

Brereton Frederick Sadleir

A Gallant Grenadier: A Tale of the Crimean War



Frederick Brereton

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F.S. Brereton

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Chapter One.

Philip Western

“You positively annoy me, Joseph, and make me feel more angry than I care to admit. The matter is a serious one, and I am deeply distressed. After thirteen years of the most careful bringing-up there is complete and absolute failure. It is a miserable reward. And then, to make matters worse, you laugh at me, and egg the lad on to even greater crimes!”

“Fiddlesticks, sir! Humbug! A miserable reward indeed!” was the spirited answer. “No one but yourself would admit it. He is a fine lad, though a little wild I will own; but for all that a generous, good-hearted boy. Let him alone! Don’t worry him with all these goody-goody ideas. There is plenty of time for him to settle down, and meanwhile he will come to no harm, and, I’ll be bound, will bring no discredit on you.” The speaker shook his head knowingly, and helped himself to a large pinch of snuff.

“How can you argue like that, Joseph, when you know what the lad has done?” the former speaker replied with much sternness. “I hold practical joking to be at any time disgraceful, but when one’s adopted son is one of three who actually laid a booby-trap for the mayor of this town in broad daylight, and made him a laughing-stock for all, then discreditable is the least one can say of it. It is positively scandalous.”

“Nonsense, Edward! Barrington deserved all he got. He is an odious man, and the fright those youngsters gave him will teach him to mind his own business in future, and not meddle with other people’s affairs. Serve him right, I say! Just because a lad breaks one of his windows with a catapult, and by pure accident, he gets the following half-holiday stopped for the whole school. If he hadn’t blustered so much, and looked so fierce, I’ve no doubt the culprit would have given himself up; but he was afraid of the consequences, and most naturally, too. Ha, ha, ha! It was funny! I saw his worship immediately after he had fallen a victim to the joke. He was quivering with mingled fear and rage, and the laughter of the by-standers did not help to soothe him.”

Joseph threw himself violently back in his chair, causing it to creak in an alarming manner and almost overturn, and gave vent to roars of laughter, followed by chuckles of intense amusement, produced in such deep tones that they seemed to come from the smart Wellingtons he wore. He was a stout, comfortable-looking man of middle height, with a round, clean-shaven face, which, now that he was laughing, was as red as fire and wrinkled in all directions. He had a shiny head, almost devoid of hair, and a double chin which half hid the wide collar and large bow he wore, while smartly-cut trousers and coat, a wide expanse of shirt front, and a double-breasted waistcoat, which seemed almost too small to reach across his massive chest and “corporation”, completed an appearance which made Joe Sweetman remarkable. He looked a gentleman all over, and his merry laugh and jovial manner made one certain at once that he was a general favourite.

Opposite him, seated in an uncomfortable armchair, and hugging one knee with his bony hands, was a big, gaunt man, whose heavy face and dull leaden-looking eyes seemed never to have lightened with a smile. A square chin, set off by long Dundreary whiskers, and knitted brows showed him to be a man of fixed purpose; one who, having made up his mind upon a subject of any importance, would adhere to his decision with exasperating stubbornness, refusing to be persuaded by any argument, and holding firmly to his convictions, though their falseness was apparent to everyone but himself.

A hard, bigoted man was Edward Western, and even good-natured Joe Sweetman was often within an ace of losing his temper when conversing with him. An educated man, and in his younger days an officer in a line regiment, Edward had suddenly taken it into his head that a soldier's life was not the calling he should follow. Once convinced of this he sent in his papers, and now for years had acted as the vicar of Riddington, a town of some importance in Hampshire. A wife, holding somewhat similar views to his own, and an adopted son of sixteen completed his family, while Joe Sweetman, his brother-in-law, was so constantly at the house that he might be said to form one of the establishment.

The one great aim and object of Edward Western's life was that his adopted son, Philip, should follow in his footsteps, and one day fill his place as vicar of the town. Fortune had decreed that he should be childless, and at first this had not been a matter for regret. But for many years the vicar of Riddington had declared to all his parishioners, when lecturing to them and advising them as to the training of their children, that by careful education they could make them what they wished. "Neglect your offspring," he would say solemnly, shaking a warning finger at his audience, "and they will become the evil-doers of the future. They will disgrace you, and even make you almost long to disown them. But with diligence, with never-ceasing care, you will instil into their minds all that is good, and will train them to follow that profession which you have decided they shall enter. There should be no need to worry yourselves in the future as to what your sons should be. Choose now, while they are infants, and bring them up according to your wishes."

This was all, undoubtedly, very true and excellent advice to give, but Mr Western went further. "There is no such thing as 'breeding' and 'noble blood'," he would declare. "Take a lad from the gutter, and I will engage that by using towards him the same amount of care as is devoted to the child of gentlefolks, you will make him a gentleman."

So strongly did he feel upon the subject that, after mature consideration, he decided to prove the truth of his sayings to all in the parish. To decide was to act. In spite of Joe Sweetman's remonstrances he inserted an advertisement in the papers, in which it was set forth that a certain clergyman, living in a country town, was anxious to adopt a son.

No difficulty was thrown in his way. An answer reached him by return of post, stating that a widow with many children would be glad to dispose of one of them if a good home were offered. A hurried visit and a few questions satisfied the vicar that the woman was truthful, and that to relieve her of a child would be an act of charity. A few guineas were handed to the widow, and Phil Reach, a fair-haired, blue-eyed boy of two, was hugged in his mother's arms, smothered with kisses and big tears, and finally, wondering no doubt what all the commotion meant, was handed over to Mr Western.

He was an interesting little mite too, always happy and bright, and ever ready for a romp. And to do them justice, Mr Western and his wife proved a devoted father and mother to their adopted son. They lived for him, and never for a single moment forgot what was the object of their lives.

When the child was four years old his training commenced, and from that day it had proceeded unceasingly. Had his days been made bright and joyous, success might have attended the efforts of the worthy vicar and his wife; but Phil Western – as he was now called – seldom knew what it was to be really happy. Living with an eccentric couple, whose austerity would have tried an adult, and deprived of playmates, he soon began to mope and pine. So much so, that at last the doctor ordered home lessons to be given up, and after a good deal of persuasion his adopted parents were prevailed upon to send him to the local school. What a change it was! From sorrow to sunlight. Phil rapidly picked up his health, and before long had hosts of friends. But at home the old life still continued. The training was never for one moment forgotten, and if only the desired end had been attained, Phil would have developed into one of those abnormally good boys who never do wrong, and whose lives are a pattern to all others. But, unfortunately, this was not the case.

Phil, indeed, grew up to be scarcely the studious and sober-minded lad his adoptive parents had hoped to see. Bottled up by the strictness of life at home, his spirits simply boiled over when once

he left the house, and at school his masters knew him as a mischievous but good-hearted youngster, whose courage and lively nature often led him into doing stupid things, for which he was afterwards full of regret. There was not a prank played of which he was not the ringleader, and any batch of culprits mustered outside the doctor's study, waiting for punishment, was certain to number him in its ranks. And yet he was not a bad boy.

"He is simply incorrigible. I can do nothing with him, and you must take him away at the end of the term," the worthy doctor had said when discussing with Mr Western the affair of the booby-trap laid for the mayor. "I shall be sorry to lose the lad, for he is upright and truthful, and has done much for the school in the way of sports and athletics. But he is never out of mischief, and the example he sets is simply destroying the discipline of the school. Be advised by me, Western, and send him away. He is by no means dull at his work, and at a school where there is more opportunity of controlling him, and where he will be separated from his present companions in mischief, he will do well, I feel sure, and be a credit to you."

But no amount of reasoning could convince Phil's father that his son was all that the Doctor had said.

"He has disgraced me," he said bitterly to Joe Sweetman, "and all our care has been thrown away. I hoped that he would grow up a quiet and well-behaved young fellow; but he is never out of mischief, so much so that I am now obliged to send him to a boarding-school, an institution of which I have the greatest dislike. And I suppose he will soon be sent away from there. I really am more than grieved, and how I shall dare to meet his worship the mayor, after what has occurred, I do not know!"

"Bother the mayor! He's a prig, and got what he deserved!" Joe answered, with a sniff and a snap of his fingers. "Send Phil away and I'll swear he'll be thankful to you. Of course I know it was foolish and very wrong of those young monkeys to play their tricks on old Barrington, but then you yourself know what an unpopular man he is. Did he not try to put an end to the annual procession of the Riddington boys through the town, on the plea that they made too much noise? That put the youngsters' backs up; and then he must needs force his way into the school and demand that the lad who broke his miserable window should be caned, and in the event of his not being found that the whole school should lose a holiday. A pig of a fellow, sir, and I'm glad Phil and his pals paid him out."

This indignant outburst, and the roar of laughter which followed on Joe's remembering the unhappy mayor's fright, roused Edward Western's ire. He sat rigidly in his chair, staring blankly before him, with a fixed expression of annoyance on his face.

"I cannot compel him to follow the profession I have chosen for him," he said sternly, "but let him disgrace me again and I will pack him off to London and there find a position for him as a clerk, where he will be tied to his desk, and where he will have fewer opportunities of doing wrong."

"Pooh! pooh! You're too hard on Phil by a long way," exclaimed Joe Sweetman earnestly, springing from his chair and pacing up and down the room. "Give him a chance. Every dog must have his day, you know. Let him get rid of some of his wild spirits, and then perhaps he will be quite ready to fall in with your wishes. You accuse me of constantly egging the lad on. I deny that charge, Edward, and I do most sincerely wish that you could see the facts as they are. Perhaps I should not speak, for he is your protégé, not mine; but, just for a moment look squarely at the facts. Does the lad lead a happy life in his home? I tell you that he does not. He has comfort and plenty of good food, but the house is not brightened for the boy, and once within its walls he has learnt to subdue and cloak a naturally sunny nature simply because gay laughter and light-hearted chatter are disapproved of. Can you wonder, then, that he is inclined to run riot outside? His high spirits get the better of him, and he is ready for any fun – fun, mark you, Edward, on which you and I might look and never feel ashamed – for, mischievous though he is, he has a healthy mind."

Joe tossed his head in the air, thrust his fat hands beneath the tails of his coat, and leaned against the mantel-piece, staring hard at Mr Western. "Come," he continued, with an easy laugh, "think better

of it, Edward. Pack the lad off to school, and leave him more to himself. He'll go straight, I'll wager anything upon it."

"Thank you, Joseph! I do not bet," Mr Western replied. "But I will do as you say. Philip shall go away, and his future must depend upon himself. Not all the arguments in the world will persuade me that there is any truth in the saying that it is good for young fellows to sow their wild oats before settling down to the serious business of life. Now let us go into the garden."

Mr Western rose slowly from his chair, and, opening a large glass door, stepped on to a verandah which surrounded his house and formed a most charming spot in which to sit during the heat of a summer's day. Joe followed him, still chuckling at the memory of the mayor's discomfiture, and together they stood looking out across the well-kept garden, with its beds of bright-coloured flowers, its splashing fountain, and its walls lined by rows of carefully-pruned trees. It was a scene which differed greatly from the monotony and lack of joyousness which marked Phil Western's daily life at home.

