I do give you some, you'll only go and spend it," grumbled Mr. Bultitude, as if he considered money an object of art.

"I shan't spend it all at once, and I shall want some to put in the plate on Sundays. We always have to put in the plate when it's a collection. And there's the cab to pay."

"Boaler has orders to pay your cab – as you know well enough," said his father, "but I suppose you must have some, though you cost me enough, Heaven knows, without this additional expense."

And at this he brought up a fistful of loose silver and gold from one of his trouser-pockets, and spread it deliberately out on the table in front of him in shining rows.

Dick's eyes sparkled at the sight of so much wealth; for a moment or two he almost forgot the pangs of approaching exile in the thought of the dignity and credit which a single one of those bright new sovereigns would procure for him.

It would ensure him surreptitious luxuries and open friendships as long as it lasted. Even Tipping, the head boy of the school, who had gone into tails, brought back no more, and besides, the money would bring him handsomely out of certain pecuniary difficulties to which an unexpected act of parental authority had exposed him; he could easily dispose of all claims with such a sum at command, and then his father could so easily spare it out of so much!

Meanwhile Mr. Bultitude, with great care and precision, selected from the coins before him a florin, two shillings, and two sixpences, which he pushed across to his son, who looked at them with a disappointment he did not care to conceal.

"An uncommonly liberal allowance for a young fellow like you," he observed. "Don't buy any foolishness with it, and if, towards the end of the term you want a little more, and write an intelligible letter asking for it, and I think proper to let you have it – why, you'll get it, you know."

Dick had not the courage to ask for more, much as he longed to do so, so he put the money in his purse with very qualified expressions of gratitude.

In his purse he seemed to find something which had escaped his memory, for he took out a small parcel and unfolded it with some hesitation.

"I nearly forgot," he said, speaking with more animation than he had yet done, "I didn't like to take it without asking you, but is this any use? May I have it?"

"Eh?" said Mr. Bultitude, sharply, "what's that? Something else – what is it you want now?"

"It's only that stone Uncle Duke brought mamma from India; the thing, he said, they called a 'Pagoda stone,' or something, out there."

"Pagoda stone? The boy means Garudâ Stone. I should like to know how you got hold of that; you've been meddling in my drawers, now, a thing I will not put up with, as I've told you over and over again."

"No, I haven't, then," said Dick, "I found it in a tray in the drawing-room, and Barbara said, perhaps, if I asked you, you might let me have it, as she didn't think it was any use to you."

"Then Barbara had no right to say anything of the sort."

"But may I have it? I may, mayn't I?" persisted Dick.

"Have it? certainly not. What could you possibly want with a thing like that? It's ridiculous. Give it to me."

Dick handed it over reluctantly enough. It was not much to look at, quite an insignificant-looking little square tablet of greyish green stone, pierced at one angle, and having on two of its faces faint traces of mysterious letters or symbols, which time had made very difficult to distinguish.

It looked harmless enough as Mr. Bultitude took it in his hand; there was no kindly hand to hold him back, no warning voice to hint that there might possibly be sleeping within that small marble block the pent-up energy of long-forgotten Eastern necromancy, just as ready as ever to awake into action at the first words which had power to evoke it.

There was no one; but even if there had been such a person, Paul Bultitude was a sober prosaic individual, who would probably have treated the warning as a piece of ridiculous superstition.

As it was, no man could have put himself in a position of extreme peril with a more perfect unconsciousness of his danger.

## 2. *A Grand Transformation Scene*

"Magnaque numinibus vota exaudita malignis."

Paul Bultitude put on his glasses to examine the stone more carefully, for it was some time since he had last seen or thought about it. Then he looked up and said once more, "What use would a thing like this be to you?"

Dick would have considered it a very valuable prize indeed; he could have exhibited it to admiring friends – during lessons, of course, when it would prove a most agreeable distraction; he could have played with and fingered it incessantly, invented astonishing legends of its powers and virtues; and, at last, when he had grown tired of it, have bartered it for any more desirable article that might take his fancy. All these advantages were present to his mind in a vague shifting form, but he could not find either courage or words to explain them.

Consequently he only said awkwardly, "Oh, I don't know, I should like it."

"Well, any way," said Paul, "you certainly won't have it. It's worth keeping, whatever it is, as the only thing your uncle Marmaduke was ever known to give to anybody."

Marmaduke Paradine, his brother-in-law, was not a connection of whom he had much reason to feel particularly proud. One of those persons endowed with what are known as "insinuating manners and address," he had, after some futile attempts to enter the army, been sent out to Bombay as agent for a Manchester firm, and in that capacity had contrived to be mixed up in some more than shady transactions with rival exporters and native dealers up the country, which led to an unceremonious dismissal by his employers.

He had brought home the stone from India as a propitiatory token of remembrance, more portable and less expensive than the lacquered cabinets, brasses, stuffs and carved work which are expected from friends at such a distance, and he had been received with pardon and started once more, until certain other proceedings of his, shadier still, had obliged Paul to forbid him the house at Westbourne Terrace.

Since then little had been heard of him, and the reports which reached Mr. Bultitude of his disreputable relative's connection with the promotion of a series of companies of the kind affected by the widow and curate, and exposed in money articles and law courts, gave him no desire to renew his acquaintance.

"Isn't it a talisman, though?" said Dick, rather unfortunately for any hopes he might have of persuading his father to entrust him with the coveted treasure.

"I'm sure I can't tell you," yawned Paul, "how do you mean?"

"I don't know, only Uncle Duke once said something about it. Barbara heard him tell mamma. I say, perhaps it's like the one in Scott, and cures people of things, though I don't think it's that sort of talisman either, because I tried it once on my chilblains, and it wasn't a bit of good. If you would only let me have it, perhaps I might find out, you know."

"You might," said his father drily, apparently not much influenced by this inducement, "but you won't have the chance. If it has a secret, I will find it out for myself" (he little knew how literally he was to be taken at his word), "and, by the way, there's your cab – at last."

There was a sound of wheels outside, and, as Dick heard them, he grew desperate in his extremity; a wish he had long secretly cherished unspoken, without ever hoping for courage to give it words, rose to his lips now; he got up and moved timidly towards his father.

"Father," he said, "there's something I want to say to you so much before I go. Do let me ask you now."

"Well, what is it?" said Paul. "Make haste, you haven't much time."

"It's this. I want you to – to let me leave Grimstone's at the end of the term."

Paul stared at him, angry and incredulous, "Let you leave Dr. Grimstone's (oblige me by giving him his full title when you speak of him)," he said slowly. "Why, what do you mean? It's an excellent school – never saw a better expressed prospectus in my life. And my old friend Bangle, Sir Benjamin Bangle, who's a member of the School Board, and ought to know something about schools, strongly recommended it – would have sent his own son there, if he hadn't entered him at Eton. And when I pay for most of the extras for you too. Dancing, by Gad, and meat for breakfast. I'm sure I don't know what you would have."

"I'd like to go to Marlborough, or Harrow, or somewhere," whimpered Dick. "Jolland's going to Harrow at Easter. (Jolland's one of the fellows at Grimstone's – Dr. Grimstone's I mean.) And what does old Bangle know about it? He hasn't got to go there himself! And – and Grimstone's jolly enough to fellows he likes, but he doesn't like *me* – he's always sitting on me for something – and I hate some of the fellows there, and altogether it's beastly. Do let me leave! If you don't want me to go to a public school, I – I could stop at home and have a private tutor – like Joe Twitterley!"

"It's all ridiculous nonsense, I tell you," said Paul angrily, "ridiculous nonsense! And, once for all, I'll put a stop to it. I don't approve of public schools for boys like you, and, what's more, I can't afford it. As for private tutors, that's absurd! So you will just make up your mind to stay at Crichton House as long as I think proper to keep you there, and there's an end of that!"

At this final blow to all his hopes, Dick began to sob in a subdued hopeless kind of way, which was more than his father could bear. To do Paul justice, he had not meant to be quite so harsh when the boy was about to set out for school, and, a little ashamed of his irritation, he sought to justify his decision.

He chose to do this by delivering a short homily on the advantages of school, by which he might lead Dick to look on the matter in the calm light of reason and common sense, and commonplaces on the subject began to rise to the surface of his mind, from the rather muddy depths to which they had long since sunk.

He began to give Dick the benefit of all this stagnant wisdom, with a feeling of surprise as he went on, at his own powerful and original way of putting things.

"Now, you know, it's no use to cry like that," he began. "It's – ah – the usual thing for boys at school, I'm quite aware, to go about fancying they're very ill-used, and miserable, and all the rest of it, just as if people in my position had their sons educated out of spite! It's one of those petty troubles all boys have to go through. And you mark my words, my boy, when they go out into the world and have real trials to put up with, and grow middle-aged men, like me, why, they see what fools they've been, Dick; they see what fools they've been. All the – hum, the innocent games and delights of boyhood, and that sort of thing, you know – come back to them – and then they look back to those hours passed at school as the happiest, aye, the very happiest time of their life!"

"Well," said Dick, "then I hope it won't be the happiest time in mine, that's all! And you may have been happy at the school you went to, perhaps, but I don't believe you would very much care about being a boy again like me, and going back to Grimstone's, you know you wouldn't!"

This put Paul on his mettle; he had warmed well to his subject, and could not let this open challenge pass unnoticed – it gave him such an opening for a cheap and easy effect.

He still had the stone in his hand as he sank back into his chair, smiling with a tolerant superiority.

"Perhaps you will believe me," he said, impressively, "when I tell you, old as I am and much as you envy me, I only wish, at this very moment, I could be a boy again, like you. Going back to school wouldn't make me unhappy, I can tell you."

It is so fatally easy to say more than we mean in the desire to make as strong an impression as possible. Well for most of us that – more fortunate than Mr. Bultitude – we can generally do so without fear of being taken too strictly at our word.

As he spoke these unlucky words, he felt a slight shiver, followed by a curious shrinking sensation all over him. It was odd, too, but the arm-chair in which he sat seemed to have grown so much bigger all at once. He felt a passing surprise, but concluded it must be fancy, and went on as comfortably as before.

"I should like it, my boy, but what's the good of wishing? I only mention it to prove that I was not speaking at random. I'm an old man and you're a young boy, and, that being so, why, of course – What the dooce are you giggling about?"

For Dick, after some seconds of half-frightened open-mouthed staring, had suddenly burst into a violent fit of almost hysterical giggling, which he seemed trying vainly to suppress.

This naturally annoyed Mr. Bultitude, and he went on with immense dignity, "I – ah – I'm not aware that I've been saying anything particularly ridiculous. You seem to be amused?"

"Don't!" gasped Dick. "It, it isn't anything you're saying – it's, it's – oh, can't you feel any difference?"

"The sooner you go back to school the better!" said Paul angrily. "I wash my hands of you. When I do take the trouble to give you any advice, it's received with ridicule. You always were an ill-mannered little cub. I've had quite enough of this. Leave the room, sir!"