Within the house all was dull and sombre. Scarcely a laugh or a smile brightened his existence. Stern and full of earnestness, his adoptive parents gave themselves up to their work, the religious education of the parishioners and the careful bringing-up of their son. Outside there was a landscape teeming with life and movement; a town of some size in the hollow below, its streets filled with country folk who had come in to attend the market, and across the haze caused by the smoke rising lazily from the chimneys, a huge vista of green trees and fields, broken here and there by a wide silvery streak which marked the course of the river, twisting and twining, now hidden by the foliage, and again running through the open fields, flashing in the brilliant sun, and bearing upon its smooth surface a host of tiny boats filled with townspeople out for an afternoon's enjoyment.

A hundred yards or more beyond the outskirts of Riddington was a large, red-brick building, almost smothered in creeper, and bearing in its centre a tall tower from the four sides of which the face of a clock looked out. It was Riddington High School, and the hands of the clock were pointing close to the hour of four. A moment later there was a loud "whirr", and then the first stroke of the hour, followed almost instantly by a hubbub in the building below. Hundreds of shrill voices seemed to have been let loose, and after them the owners; for from all sides of the school lads appeared, rushing out in mad haste, some hatless, others jamming their hats upon their heads, and all in the same condition of desperate hurry. A minute later they had streamed across the playground and were racing towards the river, to a spot where an old waterman stood guard over some dozen boats. Charging down the hill the mob of excited lads swept the old man aside, laughed merrily at his expostulations, and in a twinkling were aboard and shoving off from the river-bank.

But not all the scholars of Riddington High School had joined in the excited rush. A tall, big-boned lad of some fifteen years, with hair which was almost red in colour, and a boyish, open face, strode from one of the doors accompanied by two others. Flinging his hat jauntily upon his head, Phil Western, for it was none other than he, walked across the asphalt which formed the playground of the school, and, putting his two forefingers in his mouth, produced a loud and prolonged whistle. Twice he repeated it, and after a minute's silence shouted "Rags! Rags! where are you?"

In the distance a series of short barks answered, and very soon a fox-terrier dog came racing across the grass.

"Ah, he's waiting all right for his master!" exclaimed Phil, with a short grunt of satisfaction. "Good dog! – the best in the whole of Riddington. Now, you fellows," he went on, after having greeted his canine friend with a pat, "what's the order for to-day? We're all agreed to give that old concern an airing. The last time the good people of this town had a chance of looking at it was in the year of the queen's coronation; and that was thirteen years ago. It's getting musty, and must certainly have an airing."

"That's exactly what we think, Phil," chimed in one of the other lads, a merry-looking youngster of fifteen. "Riddington started a state barge a hundred years ago, to take the mayor and councillors

across the river to the church on great occasions. On other days they rowed over in ordinary boats or went by the bridge – when it wasn't washed away by the floods. Then a new stone bridge was built, and for a few years they kept up the old custom. But for a long while now it has fallen through – sunk into oblivion, as 'old Tommy' would say. It is clearly our duty to revive this extremely interesting – I may say this unique – old custom.”

“Bah! Stop it!” exclaimed Phil, with a laugh, snatching his comrade's hat from his head and throwing it at his face. “Tell me what arrangements you have made.”

“Simple. Simple as daylight, Phil. We saunter down to the river-side, and as soon as Peter looks the other way we enter the boat-house. Here's the key. It hangs over the pater's mantel-piece, where it has been for the last two years. He's keeper of the state barge and the bargemen's costumes.”

“Splendid, Tommy! Splendid! We'll be off at once. Come on, you fellows. Here, Rags!”

Phil hurried off with his companions in mischief towards an old and somewhat dilapidated boat-house. The lad who had been addressed as Tommy slipped up to the door, and a few moments later all three entered and closed it behind them.

A match was produced and a small piece of candle lighted.

“This way, you fellows,” cried Tommy, leading the way along a narrow shelf to the back of the house. Here there was a small room with a worm-eaten table and chairs and a heavy oak chest.

“It's no use doing things by halves, is it?” asked Tommy, with a broad grin on his face. “Here, in this old chest, are all the costumes, and if we don't make that old barge look as well as it ever did, I shall be astonished.”

“You'll probably get licked, you mean,” laughed Phil. “But, all the same, it's a splendid idea. We won't spoil the show for a ha'porth of tar. Let's see how these things fit.”

Ten minutes later, had any councillor of Riddington had sufficient interest to pay a casual visit to the boat-house, he would have seen a sight which would certainly have given a rude shock to his nerves. For in the old and musty building stalked three figures gorgeously attired in costumes of red velvet, slashed in all directions with what had once been white, red stockings and big-bowed shoes, heavy chains of brass round their necks, and huge beef-eater hats upon their heads. Beneath the hats, where bearded faces should have been, were the merry countenances of three boys who were bent upon a piece of mischief.

“Look here, Phil, you boss this show,” said Tommy shortly, looking at the other lad to see if he agreed. “We're ready. Give your orders and we'll get aboard.”

“Right, Tommy! Help with this tarpaulin. That's right. Now jump inside, you fellows, and fish out the rowlocks, and see that a couple of oars are handy. The rudder is already there. Now we can start. Hop in there and take your places. I'll open the gates and push her out.”

Waiting to see that all was ready, Phil pulled the bolt of the gates which closed the exit to the river, and threw them open. Then he guided the old state barge, all bedecked with gold and colours and curious devices, out into the river, giving a lusty push off, and springing in just at the last moment.

“Out oars!” he cried. “Tommy, what are you grinning at? Remember you are a bargeman.”

“Beg pardon, sir. Sorry, I'm sure,” replied the irrepressible Tommy, with a broad smile on his face. “I say, Phil, what a sight you do look in those togs! and sha'n't we catch it when they find out who we are? Old Barrington will be furious. He said he'd have our blood – or something like that – when we held him up the other day.”

“Oh, bother Barrington! I know he said we were a disgrace to the town, and that he'd keep a special eye upon us in future,” answered Phil, with a laugh. “But pull hard, you fellows. I'll run up past the town; there are lots of boats there that we'll go close to. Let's make 'em believe all's correct. Keep straight faces, and pass them as though nothing were wrong.”

“My eye, what fun!” chuckled Tommy. “But, all right, Phil! we'll do as you say.”

Slowly, and with a stately stroke, the two lads plied their oars, while Phil, looking almost double his real size in his strange costume, sat upright in the stern, the dog Rags by his side, and steered the

barge straight up the centre of the river. Soon they were close to the boats, and not many minutes had passed before their presence caused a sensation.

“Blest if it bain’t his wushup, the mayor!” cried a hulking countryman out for a day on the river. “Row along, boys, and let’s get closer.”

From every side cries and shouts of astonishment and pleasure resounded, and all pressed towards the centre. And through them all the old barge swept grandly on its way, while its bargemen and the steersman kept a rigid silence and hastily jerked down their caps to hide the giggles which would come in spite of all their efforts. On they swept, and soon a throng of boats was following in their wake, while others ahead lay on their oars and waited. Suddenly, as they approached one of these, Phil leant forward and, shading his eyes with his hand, stared at the occupants.

“Keep on, you fellows,” he muttered. “There’s a boat ahead of us with my pater and mater aboard, and I believe the mayor too. There’ll be trouble now, I expect.”

And this was exactly the case. It was a lovely day, and, persuaded by Joe Sweetman, Mr and Mrs Western had engaged a boat, and, happening to meet the mayor before embarking, had invited him to join the party. Even as the barge appeared in sight, Mr Western was apologising for his son’s disgraceful behaviour, and telling the mayor what a disappointment Phil was to him.

“Why, as I live,” exclaimed Joe Sweetman suddenly, “that’s the old state barge! What is happening, Barrington?”

“State barge! Yes, so it is. What can it be doing out here?” the mayor, a fat-faced personage, replied. “I have not given my permission. We must see to this, Mr Western.”

A moment later the barge slipped past, and in spite of Phil’s efforts to conceal his identity he was recognised.

“It’s that rascal Western!” exclaimed the mayor, getting red with anger. “Stop, sir! What do you mean? Are you stealing that barge?”

At the mayor’s angry order Tommy and his companion ceased rowing, and, seeing that all was discovered, Phil swept his hat from his head and politely wished all “good afternoon.”

Mr Barrington almost exploded with rage. “Take that barge back at once, you young rascal,” he shouted. “I’ll have you up for stealing. How dare you? Take it back at once!”

But meanwhile a crowd had gathered, and quickly understanding the joke, they laughed long and loudly and cheered the three boys. As for Joe Sweetman, he was convulsed, and this added not a little to the mayor’s ill-temper.

Mr Western had not spoken a word. All the while he gazed sternly at Phil, as though he could not trust himself to speak, and he had landed at the steps and was on his way home before he opened his lips.

“The mayor is right,” he said bitterly. “Philip is a disgrace, and I will not allow him to stay at home a single day longer than I can help. I know an excellent institution where boys of his character can be urged into obedience. He shall go there, and nothing shall persuade me to remove him till he has changed utterly and completely.”

“What! You would send Phil to a school for backward and incorrigible boys?” exclaimed Joe Sweetman.

“Yes, that is exactly the class of institution I mean. I know of one close to London, and will send him there, so that he may be tamed into obedience.”

“Then I tell you that you will do that boy a grievous wrong,” cried Joe, roused to anger by Edward Western’s words. “Only boys of vicious nature are sent to such schools. Of the backward ones I say nothing, for Phil’s wits are as ready as any boy’s, and he is decidedly not a dunce. Nor is he vicious, as you seem to think. For Heaven’s sake look with a more open mind at the matter. Here is a merry, good-hearted lad whom, because he gets into mischief, you would pack off to a school for unruly boys. I hope you will not insist on sending him to this place, for, as I have said, he is not so bad as you think.”

“Yes, I insist, Joseph, and no amount of argument will alter that decision.”

“Ah, I wish I had the power to compel you to do so!” said Joe bitterly. “But perhaps it is all for the best. Such schools, no doubt, are much as the others, save that a boy starts as it were with a black mark against his name. Let us hope that the headmaster of the one in your thoughts will see at a glance what sort of a lad he has in reality to deal with, and treat him accordingly.”

Chapter Two. Old Bumble

Mr Western was as good as his word, and within a week of his last escapade Phil was despatched to a certain school, situated in the outskirts of London, where only backward and incorrigible lads were received.

“I am thoroughly displeased and disappointed with you,” said the vicar severely, as he lectured Phil just before his departure. “I lifted you from poverty, provided you with a home, and for years have devoted all my spare hours to you. You know what my wishes and hopes were. They are still the same. Disappoint me again, get into further disgrace, and I will disown you.”

“I’ll do my best to keep out of trouble,” Phil answered, with a catch in his voice, for the lad was at heart fond of his home and of his guardians. “I will not promise to follow your wishes though. I don’t know why it is, but I loathe the thought of being a clergyman. I love a free and open life; and besides, a clever man is required for the Church, and I am scarcely that. Still, father, I will try my best, and should I do anything wrong, it shall not be such as to cause you to feel any shame.”

“Then we shall see, Philip. But remember my warning,” answered the vicar.