The wheels must have belonged to some other cab, for none had stopped at the pavement as yet; but Mr. Bultitude was justly indignant, and could stand the interview no longer. Dick, however, made no attempt to move; he remained there, choking and shaking with laughter, while his father sat stiffly on his chair, trying to ignore his son's unmannerly conduct, but only partially succeeding.

No one can calmly endure watching other people laughing at him like idiots, while he is left perfectly incapable of guessing what he has said or done to amuse them. Even when this is known, it requires a peculiarly keen sense of humour to see the point of a joke against oneself.

At last his patience gave out, and he said coldly, "Now, perhaps, if you are quite yourself again, you will be good enough to let me know what the joke is?"

Dick, looking flushed and half-ashamed, tried again and again to speak, but each time the attempt was too much for him. After a time he did succeed, but his voice was hoarse and shaken with laughter as he spoke. "Haven't you found it out yet? Go and look at yourself in the glass – it will make you roar!"

There was the usual narrow sheet of plate glass at the back of the sideboard, and to this Mr. Bultitude walked, almost under protest, and with a cold dignity. It occurred to him that he might have a smudge on his face or something wrong with his collar and tie – something to account to some extent for his son's frivolous and insulting behaviour. No suspicion of the terrible truth crossed his mind as yet.

Meanwhile Dick was looking on eagerly with a chuckle of anticipation, as one who watches the dawning appreciation of an excellent joke.

But no sooner had Paul met the reflection in the glass than he started back in incredulous horror – then returned and stared again and again.

Surely, surely, this could not be he!

He had expected to see his own familiar portly bow-windowed presence there – but somehow, look as he would, the mirror insisted upon reflecting the figure of his son Dick. Could he possibly have become invisible and have lost the power of casting a reflection – or how was it that Dick, and only Dick, was to be seen there?

How was it, too, when he looked round, there was the boy still sitting there? It could not be Dick, evidently, that he saw in the glass. Besides, the reflection opposite him moved when he moved, returned when he returned, copied his every gesture!

He turned round upon his son with angry and yet hopeful suspicion. "You, you've been playing some of your infernal tricks with this mirror, sir," he cried fiercely. "What have you done to it?"

"Done! how could I do anything to it? As if you didn't know that!"

"Then," stammered Paul, determined to know the worst, "then do you, do you mean to tell me you can see any – alteration in me? Tell me the truth now!"

"I should just think I could!" said Dick emphatically. "It's very queer, but just look here," and he came up to the sideboard and placed himself by the side of his horrified father. "Why," he said, with another giggle, "we're – he-he – as like as two peas!"

They were indeed; the glass reflected now two small boys, each with chubby cheeks and auburn hair, both dressed, too, exactly alike, in Eton jackets and broad white collars; the only difference to be seen between them was that, while one face wore an expression of intense glee and satisfaction, the other – the one which Mr. Bultitude was beginning to fear must belong to him – was lengthened and drawn with dismay and bewilderment.

"Dick," said Paul faintly, "what is all this? Who has been, been taking these liberties with me?"

"I'm sure I don't know," protested Dick. "It wasn't me. I believe you did it all yourself."

"Did it all myself!" repeated Paul indignantly. "Is it likely I should? It's some trickery, I tell you, some villainous plot. The worst of it is," he added plaintively, "I don't understand who I'm supposed to be now. Dick, who am I?"

"You can't be me," said Dick, "because here I am, you know. And you're not yourself, that's very plain. You must be *somebody*, I suppose," he added dubiously.

"Of course I am. What do you mean?" said Paul angrily. "Never mind who I am. I feel just the same as I always did. Tell me when you first began to notice any change. Could you see it coming on at all, eh?"

"It was all at once, just as you were talking about school and all that. You said you only wished – Why of course; look here, it must be the stone that did it!"

"Stone! what stone?" said Paul. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Yes, you do – the Garudâ Stone! You've got it in your hand still. Don't you see? It's a real talisman after all! How jolly!"

"I didn't do anything to set it off; and besides, oh, it's perfectly absurd! How can there be such things as talismans nowadays, eh? Tell me that."

"Well, something's happened to you, hasn't it? And it must have been done somehow," argued Dick.

"I was holding the confounded thing, certainly," said Paul, "here it is. But what could I have said to start it? What has it done this to me for?"

"I know!" cried Dick. "Don't you remember? You said you wished you were a boy again, like me. So you are, you see, exactly like me! What a lark it is, isn't it? But, I say, you can't go up to business like that, you know, can you? I tell you what, you'd better come to Grimstone's with me now, and see how you like it. I shouldn't mind so much if you came too. Grimstone's face would be splendid when he saw two of us. Do come!"

"That's ridiculous nonsense you're talking," said Paul, "and you know it. What should I do at school at my age? I tell you I'm the same as ever inside, though I may have shrunk into a little rascally boy to look at. And it's simply an abominable nuisance, Dick, that's what it is! Why on earth couldn't you let the stone alone? Just see what mischief you've done by meddling now – put me to all this inconvenience!"

"You shouldn't have wished," said Dick.

"Wished!" echoed Mr. Bultitude. "Why, to be sure," he said, with a gleam of returning hopefulness, "of course – I never thought of that. The thing's a wishing stone; it must be! You have to hold it, I suppose, and then say what you wish aloud, and there you are. If that's the case, I can soon put it all right by simply wishing myself back again. I – I shall have a good laugh at all this by and by – I know I shall!"

He took the stone, and got into a corner by himself where he began repeating the words, "I wish I was back again," "I wish I was the man I was five minutes ago," "I wish all this had not happened,"

and so on, until he was very exhausted and red in the face. He tried with the stone held in his left hand, as well as his right, sitting and standing, under all the various conditions he could think of, but absolutely nothing came of it; he was just as exasperatingly boyish and youthful as ever at the end of it.

"I don't like this," he said at last, giving it up with a rather crestfallen air. "It seems to me that this diabolical invention has got out of order somehow; I can't make it work any more!"

"Perhaps," suggested Dick, who had shown throughout the most unsympathetic cheerfulness, "perhaps it's one of those talismans that only give you one wish, and you've had it, you know?"

"Then it's all over!" groaned Paul. "What the dooce am I to do? What shall I do? Suggest something, for Heaven's sake; don't stand cackling there in that unfeeling manner. Can't you see what a terrible mess I've got into? Suppose – only suppose your sister or one of the servants were to come in, and see me like this!"

This suggestion simply enchanted Dick. "Let's have 'em all up," he laughed; "it would be such fun! How they will laugh when we tell them!" And he rushed to the bell.

"Touch that bell if you dare!" screamed Paul. "I won't be seen in this condition by anybody! What on earth could have induced that scoundrelly uncle of yours to bring such a horrible thing as this over I can't imagine! I never heard of such a situation as this in my life. I can't stay like this, you know – it's not to be thought of! I – I wonder whether it would be any use to send over to Dr. Bustard and ask him to step in; he might give me something to bring me round. But then the whole neighbourhood would hear about it! If I don't see my way out of this soon, I shall go raving mad!"

And he paced restlessly up and down the room with his brain on fire.

All at once, as he became able to think more coherently, there occurred to him a chance, slender and desperate enough, but still a chance, of escaping even yet the consequences of his folly.

He was forced to conclude that, however improbable and fantastic it might appear in this rationalistic age, there must be some hidden power in this Garudâ Stone which had put him in his present very unpleasant position. It was plain too that the virtues of the talisman refused to exert themselves any more at his bidding.

But it did not follow that in another's hands the spell would remain as powerless. At all events, it was an experiment well worth the trial, and he lost no time in explaining the notion to Dick, who, by the sparkle in his eyes and suppressed excitement in his manner, seemed to think there might be something in it.

"I may as well try," he said, "give it to me."

"Take it, my dear boy," said Paul, with a paternal air that sorely tried Dick's recovered gravity, it contrasted so absurdly with his altered appearance. "Take it, and wish your poor old father himself again!"

Dick took it, and held it thoughtfully for some moments, while Paul waited in nervous impatience. "Isn't it any use?" he said dolefully at last, as nothing happened.

"I don't know," said Dick calmly, "I haven't wished yet."

"Then do so at once," said Paul fustily, "do so at once. There's no time to waste, every moment is of importance – your cab will be here directly. Although, although I'm altered in this ridiculous way, I hope I still retain my authority as a father, and as a father, by Gad, I expect you to obey me, sir!"

"Oh, all right," said Dick indifferently, "you may keep the authority if you like."

"Then do what I tell you. Can't you see how urgent it is that a scandal like this shouldn't get about? I should be the laughing-stock of the city. Not a soul must ever guess that such a thing has happened. You must see that yourself."

"Yes," said Dick, who all this time was sitting on a corner of the table, swinging his legs, "I see that. It will be all right. I'm going to wish in a minute, and no one will guess there has been anything the matter."

"That's a good boy!" said Paul, much relieved, "I know your heart is in the right place – only do make haste."

"I suppose," Dick asked, "when you are yourself again, things would go on just as usual?"

"I – I hope so."

"I mean you will go on sitting here, and I shall go off to Grimstone's?"

"Of course, of course," said Paul; "don't ask so many questions. I'm sure you quite understand what has to be done, so get on. We might be found like this any minute."

"That settles it," said Dick, "any fellow would do it after that."

"Yes, yes, but you're so slow about it!"

"Don't be in a hurry," said Dick, "you mayn't like it after all when I've done it."

"Done what?" asked Mr. Bultitude sharply, struck by something sinister and peculiar in the boy's manner.

"Well, I don't mind telling you," said Dick, "it's fairer. You see, you wished to be a boy just like me, didn't you?"

"I didn't mean it," protested Paul.

"Ah, you couldn't expect a stone to know that; at any rate, it made you into a boy like me directly. Now, if I wish myself a man just like you were ten minutes ago, before you took the stone, that will put things all right again, won't it?"

"Is the boy mad?" cried Paul, horrified at this proposal. "Why, why, that would be worse than ever!"

"I don't see that," objected Dick, stubbornly. "No one would know anything about it then."

"But, you little blockhead, can't I make you understand? It wouldn't do at all. We should both of us be wrong then – each with the other's personal appearance."

"Well," said Dick blandly, "I shouldn't mind that."

"But I should – I mind very much. I object strongly to such a – such a preposterous arrangement. And what's more, I won't have it. Do you hear, I forbid you to think of any such thing. Give me back that stone. I can't trust you with it after this."

"I can't help it," said Dick doggedly. "You've had your wish, and I don't see why I shouldn't have mine. I mean to have it, too."

"Why, you unnatural little rascal!" cried the justly-enraged father, "do you mean to defy me? I tell you I will have that stone! Give it up this instant!" and he made a movement towards his son, as if he meant to recover the talisman by main force.

But Dick was too quick for him. Slipping off the table with great agility, he planted himself firmly on the hearth-rug, with the hand that held the stone clenched behind his back, and the other raised in self-defence.

"I'd much rather you wouldn't make me hit you, you know," he said, "because, in spite of what's happened, you're still my father, I suppose. But if you interfere with me before I've done with this stone, I'm afraid I shall have to punch your head."

Mr. Bultitude retreated a few steps apprehensively, feeling himself no match for his son, except in size and general appearance; and for some moments of really frightful intensity they stood panting on the hearth-rug, each cautiously watching the other, on his guard against stratagem and surprise.

It was one of those painful domestic scenes which are fortunately rare between father and son.

Overhead, the latest rollicking French polka was being rattled out, with a savage irony of which pianos, even by the best makers, can at times be capable.

Suddenly Dick drew himself up. "Stand out of my way!" he cried excitedly, "I am going to do it. I wish I was a man like you were just now!"

And as he spoke, Mr. Bultitude had the bitterness of seeing his unscrupulous son swell out like the frog in the fable, till he stood there before him the exact duplicate of what Paul had so lately been!

The transformed Dick began to skip and dance round the room in high glee, with as much agility as his increased bulk would allow. "It's all right, you see," he said. "The old stone's as good as ever. You can't say anyone would ever know, to look at us."

And then he threw himself panting into a chair, and began to laugh excitedly at the success of his unprincipled manœuvres.

As for Paul, he was perfectly furious at having been so outwitted and overreached. It was a long time before he could command his voice sufficiently to say, savagely: "Well, you've had your way, and a pretty mess you've made of it. We're both of us in false positions now. I hope you're satisfied, I'm sure. Do you think you'll care about going back to Crichton House in that state?"

"No," said Dick, very decidedly: "I'm quite sure I shouldn't."

"Well, I can't help it. You've brought it on yourself; and, provided the Doctor sees no objection to take you back as you are and receive you as one of his pupils, I shall most certainly send you there."

Paul did not really mean this, he only meant to frighten him; for he still trusted that, by letting Boaler into the secret, the charm might be set in motion once more, and the difficulty comfortably overcome. But his threat had a most unfortunate effect upon Dick; it hardened him to take a course he might otherwise have shrunk from.

"Oh," he said, "you're going to do that? But doesn't it strike you that things are rather altered with us now?"

"They are, to a certain extent, of course," said Paul, "through my folly and your wicked cunning; but a word or two of explanation from me –"

"You'll find it will take more explanation than you think," said Dick; "but, of course, you can try, if you think it worth while – when you get to Grimstone's."

"When I, – I don't understand. When I, – what did you say?" gasped Paul.

"Why, you see," exclaimed Dick, "it would never have done for us both to go back; the chaps would have humbugged us so, and as I hate the place and you seem so fond of being a boy and going back to school and that, I thought perhaps it would be best for you to go and see how you liked it!"

"I never will! I'll not stir from this room! I dare you to try to move me!" cried Paul. And just then there was the sound of wheels outside once more. They stopped before the house, the bell rang sharply – the long-expected cab had come at last.

"You've no time to lose," said Dick, "get your coat on."

Mr. Bultitude tried to treat the affair as a joke. He laughed a ghastly little laugh.

"Ha! ha! you've fairly caught your poor father this time; you've proved him in the wrong. I admit I said more than I exactly meant. But that's enough. Don't drive a good joke too far; shake hands, and let us see if we can't find a way out of this!"

But Dick only warmed his coat tails at the fire as he said, with a very ungenerous reminiscence of his father's manner: "You are going back to an excellent establishment, where you will enjoy all the comforts of home – I can specially recommend the stickjaw; look out for it on Tuesdays and Fridays. You will once more take part in the games and lessons of happy boyhood. (Did you ever play 'chevy' when you were a boy before? You'll enjoy chevy.) And you will find your companions easy enough to get on with, if you don't go giving yourself airs; they won't stand airs. Now good-bye, my boy, and bless you!"

Paul stood staring stupidly at this outrageous assumption; he could scarcely believe yet that it was meant in cruel earnest. Before he could answer, the door opened and Boaler appeared.

"Had a deal of trouble to find a keb, sir, on a night like this," he said to the false Dick, "but the luggage is all on top, and the man says there's plenty of time still."

"Good-bye then, my boy," said Dick, with well-assumed tenderness, but a rather dangerous light in his eye. "My compliments to the Doctor, remember."

Paul turned indignantly from him to the butler; he, at least, would stand by him. Boaler would not see a master who had always been fair, if not indulgent, to him driven from his home in this cold-blooded manner!

He made two or three attempts to speak, for his brain whirled so with scathing, burning things to say. He would expose the fraud then and there, and defy the impudent usurper; he would warn every

one against this spurious pinchbeck imitation of himself. The whole household should be summoned and called upon to judge between the two!

No doubt, if he had had enough self-command to do all this effectually, while Dick had as yet not had the time thoroughly to adapt himself to his altered circumstances, he might have turned the situation at the outset, and spared himself some very painful experiences.

But it is very often precisely those words which are the most vitally important to be said that refuse to pass our lips on a sudden emergency. We feel all the necessity of saying something at once, but the necessary words unaccountably desert us at the critical moment.

Mr. Bultitude felt himself in this unfortunate position. He made more wild efforts to explain, but the sense of his danger only petrified his mind instead of stimulating it. Then he was spared further conflict. A dark mist rose before his eyes; the walls of the room receded into infinite space; and, with a loud singing in his ears, he fell, and seemed to himself to be sinking down, down, through the earth to the very crust of the antipodes. Then the blackness closed over him – and he knew no more.

### 3. *In the Toils*

"I beseech you let his lack of years be no impediment to let him lack a reverend estimation, for I never knew so young a body with so old a head."

– *Merchant of Venice, Act iv.*

When Mr. Bultitude recovered his senses, which was not for a considerable time, he found that he was being jolted along through a broad well-lit thoroughfare, in a musty four-wheeler.

His head was by no means clear yet, and for some minutes he could hardly be said to think at all; he merely lay back dreamily listening to the hard grinding jar of the cab windows vibrating in their grooves.

His first distinct sensation was a vague wonder what Barbara might be intending to give him for dinner, for, oddly enough, he felt far from hungry, and was conscious that his palate would require the adroitest witching.

With the thought of dinner his dining-room was almost inseparably associated, and then, with an instant rush of recollection, the whole scene there with the Garudâ Stone surged into his brain. He shuddered as he did so; it had all been so real, so hideously vivid and coherent throughout. But all unpleasant impressions soon yielded to the delicious luxury of his present security.

As his last conscious moment had been passed in his own dining-room, the fact that he opened his eyes in a cab, instead of confirming his worst fears, actually helped to restore the unfortunate gentleman's serenity; for he frequently drove home from the city in this manner, and believed himself now, instead of being, as was actually the case, in that marvellous region of cheap photography, rocking-horses, mild stone lions, and wheels and ladders – the Euston Road – to be bowling along Holborn.

Now that he was thoroughly awake he found positive amusement in going over each successive incident of his nightmare experience with the talisman, and smiling at the tricks his imagination had played him.

"I wonder now how the dickens I came to dream such outrageous nonsense!" he said to himself, for even his dreams were, as a rule, within the bounds of probability. But he was not long in tracing it to the devilled kidneys he had had at the club for lunch, and some curious old brown sherry Robinson had given him afterwards at his office.

"Gad, what a shock the thing has given me!" he thought. "I can hardly shake off the feeling even now."

As a rule, after waking up on the verge of a fearful crisis, the effect of the horror fades swiftly away, as one detail after another evades a memory which is never too anxious to retain them, and each moment brings a deeper sense of relief and self-congratulation.

But in Paul's case, curiously enough, as he could not help thinking, the more completely roused he became, the greater grew his uneasiness.

Perhaps the first indication of the truth was suggested to him by a lurking suspicion – which he tried to dismiss as mere fancy – that he filled rather less of the cab than he had always been accustomed to do.

To reassure himself he set his thoughts to review all the proceedings of that day, feeling that if he could satisfactorily account for the time up to his taking the cab, that would be conclusive as to the unreality of any thing that appeared to have happened later in his own house. He got on well enough till he came to the hour at which he had left the office, and then, search his memory as he would, he could not remember hailing any cab!

Could it be another delusion, too, or was it the fact that he had found himself much pressed for time and had come home by the Underground to Praed Street? It must have been the day before,

but that was Sunday. Saturday, then? But the recollection seemed too recent and fresh; and besides, on Saturday, he had left at two, and had taken Barbara to see Messrs. Maskelyne and Cooke's performance.

Slowly, insidiously, but with irresistible force, the conviction crept upon him that he had dined, and dined well.

"If I have dined already," he told himself, "I can't be going home to dinner; and if I am not going home to dinner, what – what am I doing in this cab?"

The bare idea that something might be wrong with him after all made him impatient to put an end to all suspense. He must knock this scotched nightmare once for all on the head by a deliberate appeal to his senses.

The cab had passed the lighted shops now, and was driving between squares and private houses, so that Mr. Bultitude had to wait until the sickly rays of a street lamp glanced into the cab for a moment, and, as they did so, he put his feet up on the opposite seat and examined his boots and trousers with breathless eagerness.

It was not to be denied; they were not his ordinary boots, nor did he ever wear such trousers as he saw above them! Always a careful and punctiliously neat person, he was more than commonly exacting concerning the make and polish of his boots and the set of his trousers.

These boots were clumsy, square-toed, and thick-soled; one was even patched on the side. The trousers were heavy and rough, of the kind advertised as "wear-resisting fabrics, suitable for youths at school," frayed at the ends, and shiny – shamefully shiny – about the knees!

In hot despair he rapidly passed his hands over his body. It felt unusually small and slim, Mr. Bultitude being endowed with what is euphemistically termed a "presence," and it was with an agony rarely felt at such a discovery that he realised that, for the first time for more than twenty years, he actually had a waist.

Then, as a last resource, he took off his hat and felt for the broad, smooth, egg-like surface, garnished by scanty side patches of thin hair, which he knew he ought to find.

It was gone – hidden under a crop of thick close curling locks!

This last disappointment completely overcame him; he had a kind of short fit in the cab as the bitter truth was brought home to him unmistakably.

Yes, this was no dream of a distempered digestion, but sober reality. The whole of that horrible scene in the dining-room had really taken place; and now he, Paul Bultitude, the widely-respected merchant of Mincing Lane, a man of means and position, was being ignominiously packed off to school as if he were actually the schoolboy some hideous juggle had made him appear!

It was only with a violent effort that he could succeed in commanding his thoughts sufficiently to decide on some immediate action. "I must be cool," he kept muttering to himself, with shaking lips, "quite cool and collected. Everything will depend on that now!"

It was some comfort to him in this extremity to recognise on the box the well-known broad back of Clegg, a cabman who stabled his two horses in some mews near Praed Street, and whom he had been accustomed to patronise in bad weather for several years.

Clegg would know him, in spite of his ridiculous transformation.

His idea was to stop the cab, and turn round and drive home again, when they would find that he was not to be got rid of again quite so easily. If Dick imagined he meant to put up tamely with this kind of treatment, he was vastly mistaken; he would return home boldly and claim his rights!