That evening a cab stopped outside a big stone building in Highgate and deposited Phil and his baggage on the pavement.

For a moment he looked round in bewilderment, for this was the first time he had been in the neighbourhood of, or in fact, anywhere near, the great city; but a gruff “Five bob fare, please”, and “that there’s Ebden’s School”, recalled his wandering wits.

Phil paid the money, and then, remembering that he would require someone to help him with his baggage, asked the surly driver to get off his seat.

“Not if I knows it, young un,” was the answer. “I’ve got me fare, and you’ve got to yer journey’s end. So good-day to yer! Hope yer won’t find it too precious warm in there. I passes by most every day and hears horrid yells a-coming from the ’ouse. Get up, won’t yer!” and with a tug and a spiteful lash at his horse, this cheerful Jehu drove off with such a jerk that the dilapidated top hat he wore started backward, and, bounding from the box, was crushed beneath the wheels.

Phil, who had for the moment been somewhat taken aback by the man’s ominous words, roared at the cabman’s discomfiture and at the rage into which he promptly worked himself. Then, taking no notice of his growling, and seeing no one at hand to help him, he shouldered his box, pushed open the iron gate which formed the entrance of his new home, and mounted the steps. A double knock, sounding hollow and rumbling, was answered quickly by an individual who performed at once the duties of butler and general fatigue man of the school.

“Name, sir?” he asked politely.

“Western,” answered Phil.

“Ah! you’re the new boy, sir! Glad to see you. Let me help you with the box;” and in a twinkling Phil was relieved of his baggage.

Then he was ushered into a big room, where he waited, not without some feelings of uneasiness, for the appearance of the master.

“I wonder what he’ll be like!” he thought. “I’ve heard of masters of his sort before. I wonder whether that cabby was rotting! Perhaps he wasn’t, and perhaps I shall really be catching it hot. Never mind. I was happy at Haddington, and will be here too.”

Phil was in the act of sketching for himself a big, heavy-looking man, with a hard unrelenting face, as his master, when there was a quick step outside, the door burst open, and a clean-shaven little gentleman, with a smiling, pleasant face, entered the room.

“By Jove! He’s awfully like Uncle Joe, and would be just his image if he were a little fatter,” Phil thought in an instant.

“Ah, Philip Western, the boy who has been in difficulties, I believe!” said the stranger, extending a hand and shaking Phil’s heartily. “Glad to see you, my lad. Let me look at you. Yes – we shall be good friends, I hope.” Then, murmuring to himself, he continued, “Larky – high-spirited – full of go, but no vice – no vice, I will swear. Yes, we shall be good friends.”

Mr Ebden – for he it was – pushed Phil into the light and rapidly surveyed him, muttering audibly all the while.

“So you are a disappointment to your father!” he continued. “Come, tell me all about it, my lad. Let there be no secrets between us. Tell me the whole trouble; why you have come here, and in what manner you have proved such a deep worry to your people.”

“I can’t help it, sir,” Phil blurted out. “I’ve done my level best to act as father wished, but somehow or other I am always in trouble. They said I was upsetting the discipline of the school, and that is one of the reasons for which I was sent away.” Then he proceeded to describe what had happened, and how he had laid a booby-trap for the mayor, and afterwards played a prank with the town barge.

Mr Ebden listened, and, much to Phil’s relief, laughed heartily when he heard how he and his friends had afforded the townspeople of Riddington one more glance at an old-fashioned relic.

“That was a piece of pure, boyish mischief,” he exclaimed, “and only deserved a lecture; but the other was bad. You ought to have been caned. You would have caught it severely here. However, from this day we start a new book. Turn over that fresh leaf which one so often hears about. I am your friend – remember that, Phil Western. You will meet with no harshness here. A piece of pure frolic I can enjoy; but anything else, any breach of discipline, shall meet with the punishment it deserves. But we will not talk of that. We shall be excellent friends, I feel sure. Now come with me and I will introduce you to your new school-fellows.”

Mr Ebden led Phil along a passage and through another room into a garden, in which were some twenty boys.

“There they are,” he said, giving him a push. “Go and make friends with them too.”

Somewhat bewildered with the very pleasant greeting he had already received, and more than pleased with the difference between his forebodings and the reality, Phil walked forward and looked at the lads before him, wondering which one he should address first.

And they too stared hard at Phil, and summed him up in a moment. Here was a boy with a big loose frame that wanted some filling out, long legs and arms that looked as though a little exertion would push them far through his clothing, and a well-tanned and freckled face; not exactly good-looking, but distinctly pleasing, and possessing eyes which looked straight at you, and a mouth with a queer little line beneath it, which told that, though smiling now, it could become hard and stem on occasion. The whole, capped by close-cropped, almost reddish hair, made up an appearance which was taking.

“A decent chap. He must be a good fellow,” was the half-muttered thought of the boys, the tallest of whom advanced and at once entered into conversation with Phil. The others joined in, and in a few minutes he was quite at his ease, and feeling more certain than ever that the change of schools was decidedly not for the worst.

Time proved that he was right, for there was no doubt that Mr Ebden had a wonderful power over his scholars. From the first he made friends of them, and endeavoured to keep them so. Indeed he seldom failed. A lad who had elsewhere been sullen and morose, and in many cases unmanageable, became under the new regime bright and laughing, and ready at all times to do his best to master his lessons. It was just the difference between the careless neglect and misunderstanding that had been his lot before, and the keen interest in all that concerned him that was shown in every word

and act of his new ruler. A little kindness goes a long way with many an awkward, nervous boy, and Mr Ebden had proved this.

“Make a friend of him,” he would say cheerily. “Forget sometimes that you are the master and he the boy. Coax him into trying by taking an interest in all he does, and you can make a convert anywhere.”

He was right, as has been proved over and over again, for nowadays there is scarcely a school where the masters do not join heart and soul with the boys in their games, ay, and feel themselves the happier and the younger for it too?

Thus did Mr Ebden conquer the lads sent to him as a last resource.

Before a week had passed, Phil had become quite popular in the school, and his love of athletics helped him not a little. To these a fair proportion of the day was allotted, and as the school enclosure opened into a large and well-kept garden, which was the common property of the row of houses in which Mr Ebden’s stood, there was plenty of opportunity for cricket. In the centre was a smooth stretch of lawn, with a carefully-laid pitch, and here Ebden’s did battle with sundry neighbouring teams.

But it is not to be supposed that Phil and his comrades were always out of mischief. They were a high-spirited lot, and ever eager for adventure. Indeed, our hero had only been a year at his new home when he was once more in the deepest trouble. It happened in this way. The Highgate Wanderers had taken their departure in high dudgeon at the easy victory that Ebden’s had scored over them, and Phil and his friends lay on the grass, full length, beneath the shade of a pleasant oak-tree. They were lolling idly and merely waiting for the hour to strike to go in and prepare for tea. Suddenly one of the number, a lad named Fat Bowen, pointed towards the farther end of the garden and exclaimed in a high-pitched voice, “Look, you chaps, there’s old Bumble inspecting his statues again!”

All looked in the direction indicated, to see a stout old gentleman waddling slowly round an artificial lake, and halting at every other step to inspect and admire two statues which stood on pedestals placed in the centre of the water.

“Good Old Bumble!” cried Phil, with a laugh; “he spends his days in admiring that plaster Hercules. If you were close to him you would hear him muttering, ‘Beautiful! Grand! Masterpieces! I will have two like these in my own garden’. Poor old boy! he’s quite cracked on the subject. What would happen if they were to disappear?”

“There’d be a row, that’s certain,” answered Fred Wheeler, a particular friend of Phil’s. “Yes, there’d be ructions, I expect. But what a joke it would be to take them away for a time!”

“Couldn’t be done. Too heavy to move,” answered Phil promptly. “But we might do something else,” he added, nothing loth for a piece of mischief. “Now what could we do, you fellows?”

Various suggestions were offered, but none of them was practicable, and the hour striking a few moments later, the boys departed to the school and left the stout gentleman still gazing lovingly at his statues.

“Old Bumble”, as he was generally, known to Ebden’s boys, was a gentleman of the name of Workman, Mr Julius Workman, a wealthy merchant of the city of London, who owned vast property in the neighbourhood of Highgate, and, indeed, was landlord of the houses which formed the terrace in which the school stood. Consequently he was a man of some position; in fact in Mr Ebden’s eyes he was one with whom it was well to be on the best of terms, and to treat with that amount of deference due to a man of consequence who holds one’s fortune in his hands. To tell the truth, Mr Julius Workman was not altogether an agreeable person. Fat and ungainly, he was far from being the good-natured individual one might have expected. Increasing riches had not softened his nature, for he was grumpy and fussy, and apt to ride the high horse on every occasion. His tenants stood in awe of him, and, strange as it may seem, Mr Ebden, the strong-minded man, who could successfully rule a number of high-spirited boys, feared him more than all the rest. But there was good reason for this. For fifteen years Ebden’s School had been in existence, and its increasing popularity had been

a source of satisfaction to its head. Now to change the locality of the school and alter that paragraph in the advertisement which ran “at a charmingly-situated building, in the salubrious neighbourhood of Highgate” might have been to diminish the popularity of the school. Highgate was thought much of by fond parents, and more than one pupil had been sent to Ebden’s in order that he might be in that part of London. Therefore it was of paramount importance that Mr Julius Workman should be kept in good-humour.

“Boys are nuisances, terrible nuisances,” he had often remarked testily to Mr Ebden, “and ’pon my word those you have nearly worry me out of my life. There is no peace in the terrace. All day one can hear their chatter, and, out in the gardens behind, their shouts are simply unbearable. Be good enough to see that they are less noisy in future, please, for not only do they annoy me, but the neighbours complain, and I have no intention of allowing Silverdale Terrace to be depopulated on their account.”

There was always a scarcely-veiled threat about the man’s words. If he had put them into plainer sentences they would have run: “Your boys are nuisances, and if I am worried again, I will give you notice to leave.”

“Bother the surly old chap!” Mr Ebden would exclaim under his breath, “he has me fairly on the hip. I am a good tenant and he knows it, but for all that I can never have a long lease of the house. Two years is as much as he will allow; if he were to give me notice to quit, I should have precious little time to look about me, and then – supposing I had to go elsewhere – what would become of the school? I should lose half my pupils and half my income at one blow.”

Consequently Mr Ebden took care to conciliate the old man; but not so his pupils. Amongst those mischievous lads Mr Julius Workman was known as “old Bumble.”

“Old Bumble” was voted a bore and a cantankerous Johnny, and each lad, finding that a shout annoyed him, took particular pains to lift his voice to the highest pitch whenever “Bumble” was in the vicinity.

Now the old gentleman was inordinately proud of the two plaster statues in the centre of the lake, and the lads at Ebden’s knew it well. Often before had they thought of playing some practical joke at “Bumble’s” expense, but never had they given it such deep consideration as upon this night. As they filed in to tea each was bothering his brains as to how a joke could be played upon him, and afterwards, as they sat at “prep.” with their books in front of them, the glorious life and deeds of Caesar were forgotten in a vision of “Bumble” surveying his statues.