No reasonable person could be perverse enough to doubt his identity when once matters came to the proof; though at first, of course, he might find a difficulty in establishing it. His children, his clerks, and his servants would soon get used to his appearance, and would learn to look below the mere surface, and then there was always the possibility of putting everything right by means of the magic stone.

"I won't lose a minute!" he said aloud; and letting down the window, leaned out and shouted "Stop!" till he was hoarse.

But Clegg either could not or would not hear; he drove on at full speed, a faster rate of progress than that adopted by most drivers of four-wheeled cabs being one of his chief recommendations.

They were now passing Euston. It was a muggy, slushy night, with a thin brown fog wreathing the houses and fading away above their tops into a dull, slate-blue sky. The wet street looked like a black canal; the blurred forms, less like vehicles than nondescript boats, moving over its inky surface, were indistinctly reflected therein; the gas-lights flared redly through the murky haze. It was not a pleasant evening in which to be out-of-doors.

Paul would have opened the cab-door and jumped out had he dared, but his nerve failed him, and, indeed, considering the speed of the cab, the leap would have been dangerous to a far more active person. So he was forced to wait resignedly until the station should be reached, when he determined to make Clegg understand his purpose with as little loss of time as possible.

"I must pay him something extra," he thought; "I'll give him a sovereign to take me back." And he searched his pockets for the loose coin he usually carried about with him in such abundance; there was no gold in any of them.

He found, however, a variety of minor and less negotiable articles, which he fished out one by one from unknown depths – a curious collection. There was a stumpy German-silver pencil case, a broken prism from a crystal chandelier, a gilded Jew's harp, a little book in which the leaves on being turned briskly, gave a semblance of motion to the sails of a black windmill drawn therein, a broken tin soldier, some Hong-Kong coppers with holes in them, and a quantity of little cogged wheels from the inside of a watch; while a further search was rewarded by an irregular lump of toffee imperfectly enfolded in sticky brown paper.

He threw the whole of these treasures out of the window with indescribable disgust, and, feeling something like a purse in a side pocket, opened it eagerly.

It held five shillings exactly, the coins corresponding to those he had pushed across to his son such a little while ago! It did not seem to him quite such a magnificent sum now as it had done then; he had shifted his point of view.

It was too clear that the stone must have carried out his thoughtless wish with scrupulous and conscientious exactness in every detail. He had wanted, or said he wanted, to be a boy again like Dick, and accordingly he had become a perfect duplicate, even to the contents of the pockets. Evidently nothing on the face of things showed the slightest difference. Yet – and here lay the sting of the metamorphosis – he was conscious under it all of being his old original self, in utter discordance with the youthful form in which he was an unwilling prisoner.

By this time the cab had driven up the sharp incline, and under the high pointed archway of St. Pancras terminus, and now drew up with a jerk against the steps leading to the booking office.

Paul sprang out at once in a violent passion. "Here, you, Clegg!" he said, "why the devil didn't you pull up when I told you? eh?"

Clegg was a burly, red-faced man, with a husky voice and a general manner which conveyed the impression that he regarded teetotalism, as a principle, with something more than disapproval.

"Why didn't I pull up?" he said, bending stiffly down from his box. "'Cause I didn't want to lose a good customer, that's why I didn't pull up!"

"Do you mean to say you don't know me?"

"Know yer?" said Clegg, with an approach to sentiment: "I've knowed yer when you was a babby in frocks. I've knowed yer fust nuss (and a fine young woman she were till she took to drinking, as has been the ruin of many). I've knowed yer in Infancy's hour and in yer byhood's bloom! I've druv yer to this 'ere werry station twice afore. Know yer!"

Paul saw the uselessness of arguing with him. "Then, ah – drive me back at once. Let those boxes alone. I – I've important business at home which I'd forgotten."

Clegg gave a vinous wink. "Lor, yer at it agin," he said with admiration. "What a artful young limb it is! But it ain't what yer may call good enough, so to speak, it ain't. Clegg don't do that no more!"

"Don't do what?" asked Paul.

"Don't drive no young gents as is a-bein' sent to school back agin into their family's bosims," said Clegg sententiously. "You was took ill sudden in my cab the larst time. Offal bad you was, to be sure – to hear ye, and I druv' yer back; and I never got no return fare, I didn't, and yer par he made hisself downright nasty over it, said as if it occurred agin he shouldn't employ me no more. I durstn't go and offend yer par; he's a good customer to me, he is."

"I'll give you a sovereign to do it," said Paul.

"If yer wouldn't tell no tales, I might put yer down at the corner p'raps," said Clegg, hesitating, to Paul's joy; "not as it ain't cheap at that, but let's see yer suffering fust. Why," he cried with lofty contempt as he saw from Paul's face that the coin was not producible, "y'ain't got no suffering! Garn away, and don't try to tempt a pore cabby as has his livin' to make. What d'ye think of this, porter, now? 'Ere's a young gent a tryin' to back out o' going to school when he ought to be glad and thankful as he's receivin' the blessin's of a good eddication. Look at me. I'm a 'ard-workin' man. I am. I ain't 'ad no eddication. The kids, they're a learnin' French, and free'and drorin, and the bones on a skellington at the Board School, and I pays my coppers down every week cheerful. And why, porter? Why, young master? 'Cause I knows the vally on it! But when I sees a real young gent a despisin' of the oppertoonties as a bountiful Providence and a excellent par has 'eaped on his 'ed, it – it makes me sick, it inspires Clegg with a pity and a contemp' for such ingratitood, which he cares not for to 'ide from public voo!"

Clegg delivered this harangue with much gesture and in a loud tone, which greatly edified the porters and disgusted Mr. Bultitude.

"Go away," said the latter, "that's enough. You're drunk!"

"Drunk!" bellowed the outraged Clegg, rising on the box in his wrath. "'Ear that. 'Ark at this 'ere young cock sparrer as tells a fam'ly man like Clegg as he's drunk! Drunk, after drivin' his par in this 'ere werry cab through frost and fine fifteen year and more! I wonder yer don't say the old 'orse is drunk; you'll be sayin' that next! Drunk! oh, cert'nly, by all means. Never you darken my cab doors no more. I shall take and tell your par, I shall. Drunk, indeed! A ill-conditioned young wiper as ever I see. Drunk! yah!"

And with much cursing and growling, Clegg gathered up his reins and drove off into the fog, Boaler having apparently pre-paid the fare.

"Where for, sir, please?" said a porter, who had been putting the playbox and portmanteau on a truck during the altercation.

"Nowhere," said Mr. Bultitude. "I – I'm not going by this train; find me a cab with a sober driver."

The porter looked round. A moment before there had been several cabs discharging their loads at the steps; now the last had rolled away empty.

"You might find one inside the station by the arrival platform," he suggested; "but there'll be sure to be one comin' up here in another minute, sir, if you like to wait."

Paul thought the other course might be the longer one, and decided to stay where he was. So he walked into the lofty hall in which the booking offices are placed and waited there by the huge fire that blazed in the stove until he should hear the cab arrive which could take him back to Westbourne Terrace.

One or two trains were about to start, and the place was full. There were several Cambridge men "going up" after the Christmas vacation, in every variety of ulster; some tugging at refractory white terriers, one or two entrusting bicycles to dubious porters with many cautions and directions. There were burly old farmers going back to their quiet countryside, flushed with the prestige of a successful stand under cross-examination in some witness-box at the Law Courts; to tell and retell

the story over hill and dale, in the market-place and bar-parlour, every week for the rest of their honest lives. There was the usual pantomime "rally" on a mild scale, with real frantic passengers, and porters, and trucks, and trays of lighted lamps.

Presently, out of the crowd and confusion, a small boy in a thick pilot jacket and an immensely tall hat, whom Paul had observed looking at him intently for some time, walked up to the stove and greeted him familiarly.

"Hallo, Bultitude!" he said, "I thought it was you. Here we are again, eh? Ugh!" and he giggled dismally.

He was a pale-faced boy with freckles, very light green eyes, long, rather ragged black hair, a slouching walk, and a smile half-simpering, half-impudent.

Mr. Bultitude was greatly staggered by the presumption of so small a boy venturing to address him in this way. He could only stare haughtily.

"You might find a word to say to a fellow!" said the boy in an aggrieved tone. "Look here; come and get your luggage labelled."

"I don't want it labelled," said Paul stiffly, feeling bound to say something. "I'm waiting for a cab to take me home again."

The other gave a loud whistle. "That'll make it rather a short term, won't it, if you're going home for the holidays already? You're a cool chap, Bultitude! If I were to go back to my governor now, he wouldn't see it. It would put him in no end of a bait. But you're chaffing –"

Paul walked away from him with marked coolness. He was not going to trouble himself to talk to his son's schoolfellows.

"Aren't you well?" said the boy, not at all discouraged by his reception, following him and taking his arm. "Down in the mouth? It is beastly, isn't it, having to go back to old Grimstone's! The snow gave us an extra week, though – we've that much to be thankful for. I wish it was the first day of the holidays again, don't you? What's the matter with you? What have I done to put you in a wax?"

"Nothing at present," said Paul. "I don't speak to you merely because I don't happen to have the – ah – pleasure of your acquaintance."

"Oh, very well, then; I daresay you know best," said the other huffily. "Only I thought – considering we came the same half, and have been chums, and always sat next one another ever since – you might perhaps just recollect having met me before, you know."

"Well, I don't," said Mr. Bultitude. "I tell you I haven't the least idea what your name is. The fact is there has been a slight mistake, which I can't stop to talk about now. There's a cab just driven up outside now. You must excuse me, really, my boy, I want to go."

He tried to work his arm free from the close and affectionate grip of his unwelcome companion, who was regarding him with a sort of admiring leer.

"What a fellow you are, Bultitude!" he said; "always up to something or other. You know me well enough. What is the use of keeping it up any longer? Let's talk, and stop humbugging. How much grub have you brought back this time?"

To be advised to stop humbugging, and be persecuted with such idle questions as these, maddened the poor gentleman. A hansom really had rolled up to the steps outside. He must put an end to this waste of precious time, and escape from this highly inconvenient small boy.

He forced his way to the door, the boy still keeping fast hold of his arm. Fortunately the cab was still there, and its late occupant, a tall, broad man, was standing with his back to them paying the driver. Paul was only just in time.

"Porter!" he cried. "Where's that porter? I want my box put on that cab. No, I don't care about the luggage; engage the cab. Now, you little ruffian, are you going to let me go? Can't you see I'm anxious to get away?"

Jolland giggled more impishly than ever. "Well, you *have* got cheek!" he said. "Go on, I wish you may get that cab, I'm sure!"

Paul, thus released, was just hurrying towards the cab, when the stranger who had got out of it settled the fare with satisfaction to himself and turned sharply round.

The gas-light fell full on his face, and Mr. Bultitude recognised that the form and features were those of no stranger – he had stumbled upon the very last person he had expected or desired to meet just then – his flight was intercepted by his son's schoolmaster, Dr. Grimstone himself!