“Wheeler, what are you gazing at? Go on with your work, sir,” Mr Ebden’s voice suddenly rapped out.

Wheeler buried his head in his hands, and pretended to be very deep in his book. There was silence in the big room for a few minutes, and Mr Ebden once more bent over the letter with which he was occupied. A faint rustle in a far-off corner then attracted the attention of the boys, and, looking up, Phil watched a lad named Carrol spell off some words on his fingers.

“I’ve got it,” they ran. “It’s about Old Bumble’s statues.”

Then, as the lad’s excitement increased, the message became unintelligible, and Phil sent back, “Can’t make it out. Start again.”

By this time all the boys were on the *qui vive* and staring hard at Carrol. But a sudden movement on Mr Ebden’s part and a sharp “Go on with your work, boys!” disturbed them. Another attempt failed for the same reason, and then Carrol seemed to give it up altogether. But a few minutes later, keeping a wary eye upon the master, who was sitting at his desk in the centre of the room, Carrol held up a slate upon which was written in large letters, “We’ll tar and feather Old B.’s statues.”

Instantly a suppressed giggle went round the room, and the lads looked at one another with eyes which clearly said: “By Jove! he’s got it. What a joke it will be!”

That night, when Ebden’s was supposed to be buried in profound sleep, a council of war was held in Phil’s cubicle, at which the details of the plot were worked out.

“We’re certain to catch it hot,” Phil remarked, with a smile, as, dressed in a flimsy night-gown, he sat on the edge of his bed, and surveyed the three lads squatting on the floor in front of him. “Old Bumble will suspect us at once, and will do his best to find out which of us played the joke. But we’ll do it, if only to show that we can. By Jove, I wonder what the old boy will do when he sees Hercules dressed like a hen? He’ll simply blow up with rage, and I wouldn’t miss the sight for worlds.”

“There’s safe to be a ruction,” Wheeler broke in complacently, “and some of us will get a licking. But what does it matter? Ebden will talk at us till we feel as limp as rags, and then he’ll cane us till we go as stiff as any poker. Then it will all be over, and we’ll be as good friends as ever. It’ll be a fine spree, and I vote we see about it to-morrow.”

“I take a share in it at any rate,” cried Carrol, looking round at the others to see if they agreed, for he was usually left in the background. “I invented the joke, remember that, you chaps.”

“We’re all four of us in it,” Phil answered gaily; “and now how about the stuff? The feathers and the tar, I mean. Then we shall want a raft. I know we can buy some tar at Streaker’s, and a call at the poultry shop will get us heaps of feathers. We’ll manage that to-morrow, and dress our statue in the evening, between tea and prep.”

The details of the prank to be played were quickly arranged, and soon Phil’s companions slipped off like ghosts, and he tumbled into bed and fell into a deep sleep.

The following evening, after dusk had fallen, four figures, each carrying a long school-form, slipped out through the back gate of Ebden’s, and stole down to the lake.

“Now for the raft,” whispered Phil. “Place them alongside one another and lash them with the rope.”

In a few minutes a raft was constructed, but to the disgust of all the lads it was so light and frail that it was not even sufficient to support one of them.

“We’re done. Bother it!” exclaimed Carrol.

The others stood without a word, and stared at the raft in deep vexation.

“It’s all right. I’ve got it, you chaps,” Phil suddenly cried in tones of excitement and pleasure. “The lake’s only a foot deep. We’ll shove one form out, and then put another in front of it, and so on till we reach the statue. The bottom is made of stone, so there’s no fear of toppling over or sinking in mud.”

A half-suppressed shout of joy answered him, and all at once set to work to make the bridge. It was easier than they had hoped, and before very long, by means of two extra forms, Hercules was reached. Then began the work of tar-and-feathering, an act of vandalism for which each and every one of them deserved a good thrashing, done though it was as a piece of pure boyish mischief, and in all thoughtlessness.

At length it was finished, and with hands and faces smeared with tar, and feathers sticking to their clothes, Phil and his boon companions returned silently to the house, and having hastily washed themselves took their places in “prep.” as though nothing had happened. But a scarcely-suppressed bubble of excitement and huge grins of amusement showed that all at Ebden’s were conscious of the prank, save the worthy head himself, who, if he had only known, would there and then have gone out and done his best to clean the statue before the light of day disclosed it to Mr Julius Workman.

On the following afternoon a game of cricket was in progress, when a cry of “Here’s old Bumble!” put a sudden stop to it, and the boys at once selected the nearest and best hiding-places from which to look on safely and observe all that happened.

Stalking pompously down the path leading from his own residence, Mr Julius Workman scarcely deigned to acknowledge the polite salute which two of the lads gave him. He walked – or rather waddled – along towards the lake, and, arrived there, sniffed, drew his snuff-box from a pocket in the tail of his coat, and helped himself to a liberal pinch. Then he drew out a highly-coloured silk handkerchief, and, holding it in one hand, was in the act of patting it to his nose, when his eye lit upon the statue. Unable to believe that what he saw was real, he wiped his glasses and stared again.

Then his face assumed a livid hue, his cheeks puffed out, and for the moment he looked as though he were on the point of exploding, or of having an apoplectic fit.

“Tarred and feathered, as I live!” he shouted, dancing from foot to foot in his rage, and shaking his stick threateningly. “Some wretch has destroyed my statue, the most beautiful I ever saw. It is a piece of wickedness; yes, wickedness! and I will search Highgate – ay, and even the whole of London – to find the culprit.”

For a moment he stopped for lack of breath, and behind their shelters Phil and his friends enjoyed the scene to their hearts’ content.

“Ah, I know!” the old gentleman suddenly shouted; “it’s one of those rascally boys. I know it. It must be their work. They shall pay for it, the young scamps, and so shall Ebden!” and, still shaking his stick, and in a towering rage, he went off to the school to interview its head.

“By George, the fat’s in the fire now!” cried Wheeler, with a laugh which was not altogether cheerful. “Phil, there’ll be an awful row. What shall we do?”

“Wait and see,” answered Phil easily. “We’ve had our joke, and a good one it was, and perhaps we shall have to pay for it.”

Meanwhile Mr Julius Workman had reached the school, and had asked for Mr Ebden. He was shown into the library, and there, as he waited and thought over the matter, his rage, instead of decreasing, grew even more violent, so that when the pleasant-faced little master entered, and in his cheery voice said, “Ah, Mr Workman! this is a pleasure I had not expected,” the stout old gentleman was beyond himself, and could scarcely speak.

“Pleasure, sir! Pleasure!” he spluttered at last. “It’s no pleasure to me, sir; let me tell you that. I have a serious complaint to make. What have you to say, sir?”

He stared at Mr Ebden as though the latter had had a hand in the prank.

“A complaint, Mr Workman? I don’t understand,” said Mr Ebden with astonishment.

“Yes, you do, sir; yes, you do,” the irate old gentleman shouted rudely. “Why don’t you look after your boys? I told you they were a nuisance, and now they’ve played a trick on me and ruined my statue of Hercules.”

When Mr Ebden had heard the full details of the prank he too was extremely angry, or pretended to be so, and at once accompanied Mr Workman to inspect the ruined statue. Then, with a heavy frown on his usually pleasant face, he returned and summoned all the boys before him. Mr Julius Workman was also present, and glowered round at them as though he would like to do everyone some mischief.

“You’ve got to find out who did it, or there’ll be trouble,” he remarked significantly to Mr Ebden, as the latter was about to speak.

Now, the boys at Ebden’s were, naturally, unaware of the peculiar reason their master had for keeping on good terms with “Old Bumble”, but this remark struck them as peculiar, and Phil, thinking it over, and being a quick-witted lad, grasped its meaning, and determined at once to give himself up.

“I’m the biggest fellow here,” he thought, looking round at his companions, “and though I’m not the eldest by some months, I’m usually the leader in these scrapes.”

“Boys,” said Mr Ebden severely, scrutinising each one of them in turn, and speaking slowly and distinctly, “a foolish and most objectionable prank has been played upon one of the statues in the gardens. Mr Workman declares that one of you is guilty. Is this so?”

“Of course it is,” grunted “Old Bumble” angrily. “What’s the good of asking if they did it? Of course they did!”

Mr Ebden took no notice of the interruption, but looked at his pupils, who stared guiltily at one another, knowing well that each had been a party to the plot, and yet waiting for one to give the lead before the others acknowledged.

Phil stepped forward in front of his comrades, and with upright head, and eyes fixed straight on Mr Ebden’s, said:

“Yes, sir, it is so. I tarred and feathered the statue, and I’m sorry Old B – Mr Workman – is so angry.”

“Old B! What did the scamp almost call me?” shouted Mr Workman, working himself into another rage. “You are a scamp, sir, and a disgrace to the school!”

“I am sorry, sir,” Phil said again. “I did it for a joke only, and now I’ll clean the statue if Mr Ebden will allow me.”

But this was out of the question. The boys were dismissed, and a long conversation ensued between Mr Ebden and the irate old gentleman. After that work proceeded as usual, but, knowing that it was Mr Ebden’s invariable rule to allow twenty-four hours to elapse before deciding upon the punishment for any serious offence, Phil did not permit his hopes to rise, or imagine that he was to get off easily.

And, as it turned out, he was right. After mature consideration Mr Ebden summoned the boys, and having read them a lecture, gave Phil the severest caning he had ever experienced in his life, all of which that high-spirited lad bore without so much as a whimper. Then he punished somewhat more mildly the three others who had helped in the prank, and who, not to be behindhand or allow one to suffer for the fault of all, had addressed a note to the headmaster the previous evening confessing their guilt.

“I cannot tell you how annoyed I am,” said Mr Ebden in cold tones, which hurt his pupils far more than the cane. “You have aided and abetted one another in destroying a work of art, and you have deeply offended one with whom it was a matter of policy for me to be on good terms. Those four who did the actual tarring will have to pay for another statue out of their own pockets, and I shall communicate with their parents. Now you may go, and let there be no more of this foolishness.”

Chapter Three. Out into the World

Letters did not travel so rapidly in the year 1850 as nowadays, and the fact that a week elapsed between the despatch of Mr Ebden's note and its receipt at the vicarage at Riddington was not a matter to lead to abuse of the postal authorities; for the town in which Mr Western lived was somewhat remote, and well away from the main line, and epistles which were addressed to its residents usually lay for a day or more at a post-office twenty miles away, from which they were removed at most twice a week. However, arrive the letter did at last, and Mr Western, gloomier and more severe if possible than ever, sat in his study reading it for the second time.

"Look at that," he said icily, tossing it across to Joe, who stood in his favourite position, leaning against the mantel-piece, with his hands beneath the tails of his coat.

"Humph! The young rascal!" Joe exclaimed with a chuckle, as soon as he had glanced through it. "Got himself into trouble, and his master too. Young donkey! Mischievous young donkey, that's what he is, Edward; and now he won't have a penny to bless himself with till his share of the statue is paid for." Then aside to himself he muttered as he helped himself to snuff: "Humph! Must send him a tip. A few shillings are always welcome to a school-boy."