The suddenness of the shock threw him completely off his balance. In an ordinary way the encounter would not of course have discomposed him, but now he would have given worlds for presence of mind enough either to rush past to the cab and secure his only chance of freedom before the Doctor had fully realised his intention, or else greet him affably and calmly, and, taking him quietly aside, explain his awkward position with an easy man-of-the-world air, which would ensure instant conviction.

But both courses were equally impossible. He stood there, right in Dr. Grimstone's path, with terrified starting eyes and quivering limbs, more like an unhappy guinea-pig expecting the advances of a boa, than a British merchant in the presence of his son's schoolmaster! He was sick and faint with alarm, and the consciousness that appearances were all against him.

There was nothing in the least extraordinary in the fact of the Doctor's presence at the station. Mr. Bultitude might easily have taken this into account as a very likely contingency and have provided accordingly, had he troubled to think, for it was Dr. Grimstone's custom, upon the first day of the term, to come up to town and meet as many of his pupils upon the platform as intended to return by a train previously specified at the foot of the school-bills; and Paul had even expressly insisted upon Dick's travelling under surveillance in this manner, thinking it necessary to keep him out of premature mischief.

It makes a calamity doubly hard to bear when one looks back and sees by what a trivial chance it has come upon us, and how slight an effort would have averted it altogether; and Mr. Bultitude cursed his own stupidity as he stood there, rooted to the ground, and saw the hansom (a "patent safety" to him in sober earnest) drive off and abandon him to his fate.

Dr. Grimstone bore down heavily upon him and Jolland, who had by this time come up. He was a tall and imposing personage, with a strong black beard and small angry grey eyes, slightly blood-tinged; he wore garments of a semi-clerical cut and colour, though he was not in orders. He held out a hand to each with elaborate geniality.

"Ha, Bultitude, my boy, how are you? How are you, Jolland? Come back braced in body and mind by your vacation, eh? That's as it should be. Have you tickets? No? follow me then. You're both over age, I believe. There you are; take care of them."

And before Paul could protest, he had purchased tickets for all three, after which he laid an authoritative hand upon Mr. Bultitude's shoulder and walked him out through the booking hall upon the platform.

"This is awful," thought Paul, shrinking involuntarily; "simply awful. He evidently has no idea who I really am. Unless I'm very careful I shall be dragged off to Crichton House before I can put him right. If I could only get him away alone somewhere."

As if in answer to the wish, the Doctor guided him by a slight pressure straight along by the end of the station, saying to Jolland as he did so, "I wish to have a little serious conversation with Richard in private. Suppose you go to the bookstall and see if you can find out any of our young friends. Tell them to wait for me there."

When they were alone the Doctor paced solemnly along in silence for some moments, while Paul, who had always been used to consider himself a fairly prominent object, whatever might be his surroundings, began to feel an altogether novel sensation of utter insignificance upon that immense brown plain of platform and under the huge span of the arches whose girders were lost in wreaths of mingled fog and smoke.

Still he had some hope. Was it not possible, after all, that the Doctor had divined his secret and was searching for words delicate enough to convey his condolences?

"I wished to tell you, Bultitude," said the Doctor presently, and his first words dashed all Paul's rising hopes, "that I hope you are returning this term with the resolve to do better things. You have caused your excellent father much pain in the past. You little know the grief a wilful boy can inflict on his parent."

"I think I have a very fair idea of it," thought Paul, but he said nothing.

"I hope you left him in good health? Such a devoted parent, Richard – such a noble heart!"

At any other time Mr. Bultitude might have felt gratified by these eulogies, but just then he was conscious that he could lay no claim to them. It was Dick who had the noble heart now, and he himself felt even less of a devoted parent than he looked.

"I had a letter from him during the vacation," continued Dr. Grimstone, "a sweet letter, Richard, breathing in every line a father's anxiety and concern for your welfare."

Paul was a little staggered. He remembered having written, but he would scarcely perhaps have described his letter as "sweet," as he had not done much more than enclose a cheque for his son's account and object to the items for pew-rent and scientific lectures with the diorama as excessive.

"But – and this is what I wanted to say to you, Bultitude – his is no blind doting affection. He has implored me, for your own sake, if I see you diverging ever so slightly from the path of duty, not to stay my hand. And I shall not forget his injunctions."

A few minutes ago, and it would have seemed to Paul so simple and easy a matter to point out to the Doctor the very excusable error into which he had fallen. It was no more than he would have to do repeatedly upon his return, and here was an excellent opportunity for an explanation.

But, somehow the words would not come. The schoolmaster's form seemed so tremendous and towering, and he so feeble and powerless before him, that he soon persuaded himself that a public place, like a station platform, was no scene for domestic revelations of so painful a character.

He gave up all idea of resistance at present. "Perhaps I had better leave him in his error till we get into the train," he thought; "then we will get rid of that other boy, and I can break it to him gradually in the railway carriage as I get more accustomed to him."

But in spite of his determination to unbosom himself without further delay, he knew that a kind of fascinated resignation was growing upon him and gaining firmer hold each minute.

Something must be done to break the spell and burst the toils which were being woven round him before all effort became impossible.

"And now," said the Doctor, glancing up at the great clock-face on which a reflector cast a patch of dim yellow light, "we must be thinking of starting. But don't forget what I have said."

And they walked back towards the book-stalls with their cheery warmth of colour, past the glittering buffet, and on up the platform, to a part where six boys of various sizes were standing huddled forlornly together under a gaslight.

"Aha!" said Dr. Grimstone, with a slight touch of the ogre in his tone, "more of my fellows, eh? We shall be quite a party. How do you do, boys? Welcome back to your studies."

And the six boys came forward, all evidently in the lowest spirits, and raised their tall hats with a studied politeness.

"Some old friends here, Bultitude," said the Doctor, impelling the unwilling Paul towards the group. "You know Tipping, of course; Coker, too, you've met before – and Coggs. How are you, Siggers? You're looking well. Ah, by the way, I see a new face – Kiffin, I think? Kiffin, this is Bultitude, who will make himself your mentor, I hope, and initiate you into our various manners and customs."

And, with a horrible dream-like sense of unreality, Mr. Bultitude found himself being greeted by several entire strangers with a degree of warmth embarrassing in the extreme.

He would have liked to protest and declare himself there and then in his true colours, but if this had been difficult alone with the Doctor under the clock, it was impossible now, and he submitted ruefully enough to their unwelcome advances.

Tipping, a tall, red-haired, raw-boned boy, with sleeves and trousers he had outgrown, and immense boots, wrung Paul's hand with misdirected energy, saying "how-de-do?" with a gruff superiority, mercifully tempered by a touch of sheepishness.

Coggs and Coker welcomed him with open arms as an equal, while Siggers, a short, slight, sharp-featured boy, with a very fashionable hat and shirt-collars, and a horse-shoe pin, drawled, "How are you, old boy?" with the languor of a confirmed man about town.

The other two were Biddlecomb, a boy with a blooming complexion and a singularly sweet voice, and the new-comer, Kiffin, who did not seem much more at home in the society of other boys than Mr. Bultitude himself, for he kept nervously away from them, shivering with the piteous self-abandonment of an Italian greyhound.

Paul was now convinced that unless he exerted himself considerably, his identity with his son would never even be questioned, and the danger roused him to a sudden determination.

However his face and figure might belie him, nothing in his speech or conduct should encourage the mistake. Whatever it might cost him to overcome his fear of the Doctor, he would force himself to act and talk ostentatiously, as much like his own ordinary self as possible, during the journey down to Market Rodwell, so as to prepare the Doctor's mind for the disclosures he meant to make at the earliest opportunity. He was beginning to see that the railway carriage, with all those boys sitting by and staring, would be an inconvenient place for so delicate and difficult a confession.

The guard having warned intending passengers to take their seats, and Jolland, who had been unaccountably missing all this time, having appeared from the direction of the refreshment buffet, furtively brushing away some suspicious-looking flakes and crumbs from his coat, and contrived to join the party unperceived, they all got into a first-class compartment – Paul with the rest.

He longed for moral courage to stand out boldly and refuse to leave town, but, as we have seen, it was beyond his powers, and he temporised. Very soon the whistle had sounded and the train had begun to glide slowly out beyond the platform and arch, past the signal boxes and long low sheds and offices which are the suburbs of a large terminus – and then it was too late.

#### 4. *A Minnow amongst Tritons*

"Boys are capital fellows in their own way among their mates; but they are unwholesome companions for grown people."

– *Essays of Elia*.

For some time after they were fairly started the Doctor read his evening paper with an air of impartial but severe criticism, and Mr. Bultitude as he sat opposite him next to the window, found himself overwhelmed with a new and very unpleasant timidity.

He knew that, if he would free himself, this utterly unreasonable feeling must be wrestled with and overcome; that now, if ever, was the time to assert himself, and prove that he was anything but the raw youth he was conscious of appearing. He had merely to speak and act, too, in his ordinary everyday manner; to forget as far as possible the change that had affected his outer man, which was not so very difficult to do after all – and yet his heart sank lower and lower as each fresh telegraph post flitted past.

"I will let him speak first," he thought; "then I shall be able to feel my way." But there was more fear than caution in the resolve.

At last, however, the Doctor laid down his paper, and, looking round with the glance of proprietorship on his pupils, who had relapsed into a decorous and gloomy silence, observed: "Well, boys, you have had an unusually protracted vacation this time – owing to the unprecedented severity of the weather. We must try to make up for it by the zest and ardour with which we pursue our studies during the term. I intend to reduce the Easter holidays by a week by way of compensation."

This announcement (which by no means relieved the general depression – the boys receiving it with a sickly interest) was good news to Paul, and even had the effect of making him forget his position for the time.

"I'm uncommonly glad to hear it, Dr. Grimstone," he said heartily, "an excellent arrangement. Boys have too many holidays as it is. There's no reason, to my mind, why parents should be the sufferers by every snowstorm. It's no joke, I can assure you, to have a great idle boy hanging about the place eating his empty head off!"

A burglar enlarging upon the sanctity of the law of property, or a sheep exposing the fallacies of vegetarianism, could hardly have produced a greater sensation.

Every boy was roused from his languor to stare and wonder at these traitorous sentiments, which, from the mouth of any but a known and tried companion, would have roused bitter hostility and contempt. As it was, their wonder became a rapturous admiration, and they waited for the situation to develop with a fearful and secret joy.

It was some time before the Doctor quite recovered himself; then he said with a grim smile, "This is indeed finding Saul amongst the prophets; your sentiments, if sincere, Bultitude – I repeat, if sincere – are very creditable. But I am obliged to look upon them with suspicion!" Then, as if to dismiss a doubtful subject, he inquired generally, "And how have you all been spending your holidays, eh!"

There was no attempt to answer this question, it being felt probably that it was, like the conventional "How do you do?" one to which an answer is neither desired nor expected, especially as he continued almost immediately, "I took my boy Tom up to town the week before Christmas to see the representation of the 'Agamemnon' at St. George's Hall. The 'Agamemnon,' as most of you are doubtless aware, is a drama by Æschylus, a Greek poet of established reputation. I was much pleased by the intelligent appreciation Tom showed during the performance. He distinctly recognised several words from his Greek Grammar in the course of the dialogue."