Mr Western stared gloomily at the fire and kept silent for a minute or more. Then, bringing his hand down heavily upon the table, he exclaimed fretfully: "The boy worries me. What makes him wish to play these pranks? I have done my best, and so has your sister. He has had warning enough, and surely ought to keep out of these troubles. I believe he is wilfully mischievous, yes wilfully mischievous, and a bad boy at heart, and I will have no more to do with him. I will give him one more start, and leave him to make his way in the world as best he can. If he fails then he must look to himself, and thank himself alone for the trouble he has fallen into."

Joe started and looked uneasily at his brother-in-law.

"Nonsense, Edward! Nonsense!" he said sharply. "I cannot make you out; and, to be perfectly candid, you are as much a mystery to me as the lad seems to be to you. Cannot you understand that he is simply full of spirit, and though, no doubt, he is sorry afterwards for the pranks he plays, yet they are the result of thoughtlessness and an abundance of good health and animal spirits? Bless my life! where would England have been but for lads of his nature? A sunny, cheerful lad he is, and I tell you plainly you do him an injustice when you say he is bad at heart. Look at the letter again. Doesn't Mr Ebden admit that he owned up like a gentleman? What more do you want? Would you have the boy a girl?"

Joe snorted indignantly, and blew his nose so violently that Mr Western started.

"The misunderstanding is not on my side," he retorted. "I who have watched him all these years should know; and it is you, Joseph, who have helped to ruin him. You have egged him on, and now, when he should be quiet and steady, he is simply unmanageable. But we will not wrangle about the matter. Philip shall leave Mr Ebden's house at the end of this term, and shall take a position as clerk in the office of a friend of mine. After that he must look to himself, for I will have no more to do with him."

"Then I tell you the lad will not submit to your proposal," Joe said hotly. "He is too free and easy to love one of your offices, and is not the one to sit down tamely and have his spirit broken by long hours of monotonous drudgery, paid for at a rate which would disgust the average workman. But I will say nothing to dissuade him, though, mark my words, he will disappoint you again; and then, if he is thrown on the world, I will look after him. It is not for me, Edward, to remind you of your responsibilities to Phil. You took him from the gutter, as I have often heard you say, and it is your duty to bear with him, however troublesome he may be. When he reaches man's age he will be

well able to look to himself, but till then he is a boy, just as thoughtless and high-spirited as I was, and his pranks should not be treated as the deeds of a criminal.

“He got into mischief at Riddington High School, and you were asked to remove him, not only that the discipline of the school might not suffer, but also for the sake of the lad himself. By separating him from some high-spirited companions there was a better chance that they and he might settle down and become more sober, and the headmaster fully realised it. But why on that account you should send him to a school specially set aside for incorrigible lads passed my comprehension, and, as you will remember, did not meet with my approval. As a matter of fact Mr Ebden is a clever man, and took to leading and encouraging Phil instead of driving him. And now, merely because the foolish young fellow is dragged into another piece of mischief – innocent, clean-minded mischief, mind you – you would punish him severely, and possibly ruin his future by placing him in a position in which all his energies will be cramped, and from which he can scarcely hope to rise. I call it a short-sighted policy, and most unfair treatment of the boy.”

Joe once more dipped into his snuff-box, blew his nose loudly, and then, seeing that his brother-in-law did not intend to reply, sniffed loudly and stumped out of the room. A month later, when the end of the term arrived, Phil did not return to Riddington for the holidays, but instead took his box to a dingy lodging in the heart of the city, and straightway set to work at his new duties.

Mr Western had written a cold and reproving letter to him, warning him that this was the last he could do for him; while Joe had sent him a few characteristic lines telling him to do his best, and never to forget that he had one good friend in the world.

Determined to get on well if possible, Phil was most assiduous in his duties at the office, and took pains to master the writing put before him. His employer he saw little of, but whenever they met he was greeted politely, so that he had no cause to find fault in that direction. But lack of friends and lack of outdoor exercise soon told upon him. He lost his healthy looks and became pale and listless, for in those days cycling was not in vogue, and it was seldom that a city clerk was able to shake the soot and dirt of the streets from him and get into the country.

“This won’t do,” thought Phil one evening as, chained to his desk on account of unusual business, he drove his pen till the figures were blurred and his fingers cramped. “If this is the life before me I had rather be a soldier or a sailor and earn my shilling a day, and a little adventure. Fellows have often told me that a steady young soldier is bound to rise, and if he works hard and has a little education, may even reach to commissioned rank. That takes years, of course, but supposing it took ten I should be better off than after spending the same time in this office. Larking has been here fifteen years, and look what he is!”

Phil raised his eyes from his work and stared thoughtfully at a bent and prematurely-aged man who sat on his right. “Yes, I’d sooner see the world and run the risk of losing my life in some far-off country than live to grow up like that,” he mused pityingly. “At any rate I’ll go and have a chat with Sergeant-major Williams.”

The latter was a veteran of the Foot Guards, who had long ago earned a pension, and now lived with his wife on the same landing as Phil.

“Tired of your job, lad, are you?” he remarked, when Phil entered his room that night, saying that he had come for a chat and some advice. “Well, now, I’m not greatly surprised; though, mind you, there’s many a poor starving chap as would only be too glad to step into your shoes. What chance has a youngster in the army, you ask? Every chance, sir; every chance. Look at me” – and the old soldier stood upright on the hearth-rug and threw out his chest, thereby showing the row of medals pinned to his waistcoat. “I was your age, my lad, when I first ’listed, and when I had got my uniform and stood on parade for the first time, trying to look as though I knew all about it, with my chest somewhere close to my back and my stomach showing well in front, why, the sergeant-major came along, and I thought to myself he must be the colonel, and miles and miles above me. I never guessed I’d reach his rank some day; but I did, sure enough, and steady, honest work, and being sober, was what lifted

me there. But you've got education, and that's the pull. I had to teach myself, and a precious grind it was; but with you it's different, and if you only keep out of scrapes you're certain to go up."

"But I'm always in trouble and scrapes of one sort or another; at least I was at school!" exclaimed Phil.

"Yes, I dare say you was, and a precious baby you would be if you hadn't been; but that sort of thing don't go down in the army. Discipline's discipline, and so long as you remember that, and the fact that you're filling a man's place and are no longer a school-boy, you're all right. Play your larks in the barrack-room as much as you like, and no one will mind; but never give cheek back to a non-commissioned officer as orders you to stop. It's mighty trying at times, I know. Some young chap as has just been made a corporal gets beyond himself, and pitches into you. Grin and bear it is what you've got to do, and that's discipline, and it's minding that will help you to get on."

"Then you think I shall do well to enlist?" asked Phil.

"Do well? Of course you will. Why, I'd sooner pick rags than be at the work you're at," answered the sergeant-major. "How much do you earn a week, my lad, if it isn't a rude question?"

"Ten shillings, and extra if I'm kept overtime," said Phil.

"Then you'll be no worse off in the army," exclaimed the old soldier. "A shilling a day, less washing, and your extra messing, is what you'll have, and it won't be long before you're receiving corporal's pay. Now think it over, lad. I've no wish to persuade you; but if you decide to 'list for the army, I'll put you in the way of joining the finest regiment in the world."

Phil thanked the sergeant-major, and retired to bed, only to lie awake thinking the matter over. By the following morning he had quite made up his mind to be a soldier, and went in to see his friend.

"Look here, sir," the latter exclaimed, flourishing a morning paper, "you've made up your mind to leave that musty office and join the army, but you're barely seventeen yet, you say. Now, I've something to propose, and something to show you. Before you 'list try what it's like to rough it amongst rough men and earn your own living. Here's an advertisement asking for hands in a kind of private zoo. I know the show, and a friend of mine, an old soldier like myself, is office-man, and keeps the books. Take a job there for a few months and see how you like the life, and then, if roughing it suits you, join the army. Even then you'll be too young; but you're big and strong, and a few months won't make a great deal of difference."

"But I know nothing about animals," said Phil doubtfully. "I've ridden a horse occasionally, and always had a dog when possible. What does the advertisement say? Surely far more experience than I have had is wanted?"

"Here you are, sir. Read it, and judge for yourself. It's as fine an offer, and as good an opportunity for you to see what life is in the rough, as you could wish for."

Phil took the paper and read:

Wanted, a few hands in a large private menagerie. Applicants must be young and active, prepared to make themselves useful in any way, and must not object to travelling.

Then it concluded by giving the address, which was in the suburbs of London.

"Well, what do you make of it?" asked the old soldier, who had watched his face closely all the time.

"It certainly reads in a most inviting manner," Phil replied hesitatingly; "but still I scarcely think it would suit me, for I really have had no experience to teach me how to make myself useful. I should be a raw hand who was always in the way, and should be dismissed before a week had passed."

"You've no need to worry about that, I can assure you, sir," the sergeant-major answered encouragingly. "My friend will see that you have a fair chance given you, and I'll wager that a fortnight will set you on your feet and make you as knowing as those who've been working a year and longer with the firm. Mind you, though, I've scarcely more than an idea what is really required. Anyone can make himself useful if shown the way, but there must be a lot of work that's difficult and p'raps dangerous. One thing I've learnt from Timms, and that is, that animals has to be taken by road to

various parties, and that means kind of camp or gipsy life at times. Now look you here, my lad. Just you go right off, read the 'vertisement again, and then think the matter over. It don't do to jump into these affairs, for you might find it a case of 'out of the frying-pan into the fire'. There's the place; top of the centre column. Come back this evening and tell me what you have decided on."

Phil did as the old soldier suggested. He took the paper to the office, and during the day thought the matter out, finally deciding to make the plunge and find out for himself what roughing it really meant.

"After all," he mused, as he absently traced lines and figures on the blotting-paper, "I shall be in just the position I might have occupied had not Father taken me from home. My mother was a poor widow, and long ago I should have had to earn my living and help to keep her too. I'll do it. I cannot put up with this office life. A few years later it might be different, but now it stifles me."

Many a wiseacre might shake his head at Phil's cogitations, and more emphatically still at his determination to abandon a certain livelihood for an extremely uncertain one. "Do not think of leaving the office," some would say, "till a better place offers itself"; or "Remain where you are till you are thoroughly acquainted with business life, and can command a higher salary." Certainly the majority would be strongly against his applying for the post proposed by the sergeant-major.

But deep in Phil's heart was a desire to show his adoptive parents that he had profited by their kindness, and was able to work his way up in the world. He knew that by leaving his present place he would give occasion for more disappointment; but then, after many a chat with others similarly situated, and being, for all his spirits, a thoughtful young fellow who looked to the future, he came to the conclusion that here he had no opportunity of rising. He knew that whenever a vacancy in some business house did occur there were plenty asking for it, and he knew, too, that without means at their disposal those who were selected had prospects none too brilliant. Many did rise undoubtedly from the office-stool to the armchair of the manager. But how many? Why should that good fortune come his way? No, in an office he felt like a canary in a cage; therefore he determined to forsake the life and seek one with more of the open air about it, and a spice of danger and hardship thrown in. Who could say that luck would not come his way? If it did, perhaps it would give him just that necessary heave which would enable him to set foot upon the first rung of the ladder which leads upward to honour and glory, and a position of standing in the world.

It was a brilliant prospect, and it must be admitted that Phil built many castles in the air. Yet for all that, once he had descended to *terra firma*, he plainly acknowledged to himself that plenty of hard work, plenty of rough and tumble, and no doubt a share of privation and hardship, must be faced before the height of his ambition could be reached.

"I've read the advertisement through," he said that evening, when once more seated in front of the sergeant-major, "and if you will introduce me to your friend I will apply for one of the vacant places. First of all, though, I should like to hear whether they will have me, and then I will give my present employer notice."

"Shake hands on it, lad! I'm glad you've decided, and I'll be hanged if you won't make a splendid workman, and one of these days as fine a soldier as ever stepped. Here's wishing you the best of luck. Now we'll go off to Timms right away and see what he has to say."

Accordingly the two started off, and in due time reached a big building in which the menagerie had its home. Phil was introduced to Timms, as fine an old soldier as the sergeant-major, and was greatly relieved to hear that his services would be accepted at fifteen shillings a week.

"Come in a week, when your notice is up," Timms said pleasantly, "and your job will be waiting for you. You'll look after the horses at first, and perhaps we'll give you one of the cages later on. You'll want rough clothes and strong boots, and, for sleeping, a couple of thick rugs. Get a bag to hold your kit, and that will do for your pillow as well. Set your mind easy, Williams. I'll look after the lad and see that he comes to no harm."

That day week Phil left the office on the expiration of his notice, having meanwhile written to Mr Western and to Joe. Then he returned to his room, packed the few valuables he possessed, and a couple of changes of clothing in a waterproof bag, and with this under one arm, and a roll of coarse blankets under the other, set out for the menagerie.

“That you, youngster?” Timms asked cheerily. “Pon my word I hardly expected you. Some fellows back out of a job like this at the last moment. But come along and I’ll show you where you will sleep, and who will be your mate. He’s a good fellow, and will show you the ropes.”

Passing outside the building, Timms led the way to a large yard at the back in which was an assortment of the caravans which usually accompany a circus.

“Jim!” he shouted. “Here, Jim, your new mate’s arrived. Show him round.”

A jovial and dirty face, with a two-days’ growth of beard upon it, was thrust out of a wagon, and a voice called out: “Come right in here, mate. Glad to see yer. Bring your togs along.”

Phil scrambled up the steep steps and into the wagon, where, having grasped the hand extended to him, he looked round with some curiosity, noticing with much interest the two neat little bunks, one above the other, at the farther end, the diminutive table close to one red-curtained window, and the stove on the other side, filled with paper shavings of all colours, and gold tinsel, with its chimney of brightly-polished brass.

“Queer little house, mate, ain’t it?” sang out the man who went by the name of Jim, busying himself with a pot of hot water and a shaving-brush and soap.

“Yes, I’ve never been in a van of this sort before,” said Phil. “It looks comfortable, and at any rate must be a good shelter on wet nights.”

“That it is, mate, and you’ll find it so precious soon. We start at daylight to-morrow on a long trip to the south, and I tell yer it’s mighty pleasant to know as there’s a warm fire, and a dry bed to get into, when the water’s coming down in buckets, and the wind’s that cold it freezes yer to the marrer.”

Phil noted every little article in the van, and listened to the scrape, scrape of the razor as Jim removed his bristles. When this operation was completed, Jim took him round the horses, and having initiated him into the mysterious duties of a stableman, invited him back to the wagon to tea.

“Timms and I sleep here,” he remarked, with his pipe firmly clenched between his teeth, “and you’ll put your rugs down on the floor. We’ll mess together, and you’ll find that five bob a week joined to our two fives will feed us well and leave the rest in our pockets. The other chaps has their own messes. I’ll take yer round to see them soon. They’re a queer lot; some has been sailors and soldiers, and some anything at all. Others has been at this game all their lives. You’ll learn to know them all in a few days, and I’ll give yer a hint – keep clear of the rowdy ones. They soon gets the sack, for the boss is very particular, and won’t have no drinking and such like goings-on.

“Now about your job. What do you know of animals, and what class are yer on top of a horse what ain’t ’xactly a camel?”

“I am sorry to say I am hopelessly ignorant of the first,” Phil answered. “I’ve ridden horses often, and can manage to keep in my saddle as a rule, but cannot boast that I am a good horseman.”

“Oh, you’ll do! besides, I can see you’re willing to learn and has got the grit to stick to things that might bother others of your sort. You’re to be my mate, and for a time, at any rate, we shall be on the move. The gent who runs this business keeps five and six such vans as this moving most of the year, besides the cages, of course, which follow.

“You see, agents in furrin parts collects lions and every sort of animal down to snakes, and sends them to England. No sooner does the ship come alongside the river dock than some of us are there with cages, mounted on wheels and drawn by horses. We unload the animals, slip ’em into the cage, and bring them here. A day or two later, perhaps a week, or even as long after as a month, someone wants one or other of them beasts, and arranges to buy him from the gov’nor. Then in he goes into the travelling-cage again, and off we take him to wherever he’s been ordered. Of course there’s railroads nowadays; but they are risky things at any time, and the wild beasts we deal in catch cold, and fall

sick so easy that it's been found cheaper and safer to take 'em by road. And a very pleasant life it is, to be sure. With two of us on the beat, and drawing our own house, we're as comfortable as chaps could wish for. Every day there's something different to look at and ask questions about, and every evening, when yer pull up on some wayside piece of ground and start to water and feed the animals, there's new scenery and new people around yer, the last always ready to be civil and polite. Yes, it's a free, easy life, with plenty of change and movement to make yer work come pleasant and light. You'll like it, lad. By the way – what's yer name? Ah, Philip Western! Well, Phil, I've told yer pretty nigh all I can think about. Timms and me start early to-morrow, as I told yer, so turn in soon to-night. We'll teach yer all yer want to know while on the road, and if yer only keeps yer eyes open you'll soon get a hold on the work." Jim nodded pleasantly, and having invited Phil to sit down for a short time and rest himself, he ran down the steps of the van and went to complete his daily work.

"Of course all this is very different from office life," mused Phil, looking round, and still finding many little things in the quaint travelling house to interest and amuse him, "I can see that any kind of work is expected of me, and I must not be afraid of dirtying my hands. A few months at this will show me whether or not I shall like the army, for I remember the sergeant-major told me that there too the men have numerous fatigues to do, cleaning barracks and quarters, carrying coal, and a hundred-and-one other things. Yes, I've come to rough it, and I'll do my utmost to prove useful. It seems, too, that this travelling with wild beasts is very much liked by the other men. It will be funny to be constantly on the move, and constantly seeing fresh places. Well, I think I shall like it. It will be what I have hankered after – an open-air life, – and since Jim is to be my companion I feel sure I shall be happy, for he looks an excellent fellow."

Indeed, though outwardly rough, Jim was a sterling good fellow, with a kind heart beating beneath his weather-stained jacket. Already he had taken a liking to Phil, and seeing that he was altogether different from the new hands usually employed, and moreover having heard something of his story from Timms, he determined to look after his charge and make life as pleasant for him as possible.

That evening the three who were to be companions supped at a little coffee-stall standing close outside the menagerie, and, having returned to the van, indulged in a chat before turning-in. Then Jim and the old soldier Timms climbed into their bunks, while Phil spread his blankets on the floor, and with his kit-bag beneath his head soon fell asleep, to be wakened, however, every now and again by the roaring of a big African lion, which had arrived two days before, and was caged close at hand.

Day had scarcely dawned when Jim turned over in his bunk, yawned loudly, and, sitting up with a start, consulted a silver watch, of the proportions of a turnip, which dangled from the arched roof of the van. "Five o'clock, and not a soul stirring!" he cried. "Up, up yer get, all of yer. Look lively now, or else we'll be moving before we've had a morning meal."

"What! Time for breakfast! Hullo, where am I?" cried Phil, sitting up with a start and staring round in bewilderment. Then the truth dawned upon him, and, throwing off his blankets, he rose to his feet.

"What orders, Jim?" he asked.

"Come along with me, Phil. That's the orders. Timms'll see to the breakfast, while you and me looks to the horses."

Hurriedly throwing on their coats – for they had discarded nothing more when they turned in on the previous night – they ran down the steps to the stables, where they found other men at work busily grooming their animals. Instructed by Jim, Phil started with a brush upon the smooth coat of a fine draught horse which was to form one of their team. From that he went to another, while Jim looked to the other two. That done the animals were fed, and while Phil returned to the van Jim went to see that the lion they were to transport was safely caged and fed in preparation for the journey.

Meanwhile Timms had not been idle. As Phil reached the van he emerged from a doorway opposite, bearing a kettle, from the spout of which a cloud of steam was puffing. Already he had

placed a rough folding-table on the ground, and now he proceeded to infuse the tea. Then he dived into the van, to reappear immediately with plates and knives and enough cups and saucers. Ten minutes later Jim had returned, and, sitting down, the three hastily swallowed thick slices of bread and butter, washing them down with cups of steaming tea.

“That’ll keep us quiet for a few hours, I reckon,” exclaimed Jim, jumping to his feet and hastily filling a pipe in preparation for a morning smoke. “Now, young un, you and me’ll slip off and harness the horses, while our mate cleans up the breakfast things.”

Half an hour later two fine horses had been yoked to the van, while another pair had been harnessed to the large boxed-in cage on wheels, which enclosed the magnificent animal they were to transport. A sack of corn was placed on the van, and a large joint of horse-flesh hung beneath, and then, fully prepared for the journey, the gates were thrown open, and with nodded adieus from the other hands they issued from the yard and took the road for Brighton, Jim driving the horses in the van, with Phil by his side, while Timms went in front in charge of the lion. Trundling over the London cobbles they crossed one of the bridges, and before very long were out of the great city and enjoying to the full the sunshine and sweet breath of the country.

Chapter Four. A Gallant Deed

The outdoor life agreed with Phil thoroughly, and he had scarcely been with the menagerie a month before all his paleness had disappeared, and he felt and looked in the best of health.

Constantly accompanying Jim and the old soldier upon some journey, the beginning of one week would find them at some sunny spot on the southern sea-coast, while at the end they would be slowly trudging to the north, having called *en route* at the headquarters in London, there to take possession of some other animal. And while they carried out this work others did the same, for the menagerie was a large and profitable concern. At the London headquarters there were cages and houses innumerable, in which the various animals were kept. But seldom indeed was any particular one a tenant of his cage for more than a fortnight, for, much to Phil's surprise, the demand for lions, tigers, and other wild beasts was extraordinarily large. Now it was a zoological garden that wished to replace the loss of one of its show animals, and now some wealthy nobleman with a fancy for a private menagerie. Then, too, demands came from the Continent, and had to be attended to. The animals were placed in well-built, warm, but properly ventilated cages, capable of being lifted from their wheels if necessary, and in these they journeyed by road to their several destinations. In no case was the railroad used, for it was as yet very far from attaining to its present efficiency, and experience had taught the owner of the menagerie that beasts from foreign parts required to be treated like hot-house flowers, and protected from the chills and biting winds met with in England.

Two months and more passed pleasantly, and by that time Phil was quite accustomed to his work, and moreover, from frequent calls at the menagerie in London, had met all the other hands.