No one seemed capable of responding except Mr. Bultitude, who dashed into the breach with an almost pathetic effort to maintain his accustomed stiffness.

"I may be old-fashioned," he said, "very likely I am; but I – ah – decidedly disapprove of taking children to dramatic exhibitions of any kind. It unsettles them, sir – unsettles them!"

Dr. Grimstone made no answer, but he put a hand on each knee, and glared with pursed lips and a leonine bristle of the beard at his youthful critic for some moments, after which he returned to his *Globe* with a short ominous cough.

"I've offended him now," thought Paul. "I must be more careful what I say. But I'll get him into conversation again presently."

So he began at the first opportunity: "You have this evening's paper, I see. No telegrams of importance, I suppose?"

"No, sir," said the Doctor shortly.

"I saw a report in to-day's *Times*," said poor Mr. Bultitude, with a desperate attempt at his most conversational and instructive manner, "I saw a report that the camphor crop was likely to be a failure this season. Now, it's a very singular thing about camphor, that the Japanese – " (he hoped to lead the conversation round to colonial produce, and thus open the Doctor's eyes by the extent of his acquaintance with the subject).

"I am already acquainted with the method of obtaining camphor, thank you, Bultitude," said the Doctor, with dangerous politeness.

"I was about to observe, when you interrupted me," said Paul, "(and this is really a fact that I doubt if you are aware of), that the Japanese never – "

"Well, well," said the Doctor, with some impatience, "probably they never do, sir, but I shall have other opportunities of finding out what you have read about the Japanese."

But he glanced over the top of the paper at the indignant Paul, who was not accustomed to have his information received in this manner, with less suspicion and a growing conviction that some influence during the holidays had changed the boy from a graceless young scapegrace into a prig of the first water.

"He's most uncivil" – Mr. Bultitude told himself – "almost insulting, but I'll go on. I'm rousing his curiosity. I'm making way with him; he sees a difference already." And so he applied himself once more.

"You're a smoker, of course, Dr. Grimstone?" he began. "We don't stop anywhere, I think, on the way, and I must confess myself, after dinner, a whiff or two – I think I can give you a cigar you'll appreciate."

And he felt for his cigar-case, really forgetting that it was gone, like all other incidents of his old self; while Jolland giggled with unrestrained delight at such charming effrontery.

"If I did not know, sir," said the Doctor, now effectually roused, "that this was ill-timed buffoonery, and not an intentional insult, I should be seriously angry. As it is, I can overlook any exuberance of mirth which is, perhaps, pardonable when the mind is elated by the return to the cheerful bustle and activity of school-life. But be very careful."

"He needn't be so angry," thought Paul, "how could I know he doesn't smoke? But I'm afraid he doesn't quite know me, even now."

So he began again: "Did I hear you mention the name of Kiffin amongst those of your pupils here, Doctor? I thought so. Not the son of Jordan Kiffin, of College Hill, surely? Yes? Why, bless my soul, your father and I, my little fellow, were old friends in days before you were born or thought of – born or thought of. He was in a very small way then, a very small – Eh, Dr. Grimstone, don't you feel well?"

"I see what you're aiming at, sir. You wish to prove to me that I'm making a mistake in my treatment of you."

"That was my idea, certainly," said Paul, much pleased. "I'm very glad you take me, Doctor."

"I shall take you in a way you won't appreciate soon, if this goes on," said the Doctor under his breath.

"When the time comes I shall know how to deal with you. Till then you'll have the goodness to hold your tongue," he said aloud.

"It's not a very polite way of putting it," Paul said to himself, "but, at any rate, he sees how the case stands now, and after all, perhaps, he only speaks like that to put the boys off the scent. If so, it's uncommonly considerate and thoughtful of him, by Gad. I won't say any more."

But by-and-by, the open window made him break his resolution. "I'm sorry to inconvenience you, Dr. Grimstone," he said, with the air of one used to having his way in these matters, "but I positively must ask you either to allow me to have this window up or to change places with you. The night air, sir, at this time of the year is fatal, my doctor tells me, simply fatal to a man of my constitution."

The Doctor pulled up the window with a frown, and yet a somewhat puzzled expression. "I warn you, Bultitude," he said, "you are acting very imprudently."

"So I am," thought Paul, "so I am. Good of him to remind me. I must keep it up before all these boys. This unpleasant business mustn't get about. I'll hold my tongue till we get in. Then, I daresay, Grimstone will see me off by the next train up, if there is one, and lend me enough for a bed at an hotel for the night. I couldn't get to St. Pancras till very late, of course. Or he might offer to put me up at the school. If he does, I think I shall very possibly accept. It might be better."

And he leant back in his seat in a much easier frame of mind; it was annoying, of course, to have been turned out of his warm dining-room, and sent all the way down to Market Rodwell on a fool's errand like this; but still, if nothing worse came of it, he could put up with the temporary inconvenience, and it was a great relief to be spared the necessity of an explanation.

The other boys watched him furtively with growing admiration, which expressed itself in subdued whispers, varied by little gurgles and "squirks" of laughter; they tried to catch his eye and stimulate him to further feats of audacity, but Mr. Bultitude, of course, repulsed all such overtures with a coldness and severity which at once baffled and piqued them.

At last his eccentricity took a shape which considerably lessened their enthusiasm. Kiffin, the new boy, occupied the seat next to Paul; he was a nervous-looking little fellow, with a pale face and big pathetic brown eyes like a seal's, and his dress bore plain evidence of a mother's careful supervision, having all the uncreased trimness and specklessness rarely to be observed except in the toilettes of the waxen prodigies in a shop-window.

It happened that, as he lay back in the padded seat between the sheltering partitions, watching the sickly yellow dregs of oil surging dismally to and fro with the motion in the lamp overhead, or the black indistinct forms flitting past through the misty blue outside, the pathos of his situation became all at once too much for him.

He was a home-bred boy, without any of that taste for the companionship and pursuits of his fellows, or capacity for adapting himself to their prejudices and requirements, which give some home-bred boys a ready passport into the roughest communities.

His heart throbbed with no excited curiosity, no conscious pride, at this his first important step in life; he was a forlorn little stranger, in an unsympathetic strange land, and was only too well aware of his position.

So that it is not surprising that as he thought of the home he had left an hour or two ago which now seemed so shadowy, so inaccessible and remote, his eyes began to smart and sting, and his chest to heave ominously, until he felt it necessary to do something to give a partial vent to his emotions and prevent a public and disgraceful exhibition of grief.

Unhappily for him he found this safety-valve in a series of suppressed but distinctly audible sniffs.

Mr. Bultitude bore this for some time with no other protest than an occasional indignant bounce or a lowering frown in the offender's direction, but at last his nerves, strung already to a high pitch by all he had undergone, could stand it no longer.

"Dr. Grimstone," he said with polite determination, "I'm not a man to complain without good reason, but really I must ask you to interfere. Will you tell this boy here, on my right, either to control his feelings or to cry into his pocket-handkerchief, like an ordinary human being? A good honest bellow I can understand, but this infernal whiffling and sniffing, sir, I will not put up with. It's nothing less than unnatural in a boy of that size."

"Kiffin," said the Doctor, "are you crying?"

"N – no, sir," faltered Kiffin; "I – I think I must have caught cold, sir."

"I hope you are telling me the truth, because I should be sorry to believe you were beginning your new life in a spirit of captiousness and rebellion. I'll have no mutineers in my camp. I'll establish a spirit of trustful happiness and un murmuring content in this school, if I have to flog every boy in it as long as I can stand over him! As for you, Richard Bultitude, I have no words to express my pain and disgust at the heartless irreverence with which you persist in mimicking and burlesquing a fond and excellent parent. Unless I perceive, sir, in a very short time a due sense of your error and a lively repentance, my disapproval will take a very practical form."

Mr. Bultitude fell back into his seat with a gasp. It was hard to be accused of caricaturing one's own self, particularly when conscious of entire innocence in that respect, but even this was slight in comparison with the discovery that he had been so blindly deceiving himself!

The Doctor evidently had failed to penetrate his disguise, and the dreaded scene of elaborate explanation must be gone through after all.

The boys (with the exception of Kiffin) still found exquisite enjoyment in this extraordinary and original exhibition, and waited eagerly for further experiment on the Doctor's patience.

They were soon gratified. If there was one thing Paul detested more than another, it was the smell of peppermint – no less than three office boys had been discharged by him because, as he alleged, they made the clerks' room reek with it, – and now the subtle searching odour of the hated confection was gradually stealing into the compartment and influencing its atmosphere.

He looked at Coggs, who sat on the seat opposite to him, and saw his cheeks and lips moving in slow and appreciative absorption of something. Coggs was clearly the culprit.

"Do you encourage your boys to make common nuisances of themselves in a public place, may I ask, Dr. Grimstone?" he inquired, fuming.

"Some scarcely seem to require encouragement, Bultitude," said the Doctor pointedly: "what is the matter now?"

"If he takes it medicinally," said Paul, "he should choose some other time and place to treat his complaint. If he has a depraved liking for the abominable stuff, for Heaven's sake make him refrain from it on occasions when it is a serious annoyance to others!"

"Will you explain? Who and what are you talking about?"

"That boy opposite," said Paul, pointing the finger of denunciation at the astonished Coggs; "he's sucking an infernal peppermint lozenge strong enough to throw the train off the rails!"

"Is what Bultitude tells me true, Coggs?" demanded the Doctor in an awful voice.

Coggs, after making several attempts to bolt the offending lozenge, and turning scarlet meanwhile with confusion and coughing, stammered huskily something to the effect that he had "bought the lozenges at a chemist's," which he seemed to consider, for some reason, a mitigating circumstance.

"Have you any more of this pernicious stuff about you?" said the Doctor.

Very slowly and reluctantly Coggs brought out of one pocket after another three or four neat little white packets, make up with that lavish expenditure of time, string, and sealing-wax, by which the struggling chemist seeks to reconcile the public mind to a charge of two hundred and fifty per

cent. on cost price, and handed them to Dr. Grimstone, who solemnly unfastened them one by one, glanced at their contents with infinite disgust, and flung them out of window.

Then he turned to Paul with a look of more favour than he had yet shown him. "Bultitude," he said, "I am obliged to you. A severe cold in the head has rendered me incapable of detecting this insidious act of insubordination and self-indulgence, on which I shall have more to say on another occasion. Your moral courage and promptness in denouncing the evil thing are much to your credit."

"Not at all," said Paul, "not at all, my dear sir. I mentioned it because I – ah – happen to be peculiarly sensitive on the subject and – " Here he broke off with a sharp yell, and began to rub his ankle. "One of these young savages has just given me a severe kick; it's that fellow over there, with the blue necktie. I have given him no provocation, and he attacks me in this brutal manner, sir; I appeal to you for protection!"