"I like the life immensely, and am sure it agrees with me," he answered with enthusiasm one day when Jim suddenly turned upon him and asked him the question. "I earn more than I did some weeks ago, and in a very pleasant manner compared with the other employment. Besides, I have been amongst a number of working men and find that I can rub shoulders with them and not quarrel. It is just what I wanted to know, and now that I have had the experience I shall not be long in leaving this employment and enlisting in the army."

"You must do just as you like there, lad," replied Jim briskly. "Each chap settles that kind of thing for himself. For my part, though, I've been too long and too contented at this here work to want to change."

And indeed there was no doubt that Jim enjoyed his life to the full. A contented and merry fellow, he was just the one to make his companions look upon the bright side of things. Not that Phil was ever inclined to do otherwise. Up at daylight, as blithe as a lark, he was off with the horses to the nearest water so soon as the sun had lifted the mist from the ground. Then, tethering them to the wagon shafts again, he would slip off the thick rugs which covered them and groom them thoroughly, all the while giving vent to that peculiar "hiss" which seems necessary for this purpose, in a way that would have aroused the envy of many a stable lad.

That done, the canvas bin that stretched from the tip of the shaft was filled with corn, and while the sleek-coated animals set to work to consume it, Phil produced an iron tripod, gathered a pile of sticks, and set them alight. A box placed in proper position kept the breeze away on a gusty day, and in a twinkling, it seemed, the kettle above was singing, and a jet of white steam blowing into the cool morning air.

Now came the time he enjoyed most of all. Armed with a frying-pan, he sat down to prepare rashers of bacon, and if it were an extraordinary day, possibly eggs too. A shout would rouse Jim and the old soldier, and in five minutes the folding-table was set up, the tea made, and all three heartily devouring their breakfast.

“We might be in Ameriky, or some such place,” remarked Jim one morning. “It’s a treat being in the country this fine weather, and it does yer good to get up early and prepare yer own grub.”

“A precious lot of preparing you do, I notice,” laughed Timms. “Why, ever since Phil joined us he’s done all that.”

“You’ve got me there, mate, I owns,” Jim grinned. “The young un’s a beggar to work, and saves us a deal of trouble. Before he come I used to act as cook. Now I lies abed and takes it easy, as I ought to, on account of my age.”

Phil joined heartily in the laugh, for he knew well how Jim and Timms could work. As to his own share, he was glad to have plenty to do, and especially when he found he could help his two comrades, who had shown themselves such excellent fellows.

Phil liked the majority of those he met at the menagerie in London, and as for himself the other hands soon took his measure, and readily acknowledged that he was a hard-working and straight lad, willing to be friends with all. A few, however, were of the opposite opinion. There was a small clique of rowdy fellows who took an instant dislike to Phil, probably because, seeing what they were, he held aloof from them, and these, and in particular one of them, set themselves to make things unpleasant for him.

“Ought to ha’ been a lord or summat of the sort,” this worthy sneered one day as Phil passed the doorway round which they were lounging. “Thinks he owns the show – that’s what it is. I’ll take the gent down; see if I don’t, and right away too. Hi, you, Phil Western, or whatever’s yer name,” he shouted, “come here! I want to speak to yer. Now look here, Mr Dook, you’re a pretty fine bird, but where do you come from? That’s what we’re arter. Chaps of your sort don’t take to being hands in a menagerie every day, and that’s the truth, I reckon. I suppose yer wanted to hide away. That’s it, ain’t it?”

Now Phil had often been annoyed by this same young man, who went by the name of “Tony”, and in particular by the jeering way in which he shouted names and various other pleasantries after him every time he happened to pass.

“You want to know where I come from,” he replied calmly, standing close to the circle. “Then I’m afraid you will have to want.”

“Eh! What! Have to want, shall I?” Tony growled. “Now none of yer cheek. You’re too proud, that’s what you are, my young peacock, and you’ve got to get taken down.”

“That’s possible,” Phil rejoined, and was on the point of turning away to avoid a quarrel when the pleasant Tony sprang to his feet and shouting “Possible! Should just about think it is!” grasped him by the arm and swung him round till they faced one another.

“Leave go!” cried Phil, losing his temper.

“Sha’n’t till I’ve took yer down,” Tony snapped.

“Then take that!” and Phil dashed his fist into the young man’s face.

A scuffle at once ensued, and after a short and fiercely contested round, a ring was formed. But at this moment the owner of the menagerie put in an appearance and stopped the fight, with the natural result that there was bad blood between Phil and Tony from that day, and the latter never ceased to vow that he would have an ample revenge for the black eye he had received.

Now Tony had another disagreeable trait. Besides being a bully, he was also cruel, and took every opportunity of teasing a big brown bear which happened to be his special charge. The more Bruin snarled and showed his teeth, the harder Tony prodded him with his stick, till at times the poor beast was almost mad with rage. It was a dangerous game to play, and could have but one ending, and that was within an ace of being a fatal one for Tony.

It happened upon a day when Phil and his two companions had returned to London and were enjoying a well-earned rest after a few longer tramps than usual. By the merest chance, too, it was a holiday in the menagerie, for some valuable animals had recently arrived, and in consequence,

the wives and children and other relatives of the various hands had gathered, by the owner's special request, to have tea with their friends and see the wild beasts in their new home.

Phil was sitting in the van with Jim, sipping a cup of tea, and quite unaware of the fact that Tony was engaged in his usual practice of stirring up the bear for his own amusement and to excite the fear of a few by-standers.

Suddenly there was a snarl, a crash, and the sound of breaking woodwork, and then shrieks of terror and the noise of a wild stampede.

"What's that? Something's up," cried Phil, and springing down the steps he ran towards the spot where the animals were kept.

A fearful sight met his eye, for the end of the flimsy cage in which Bruin was kept a prisoner was splintered, and close beside it. Tony lay motionless, and full length upon the ground, with the bear crouching over him and clutching his head with a paw armed with murderous-looking claws.

Not a soul was near, for all had fled for their lives. As Phil ran forward, the enraged animal crouched lower over its victim, and snarled fiercely, showing a row of teeth and gums.

"Help, Jim! The bear is killing Tony," shouted Phil, turning his head for a moment, but still running towards the scene of the conflict.

As he passed a wagon he snatched up a long pitchfork. Rushing at the bear, which reared itself on end, Phil swung the fork above his head and brought it down with a smash on the animal's nose, shouting at the same time in the hope of frightening it.

But Bruin was thoroughly aroused, and, stung to further anger by the tap upon his head, he darted from the prostrate man and came open-mouthed at Phil.

It was a terrifying sight, and many another might have taken to his heels and not been called a coward. But Phil's mouth hardened till it was a thin, straight line. Standing with his feet planted wide apart, and the fork well in front of him, he kept his ground and lunged at the animal with all his might, driving the prongs well into its chest.

There was a roar of pain and anger, and Bruin drew back for a moment, but only to rise upon his hind-legs and advance with arms ready to crush the life out of Phil's body, and gleaming teeth with which to tear his flesh.

On he came, and, waiting his time, Phil once more plunged the prongs deep into his chest, where they remained fast. A second later the bear had shattered the pole with his paw, and, rushing at his enemy, had beaten him to the ground and fallen upon him – dead.

It was a narrow shave, as Jim remarked.

"You're the biggest, yes, the biggest idiot I ever see, young un," he said severely, as Phil lay in his bunk. "Here you go and attack a bear as is always pretty wild, and only with a thing as is little better than a toothpick. I can't make yer out. If it was me as was laid under that there beast I might see some reason for it, though even then you'd be pretty mad, I reckon; but when it's Tony, who's always a-naggin' at yer, why, it fairly does for me."

"I didn't think of that, though," answered Phil cheerfully, for by a piece of good fortune he had escaped with a severe shaking and a fright. "There was the bear killing someone, and I was the first on the spot and therefore bound to do something."

"Get on with yer! Bound to do something! Yes, it's run away most of us would do – least – I don't know, though; I expects we'd have had a try to drive the brute off. But for you, a kid like you, Phil, to tackle the job all alone, and with only a pitchfork too, why, it just knocks all the stuffin' out of me. Give us yer flipper, mate. You're a true un, and don't you go a-telling me yer didn't know it was Tony as lay there. I heard yer shout it. So no more of them fibs."

Jim got quite indignant, and then shook Phil's hand, squeezing it so hard that he could have shouted with the pain.

"And that chap Tony's goin' to live too," he went on. "If he don't say summat out o' the ord'nary, blest if I won't set to work and give him the biggest hidin' he ever had. That is, when he's strong

again. Now, young un, turn over and get to sleep. You've had a roughish time, and a go of grog ain't sufficient to pull yer round."

Phil obediently curled himself up and promptly fell asleep, but only to dream that it was Joe Sweetman who lay helpless upon the ground, while the figure that was crouching over him, and that rushed at himself when he ran to the rescue, was none other than "old Bumble", rendered furious by the joke played upon his statue. It was an awful moment when Phil plunged the fork into the old gentleman's massive chest, and so upset him that he awoke, to find himself drenched with perspiration, but decidedly better for all that, while through the open door he could see Jim, pipe in mouth and in his shirt sleeves, squatting over the fire and preparing breakfast.

Another month passed, making the third that Phil had spent in his new employment, and ending also his seventeenth year. Short as the time had been it had done much for him. He had filled out a little, and though his face was still that of a boy, his limbs and body were big, so that, if he could only pass inspection, he was quite fitted to take his place in the ranks as a full-grown man. By this time he had completed a long journey into the country, and having returned to London with Jim and the old soldier, he was not long in looking up his friend, Sergeant-major Williams.

"Back again, sir, and filled out and healthier-looking, too! How do you like the life?" the latter exclaimed.

"I never spent a better or more profitable three months, never in my life," said Phil emphatically. "We've had grand weather, and always fresh scenery. The work was not too hard, and my comrades were all that I could wish for. In addition, I have saved close upon five pounds, which was simply impossible when I was living here."

"Ah, glad you like it, lad! But I thought you would; and now I suppose you'll be off again soon?"

"Yes, but not with the van and my old comrades," said Phil. "The best I can do there is to become a foreman in charge of a number of cages. I mean to enlist and try my fortune in the army."

"Bless the lad!" exclaimed the sergeant-major. "He's as long-headed as a lawyer, and always thinking of the future. But you couldn't do better than that. Keep it always in your mind's eye and you'll get on. Now, what regiment will you go for? I'm from the Guards, and of course I say there's none to beat them. It's the truth too, as others can tell you."

"I've been thinking it over," Phil answered, "and I have decided to become a Grenadier – one of the old Grenadiers."

The sergeant-major's features flushed, and he looked not a little flattered, for he too was one of the Grenadier Guards, and he knew it was because of his connection with it that Phil had decided to enlist in that regiment.

"You couldn't do better, sir," he exclaimed, "and what's more, by joining them I'll be able to make your start easier. I am not so old but that some of the non-commissioned officers – N.C.O.'s as we call 'em – remember Owen Williams. I've many a pal there, and as soon as you're ready I'll take you right along to the barracks and see you 'listed myself."