"So, Coker" (Coker wore a blue necktie), said the Doctor, "you emulate the wild ass in more qualities than those of stupidity and stubbornness, do you? You lash out with your hind legs at an inoffensive school-fellow, with all the viciousness of a kangaroo, eh? Write out all you find in Buffon's Natural History upon those two animals a dozen times, and bring it to me by to-morrow evening. If I am to stable wild asses, sir, they shall be broken in!"

Six pairs of sulky glowering eyes were fixed upon the unconscious Paul for the rest of the journey; indignant protests and dark vows of vengeance were muttered under cover of the friendly roar and rattle of tunnels. But the object of them heard nothing; his composure was returning once more in the sunshine of Dr. Grimstone's approbation, and he almost decided on declaring himself in the station fly.

And now at last the train was grinding along discordantly with the brakes on, and, after a little preliminary jolting and banging over the points, drew up at a long lighted platform, where melancholy porters paced up and down, croaking "Market Rodwell!" like so many Solomon Eagles predicting woe.

Paul got out with the others, and walked forward to the guard's van, where he stood shivering in the raw night air by a small heap of portmanteaux and white clamped boxes.

"I should like to tell him all about it now," he thought, "if he wasn't so busy. I'll get him to go in a cab alone with me, and get it over before we reach the house."

Dr. Grimstone certainly did not seem in a very receptive mood for confidences just then. No flies were to be seen, which he took as a personal outrage, and visited upon the station-master in hot indignation.

"It's scandalous, I tell you," he was saying: "scandalous! No cabs to meet the train. My school reassembles to-day, and here I find no arrangements made for their accommodation! Not even an omnibus! I shall write to the manager and report this. Let some one go for a fly immediately. Boys, go into the waiting room till I come to you. Stay – there are too many for one fly. Coker, Coggs, and, let me see, yes, Bultitude, you all know your way. Walk on and tell Mrs. Grimstone we are coming."

Paul Bultitude was perhaps more relieved than disappointed by this postponement of a disagreeable interview, though, if he had seen Coker dig Coggs in the side with a chuckle of exultant triumph, he might have had misgivings as to the prudence of trusting himself alone with them.

As it was he almost determined to trust the pair with his secret. "They will be valuable witnesses," he said to himself, "that, whoever else I may be, I am not Dick."

So he went on briskly ahead over a covered bridge and down some break-neck wooden steps, and passed through the wicket out upon the railed-in space, where the cabs and omnibuses should have been, but which was now a blank spectral waste with a white ground-fog lurking round its borders.

Here he was joined by his companions, who, after a little whispering, came up one on either side and put an arm through each of his.

"Well," said Paul, thinking to banter them agreeably; "here you are, young men, eh? Holidays all over now! Work while you're young, and then – Gad, you're walking me off my legs. Stop; I'm not as young as I used to be –"

"Grim can't see us here, can he, Coker?" said Coggs when they had cleared the gates and palings.

"Not he!" said Coker.

"Very well, then. Now then, young Bultitude, you used to be a decent fellow enough last term, though you *were* coxy. So, before we go any further – what do you mean by this sort of thing?"

"Because," put in Coker, "if you aren't quite right in your head, through your old governor acting like a brute all the holidays, as you said he does, just say so, and we won't be hard on you."

"I – he – always an excellent father," stammered Paul. "What am I to explain?"

"Why, what did you go and sneak of *him* for bringing tuck back to school for, eh?" demanded Coker.

"Yes, and sing out when he hacked your shin?" added Coggs; "and tell Grimstone that new fellow was blubbing? Where's the joke in all that, eh? Where's the joke?"

"You don't suppose I was bound to sit calmly down and allow you to suck your villainous peppermints under my very nose, do you?" said Mr. Bultitude. "Why shouldn't I complain if a boy annoys me by sniffing, or kicks me on the ankle? Just tell me that? Suppose my neighbour has a noisy dog or a smoky chimney, am I not to venture to tell him of it? Is he to –"

But his arguments, convincing as they promised to be, were brought to a sudden and premature close by Coker, who slipped behind him and administered a sharp jog below his back, which jarred his spine and caused him infinite agony.

"You little brute!" cried Paul, "I could have you up for assault for that!"

But upon this Coggs did the very same thing only harder. "Last term you'd have shown fight for much less, Bultitude," they both observed severely, as some justification for repeating the process.

"Now, perhaps, you'll drop it for the future," said Coker. "Look here! we'll give you one more chance. This sneaking dodge is all very well for Chawner. Chawner could do that sort of thing without getting sat upon, because he's a big fellow; but we're not going to stand it from you. Will you promise on your sacred word of honour, now, to be a decent sort of chap again, as you were last term?"

But Mr. Bultitude, though he longed for peace and quietness, dreaded doing or saying anything to favour the impression that he was the schoolboy he unluckily appeared to be, and he had not skill and tact enough to dissemble and assume a familiar genial tone of equality with these rough boys.

"You don't understand," he protested feebly. "If I could only tell you –"

"We don't want any fine language, you know," said the relentless Coggs. "Yes or no. Will you promise to be your old self again?"

"I only wish I could," said poor Mr. Bultitude – "but I can't!"

"Very well, then," said Coggs firmly, "we must try the torture. Coker, will you screw the back of his hand, while I show him how they make barley-sugar?"

And he gave Paul an interesting illustration of the latter branch of industry by twisting his right arm round and round till he nearly wrenched it out of the socket, while Coker seized his left hand and pounded it vigorously with the first joint of his forefinger, causing the unfortunate Paul to yell for mercy.

At last he could bear no more, and breaking away from his tormentors with a violent effort, he ran frantically down the silent road towards a house which he knew from former visits to be Dr. Grimstone's.

He was but languidly pursued, and, as the distance was short, he soon gained a gate on the stuccoed posts of which he could read "Crichton House" by the light of a neighbouring gas-lamp.

"This is a nice way," he thought, as he reached it breathless and trembling, "for a father to visit his son's school!"

He had hoped to reach sanctuary before the other two could overtake him; but he soon discovered that the gate was shut fast, and all his efforts would not bring him within reach of the bell-handle – he was too short.

So he sat down on the doorstep in resigned despair, and waited for his enemies. Behind the gate was a large many-windowed house, with steps leading up to a portico. In the playground to his right the school gymnasium, a great gallows-like erection, loomed black and grim through the mist, the night wind favouring the ghastliness of its appearance by swaying the ropes till they creaked and moaned weirdly on the hooks, and the metal stirrups clinked and clashed against one another in irregular cadence.

He had no time to observe more, as Coker and Coggs joined him, and, on finding he had not rung the bell, seized the occasion to pummel him at their leisure before announcing their arrival.

Then the gate was opened, and the three – the revengeful pair assuming an air of lamb-like inoffensiveness – entered the hall and were met by Mrs. Grimstone.

"Why, here you are!" she said, with an air of surprise, and kissing them with real kindness. "How cold you look! So you actually had to walk. No cabs as usual. You poor boys! come in and warm yourselves. You'll find all your old friends in the schoolroom."

Mr. Bultitude submitted to be kissed with some reluctance, inwardly hoping that Dr. Grimstone might never hear of it.

Mrs. Grimstone, it may be said here, was a stout, fair woman, not in the least intellectual or imposing, but with a warm heart, and a way of talking to and about boys that secured her the confidence of mothers more effectually, perhaps, than the most polished conversation and irreproachable deportment could have done.

She did not reserve her motherliness for the reception room either, as some schoolmasters' wives have a tendency to do, and the smallest boy felt less homesick when he saw her.

She opened a green baize outer door, and the door beyond it, and led them into a long high room, with desks and forms placed against the walls, and a writing table, and line of brown-stained tables down the middle. Opposite the windows there was a curious structure of shelves partitioned into lockers, and filled with rows of shabby schoolbooks.

The room had been originally intended for a drawing-room, as was evident from the inevitable white and gold wall-paper and the tarnished gilt beading round the doors and window shutters; the mantelpiece, too, was of white marble, and the gaselier fitted with dingy crystal lustres.

But sad-coloured maps hung on the ink-splashed walls, and a clock with a blank idiotic face (it is not every clock that possesses a decently intelligent expression) ticked over the gilt pier-glass. The boards were uncarpeted, and stained with patches of ink of all sizes and ages; while the atmosphere, in spite of the blazing fire, had a scholastic blending of soap and water, ink and slate-pencil in its composition, which produced a chill and depressing effect.

On the forms opposite the fire some ten or twelve boys were sitting, a few comparing notes as to their holiday experiences with some approach to vivacity. The rest, with hands in pockets and feet stretched towards the blaze, seemed lost in melancholy abstraction.

"There!" said Mrs. Grimstone cheerfully, "you'll have plenty to talk to one another about. I'll send Tom in to see you presently!" And she left them with a reassuring nod, though the prospect of Tom's company did not perhaps elate them as much as it was intended to do.

Mr. Bultitude felt much as if he had suddenly been dropped down a bear-pit, and, avoiding welcome and observation as well as he could, got away into a corner, from which he observed his new companions with uneasy apprehension.

"I say," said one boy, resuming the interrupted conversation, "did you go to Drury Lane? Wasn't it stunning! That goose, you know, and the lion in the forest, and all the wooden animals lumbering in out of the toy Noah's Ark!"

"Why couldn't you come to our party on Twelfth-night?" asked another. "We had great larks. I wish you'd been there!"

"I had to go to young Skidmore's instead," said a pale, spiteful-looking boy, with fair hair carefully parted in the middle. "It was like his cheek to ask me, but I thought I'd go, you know, just to see what it was like."

"What was it like?" asked one or two near him languidly.

"Oh, awfully slow! They've a poky little house in Brompton somewhere, and there was no dancing, only boshy games and a conjurer, without any presents. And, oh! I say, at supper there was a big cake on the table, and no one was allowed to cut it, because it was hired. They're so poor, you know. Skidmore's pater is only a clerk, and you should see his sisters!"

"Why, are they pretty?"

"Pretty! they're just like young Skidmore – only uglier; and just fancy, his mother asked me 'if I was Skidmore's favourite companion, and if he helped me in my studies?'"

The unfortunate Skidmore, when he returned, soon found reason to regret his rash hospitality, for he never heard the last of the cake (which had, as it happened, been paid for in the usual manner) during the rest of the term.

There was a slight laugh at the enormity of Mrs. Skidmore's presumption, and then a long pause, after which some one asked suddenly, "Does any one know whether Chawner really has left this time?"

"I hope so," said a big, heavy boy, and his hope seemed echoed with a general fervour. "He's been going to leave every term for the last year, but I believe he really has done it this time. He wrote and told me he wasn't coming back."

"Thank goodness!" said several, with an evident relief, and some one was just observing that they had had enough of the sneaking business, when a fly was heard to drive up, and the bell rang, whereupon everyone abandoned his easy attitude, and seemed to brace himself up for a trying encounter.

"Look out – here's Grimstone!" they whispered under their breaths, as voices and footsteps were heard in the hall outside.

Presently the door of the schoolroom opened, and another boy entered the room. Dr. Grimstone, it appeared, had not been the occupant of the fly, after all. The new-comer was a tall, narrow-shouldered, stooping fellow, with a sallow, unwholesome complexion, thin lips, and small sunken brown eyes. His cheeks were creased with a dimpling subsmile, half uneasy, half malicious, and his tread was mincing and catlike.

"Well, you fellows?" he said.

All rose at once, and shook hands effusively. "Why, Chawner!" they cried, "how are you, old fellow? We thought you weren't coming back!"

There was a heartiness in their manner somewhat at variance with their recent expressions of opinion; but they had doubtless excellent reasons for any inconsistency.

"Well," said Chawner, in a low, soft voice, which had a suggestion of feminine spitefulness, "I was going to leave, but I thought you'd be getting into mischief here without me to watch over you. Appleton, and Lench, and Coker want looking after badly, I know. So, you see, I've come back after all."

He laughed with a little malevolent cackle as he spoke, and the three boys named laughed too, though with no great heartiness, and shifting the while uneasily on their seats.

After this sally the conversation languished until Tom Grimstone's appearance. He strolled in with a semi-professional air, and shook hands with affability.

Tom was a short, flabby, sandy-haired youth, not particularly beloved of his comrades, and his first remark was, "I say, you chaps, have you done your holiday task? Pa says he shall keep everyone in who hasn't. I've done mine;" which, as a contribution to the general liveliness, was a distinct failure.

Needless to say, the work imposed as a holiday occupation had been first deferred, then forgotten, then remembered too late, and recklessly defied with the confidence begotten in a home atmosphere.

Amidst a general silence Chawner happened to see Mr. Bultitude in his corner, and crossed over to him. "Why, there's Dicky Bultitude there all the time, and he never came to shake hands! Aren't you going to speak to me?"

Paul growled something indistinctly, feeling strangely uncomfortable and confused.

"What's the matter with him?" asked Chawner. "Does anyone know? Has he lost his tongue?"

"He hadn't lost it coming down in the train," said Coker: "I wish he had. I tell you what, you fellows – He – here's Grim at last! I'll tell you all about it up in the bedroom."

And Dr. Grimstone really did arrive at this point, much to Paul's relief, and looked in to give a grip of the hand and a few words to those of the boys he had not seen.

Biddlecomb, Tipping, and the rest, came in with him, and the schoolroom soon filled with others arriving by later trains, amongst the later comers being the two house-masters, Mr. Blinkhorn and Mr. Tinkler; and there followed a season of bustle and conversation, which lasted until the Doctor touched a small hand-bell, and ordered them to sit down round the tables while supper was brought in.

Mr. Bultitude was not sorry to hear the word "supper." He was faint and dispirited, and although he had dined not very long since, thought that perhaps a little cold beef and beer, or some warmed-up trifle, might give him courage to tell his misfortunes before bedtime.

Of one thing he felt certain. Nothing should induce him to trust his person in a bedroom with any of those violent and vindictive boys; whether he succeeded in declaring himself that night or not, he would at least insist on a separate bedroom. Meantime he looked forward to supper as likely to restore geniality and confidence.

But the supper announced so imposingly proved to consist of nothing more than two plates piled with small pieces of thinly-buttered bread, which a page handed round together with tumblers of water; and Paul, in his disappointment, refused this refreshment with more firmness than politeness, as Dr. Grimstone observed.

"You got into trouble last term, Bultitude," he said sternly, "on account of this same fastidious daintiness. Your excellent father has informed me of your waste and gluttony at his own bountifully spread table. Don't let me have occasion to reprove you for this again."

Mr. Bultitude, feeling the necessity of propitiating him, hastened to take the two largest squares of bread and butter on the plate. They were moist and thick, and he had considerable difficulty in disposing of them, besides the gratification of hearing himself described as a "pig" by his neighbours, who reproved him with a refreshing candour.

"I must get away from here," he thought, ruefully. "Dick seems very unpopular. I wish I didn't feel so low-spirited and unwell. Why can't I carry it off easily as – as a kind of joke? How hard these forms are, and how those infernal boys did jog my back!"

Bedtime came at length. The boys filed, one by one, out of the room, and the Doctor stood by the door to shake hands with them as they passed.

Mr. Bultitude lingered until the others had gone, for he had made up his mind to seize this opportunity to open the Doctor's eyes to the mistake he was making. But he felt unaccountably nervous; the diplomatic and well-chosen introduction he had carefully prepared had left him at the critical moment; all power of thought was gone with it, and he went tremblingly up to the schoolmaster, feeling hopelessly at the mercy of anything that chose to come out of his mouth.

"Dr. Grimstone," he began; "before retiring I – I must insist – I mean I must request – What I wish to say is –"

"I see," said the Doctor, catching him up sharply. "You wish to apologise for your extraordinary behaviour in the railway carriage? Well, though you made some amends afterwards, an apology is very right and proper. Say no more about it."

"It's not that," said Paul hopelessly; "I wanted to explain – "

"Your conduct with regard to the bread and butter? If it was simply want of appetite, of course there is no more to be said. But I have an abhorrence of – "

"Quite right," said Paul, recovering himself; "I hate waste myself, but there is something I must tell you before – "

"If it concerns that disgraceful conduct of Coker's," said the Doctor, "you may speak on. I shall have to consider his case to-morrow. Has any similar case of disobedience come to your knowledge? If so, I expect you to disclose it to me. You have found some other boy with sweetmeats in his possession?"

"Good Heavens, sir!" said Mr. Bultitude, losing his temper; "I haven't been searching the whole school for sweetmeats! I have other things to occupy my mind, sir. And, once for all, I demand to be heard! Dr. Grimstone, there are, ahem, domestic secrets that can only be alluded to in the strictest privacy. I see that one of your assistants is writing at his table there. Cannot we go where there will be less risk of interruption? You have a study, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir," said the Doctor with terrible grimness, "I have a study – and I have a cane. I can convince you of both facts, if you wish it. If you insult me again by this brazen buffoonery, I will! Be off to your dormitory, sir, before you provoke me to punish you. Not another word! Go!"

And, incredible as it may appear to all who have never been in his position, Mr. Bultitude went. It was almost an abdication, it was treachery to his true self; he knew the vital importance of firmness at this crisis. But nevertheless his courage gave way all at once, and he crawled up the bare, uncarpeted stairs without any further protest!

"Good night, Master Bultitude," said a housemaid, meeting him on the staircase: "you know your bedroom. No. 6, with Master Coker, and Master Biddlecomb, and the others."

Paul dragged himself up to the highest landing-stage, and, with a sick foreboding, opened the door on which the figure 6 was painted.

It was a large bare plainly papered room, with several curtainless windows, the blinds of which were drawn, a long deal stand of wash-hand basins, and eight little white beds against the walls.

A fire was lighted in consideration of its being the first night, and several boys were talking excitedly round it. "Here he is! He's stayed behind to tell more tales!" they cried, as Paul entered nervously. "Now then, Bultitude, what have you got to say for yourself?"

Mr. Bultitude felt powerless among all these young wolves. He had no knowledge of boys, nor any notion of acquiring an influence over them, having hitherto regarded them as necessary nuisances, to be rather repressed than studied. He could only stare hopelessly at them in fascinated silence.

"You see he hasn't a word to say for himself!" said Tipping. "Look here, what shall we do to him? Shall we try tossing in a blanket? I've never tried tossing a fellow in one myself, but as long as you don't jerk him too high, or out on the floor, you can't hurt him dangerously."

"No, I say, don't toss him in a blanket," pleaded Biddlecomb, and Paul felt gratefully towards him at the words; "anyone coming up would see what was going on. I vote we flick at him with towels."

"Now just you understand this clearly," said Paul, thinking, not without reason, that this course of treatment was likely to prove painful; "I refuse to allow myself to be flicked at with towels. No one has ever offered me such an indignity in my life! Oh, do you think I've not enough on my mind as it is without the barbarities of a set of young brutes like you!"

As this appeal was not of a very conciliatory nature they at once proceeded to form a circle round him and, judging their distance with great accuracy, jerked towels at his person with such diabolical dexterity that the wet corners cut him at all points like so many fine thongs, and he span round like a top, dancing, and, I regret to add, swearing violently, at the pain.

When he was worked up almost to frenzy pitch Biddlecomb's sweet low voice cried, "*Cave*, you fellows! I hear Grim. Let him undress now, and we can lam it into him afterwards with slippers!"

At this they all cast off such of their clothes as they still wore, and slipped modestly and peacefully into bed, just as Dr. Grimstone's large form appeared at the doorway. Mr. Bultitude made as much haste as he could, but did not escape a reprimand from the Doctor as he turned the gas out; and as soon as he had made the round of the bedrooms and his heavy tread had died away down the staircase, the light-hearted occupants of No. 6 "lammed" it into the unhappy Paul until they were tired of the exercise and left him to creep sore and trembling with rage and fright into his cold hard bed.

Then, after a little desultory conversation, one by one sank from incoherence into silence, and rose from silence to snores, while Paul alone lay sleepless, listening to the creeping tinkle of the dying fire, drearily wondering at the marvellous change that had come over his life and fortunes in the last few hours, and feverishly composing impassioned appeals which were to touch the Doctor's heart and convince his reason.

## 5. *Disgrace*

"Well had the boding tremblers learned to trace  
The day's disasters in his morning's face."

Sleep came at last, and brought too brief forgetfulness. It was not till the dull grey light of morning was glimmering through the blinds that Mr. Bultitude awoke to his troubles.

The room was bitterly cold, and he remained shivering in bed for some time, trying to realise and prepare for his altered condition.

He was the only one awake. Now and then from one of the beds around a boy would be heard talking in his sleep, or laughing with holiday glee – at the drolleries possibly of some pantomime performed for his amusement in the Theatre Royal, Dreamland – a theatre mercifully open to all boys free of charge, long after the holidays have come to an end, the only drawbacks being a certain want of definiteness in the plot and scenery, and a liability to premature termination of the vaguely splendid performance.

Once Kiffin, the new boy, awoke with a start and a heavy sigh, but he cried himself to sleep again almost immediately.

Mr. Bultitude could bear being inactive no longer. He thought, if he got up, he might perhaps see his misfortunes shrink to a more bearable, less hopeless scale, and besides, he judged it prudent, for many reasons, to finish his toilet before the sleepers began theirs.

Very stealthily, dreading to rouse anyone and attract attention in the form of slippers, he broke the clinking crust of ice in one of the basins and, shuddering from the shock, bathed face and hands in the biting water. He parted his hair, which from natural causes he had been unable to accomplish for some years, and now found an awkwardness in accomplishing neatly, and then stole down the dark creaking staircase just as the butler in the hall began to swing the big railway bell which was to din stern reality into the sleepy ears above.

In the schoolroom a yawning maid had just lighted the fire, from which turbid yellow clouds of sulphurous smoke were pouring into the room, making it necessary to open the windows and lower a temperature that was far from high originally.

Paul stood shaking by the mantelpiece in a very bad temper for some minutes. If the Doctor had come in then, he might have been spurred by indignation to utter his woes, and even claim and obtain his freedom. But that was not to be.

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