A day was fixed, and having learned a few more details, Phil returned to his friends. The latter were genuinely sorry to hear that he was to go, and of all, Jim was perhaps the saddest.

"No one to cook the breakfast no more, now you're off, young un," he said, with a ring of true regret in his voice. "Never mind; that chap Tony's come back, and I'll turn him on to the job. If he kicks there'll be trouble, and then I'll do as I promised yer."

But Jim was disappointed. For three weeks Tony had lain in bed at a hospital, and for the first six days it was a matter of life and death. The bear's claws had lacerated his scalp so severely that it was a wonder he survived. But by dint of careful nursing he recovered, and on the very day that Phil had been to see the sergeant-major he returned to the menagerie. But he was a changed man. A double escape from death had cured him of his rowdiness, and when he came towards Phil shamefacedly, offering his hand as though he could not expect it to be shaken, he was filled with deep gratitude for the truly gallant deed that had saved his life.

Phil clutched the hand extended and shook it heartily.

“Ah, sir!” Tony blurted out, with tears in his eyes, “I’ve been a real brute, and no one knows it better nor myself. But yer saved my life, Phil Western, yer did, and I ain’t ungrateful. If you’d left me to be torn to pieces it was only what I deserved, for we wasn’t the best of friends, and a chap as can torment a dumb animal must expect something back in the end. And now, sir, I hear you’re going, and if you’ll let me I’ll come too.”

“Nonsense, Tony!” Phil exclaimed. “You’ve got a good job, and had better stick to it.”

“I had one, but I ain’t now, Phil,” Tony replied dolefully. “The boss give me the sack, saying I’d cost him a good fifty pounds by causing the death of the bear. So I’m out of work now, and if you’re for a soldier, as they tell me, why, so am I too; and I tell yer I’ll stick to yer like a true ’un if you’ll let me come, and one day when you’re an officer I’ll be yer servant.”

Phil laughed good-naturedly, and flushed red when he saw that here was one who thought it was within the bounds of possibility that he would attain to the status of officer.

“It will be a long time before I shall be that, Tony,” he said, with a smile; “but if you really have made up your mind to be a soldier, come with me. There’s been bad blood between us up to this, but now we’ll be good friends and help one another along.”

“Ah, we’ll be friends, sir, good friends too! I’ve had my lesson, and I sha’n’t need another. I’ve acted like a brute up to this, but now I mean to be steady, and I mean to show yer too that I ain’t bad altogether.”

Phil was astonished at the turn matters had taken; but he recognised that Tony had really made up his mind to reform, and at once determined to help him to adhere to that resolution.

“Very well, Tony,” he said, “we’ll enlist together. My month is up to-morrow, and on the following day we’ll take the shilling. I’m going to join the Grenadier Guards.”

“Grenadier Guards or any Guards for me, Phil. It don’t make a ha’porth of difference so far as I’m concerned. Just fix what it’s to be, and I’ll be there with yer.”

“Then it’s settled, Tony. We’re for the Guards. Come to the house where Sergeant-major Williams lives, at nine o’clock the day after to-morrow.”

They shook hands, as though to seal the compact, and separated, Phil returning to the van, where he spent part of the day in writing to Mr Western and to Joe, informing them of the step he was taking. To his previous letter Mr Western had deigned no answer, for he was thoroughly upset by its contents, and from that day firmly resolved never again to have any dealings with his adopted son. He was an utter failure and a scamp, and it only needed Joe Sweetman’s efforts to defend him to settle the matter.

“It is just what I told you would happen,” Joe had said defiantly. “The lad has spirit, and far from being the rogue you think him, is filled with the desire to see life and make his way in the world. I am not a great judge of character, but if ever there was a youth unfitted for office life, that one is Phil. You have only yourself to thank after all. You have endeavoured to force a profession on him, whereas you should have given the lad an opportunity of selecting one for himself. Mark my words, Edward: Phil will live to do well and be a credit to you, and one of these days you will acknowledge that the step he is taking now was a good one and for the best. Now I’ll write to him, and give him a few words of advice.”

And this Joe did, sending a characteristic letter, written not to damp Phil’s hopes, but to encourage him, and let him see that there was one old friend at least who still thought well of him.

Find your own place in the world, Phil, he wrote; and if it is a good one, as I feel sure it will be, there is one who will be proud of you. You start in the ranks, and so fall into discredit among your friends. You are on the lowest rung; stick to it, and we will see where you come out. Meanwhile, my lad, I will send you ten shillings a week, paid every month in advance. You will find it a help, for soldiers want spare cash as well as other people.

At last the morning arrived for Phil and Tony to enlist, and, attended by the sergeant-major, they made their way to Wellington Barracks. Both felt somewhat nervous and bashful, especially when they passed the sentries at the gate.

“My eye!” exclaimed Tony in a whisper, “what swells them coves look! Shall we wear them hats, do yer think?”

“Of course you will,” the sergeant-major, who had overheard the remark, replied. “That is the Guards’ bearskin, and you’ll learn to be proud of it yet. It’s a grand head-dress, and there isn’t another half as good; at least that’s what I think, though chaps in other regiments would stick up for theirs in just the same way. And you’ll find, too, that the forage-cap with the red band round it, that’s worn well over the right ear – well over, mind you, youngsters – is as taking a thing as was ever invented.”

Phil and Tony both agreed, for the men walking about in uniform with forage-caps on did look smart and well dressed.

“Now here we are at the orderly-room,” said the old soldier, a moment later. “Wait a moment and I’ll speak to the sergeant-major.”

Phil and Tony stood looking with interest across the parade-ground. Then they suddenly heard a voice say in a room at the door of which they were waiting: “Two recruits, and likely-looking fellows, I think you said, sergeant-major? March them in.”

A moment later a big man with bristling moustache, and dressed in a tight-fitting red tunic, came to the door, and in a voice that made Phil and Tony start, and which could easily have been heard across the square, exclaimed: “Now, you two, get together; yes, just like that. Right turn! Quick march!”

It was a new experience, but Phil, who stood nearest the door, carried out the order smartly, and, snatching his hat from his head, followed the sergeant-major. A moment later they were standing in front of a table covered with green baize, and with a number of books and blue papers all neatly arranged upon it. Behind it sat an officer, dressed in a dark-blue uniform, with braided front, and a peaked cap encircled with a dark band and bearing a miniature grenade in front. It was the adjutant, and he at once cross-questioned the new recruits.

“Both of you have been in a menagerie,” he remarked with some astonishment, “but surely you – and he pointed towards, Phil – have had some education?”

“Yes, sir, I have been to a good school,” Phil answered, “and before I joined the menagerie I was a clerk in an office for a short time.”

“Ah, just the kind of man we want!” exclaimed the officer. “And both of you wish to enlist in the Grenadier Guards? Very well; send them across to the doctor’s.”

“Right turn! Quick march!” The words almost made Tony jump out of his skin, but he and Phil obeyed them promptly, and next moment were breathing a trifle more freely in the open air. A corporal was now sent for, and he conducted them across to another room. Here they were told to strip, and a few minutes later were ushered into an inner room, in which were the regimental doctor and a sergeant who sat with a book before him. Phil and Tony were sounded and thumped all over, and then told to hop up and down the floor. They swung their arms round their heads till they were red in the face, and swung their legs to and fro to show that they had free movement of their joints. Then their eyes were tested, and these and their hearing having proved satisfactory, they were declared fit for the army, and were told to dress themselves.

“What’s coming next, Phil?” whispered Tony, with a chuckle. “We’ve been interviewed – or whatever they calls it – by the officer, and now we’ve been punched all over, like folks used to do with that prize mare the boss in the old show was so fond of.”

“Wait and see,” Phil answered, for he too was wondering what their next experience would be.

They had not long to wait. The same corporal who had conducted them before took them round to the back of the building, up a steep flight of stairs, and showed them into the quarter-master’s stores. And here they spent almost an hour, during which time a complete set of uniform, with the

exception of a bearskin, was served out to each of them. Their civilian clothing was then taken from them and safely packed away, and feeling remarkably queer, and uncertain how to carry the smart little cane which had been given them, they were marched away to the barrack-room, heads in air and chests well to the front, as every new recruit does when in uniform for the first time, and trying to look as though they were well used to their new circumstances, whereas every man they passed grinned, and, nudging his comrade, chuckled: “New uns! Look at the chest that redheaded cove’s got on ’im, and don’t the other hold his nose up?” or something equally flattering.

But Phil and Tony were blissfully ignorant of these facetious remarks, and in a few minutes had reached the room in which they were to sleep, and had taken possession of their cots.

The following day they were once more inspected by the adjutant, and under his eye the regimental tailor chalk-marked their clothing where alterations were to be made.

In due time both settled down to their new duties and began to learn their drill on the parade-ground. A few days, and they lost all the slovenliness of recruits and held themselves erect. Soon they were as smart as any, and an old friend of Phil’s, looking at him now, with his forage-cap jauntily set over his ear, his tight-fitting tunic and belt, and the swagger-cane beneath his arm, would scarcely have recognised him, so much had he altered. But had he only asked Tony, he would quickly have learnt the truth.

“Yus, that’s Phil Western, you bet!” the latter would exclaim; “and I tell yer what it is, that young chap is downright the smartest lad in this lot of recruits, and that’s saying a deal, as you’ll agree if you’ll only take a look at ’em.”

So thought Joe Sweetman too, when he visited London on one occasion and looked his young friend up. “He’s every inch a soldier,” he exclaimed admiringly to Mr Western, on his return to Riddington. “As smart and good-looking a fellow as ever I saw; and that lad means to get on and do well. Mark my words! That’s what he means, and he’ll do it too, or I’m a donkey.”

Chapter Five. A Step in Rank

Whether or not honest kind-hearted old Joe Sweetman was a donkey was yet to be proved, as the reader will ascertain for himself if he will only have patience to bear with the narrative till the end; but certain it was that Joe and Tony were not alone in thinking well of Phil.

“He’s a likely youngster,” the adjutant had more than once remarked to the colonel, “and he’ll make an excellent N.C.O. once he has sufficient service. He’s well educated, and always well-behaved, and with your permission, Colonel, I will give him a trial in the orderly-room.”

“Do just as you like,” the latter had answered. “I leave these matters in your hands; only, if you make him a clerk, do not take him altogether from his other duties. He might lose his smartness in the ranks, and what I want is not alone N.C.O.’s who can write well, but men who can be an example to the others, and, above all, have authority over them. Keep your eye on the lad, and let me know how he gets on.”

“Certainly, sir. I’ll see how he performs his duties, and mention the subject to you another day.”

Phil had thus already attracted attention, and a hint to that effect, passed from the sergeant-major through the colour-sergeant to himself, encouraged him to persevere in his drill. Not long afterwards the battalion received orders to proceed to Windsor, and there relieve another of the Guards regiments. By that time Phil and Tony had completed their recruits’ course, and had taken their places in a company of the regiment.

“We couldn’t ha’ been luckier, Phil, could we?” remarked Tony, with a grunt of satisfaction, as the two stood on the parade-ground waiting for the bugle to sound the “Fall in”. “I said weeks back as I’d stick to yer through thick and thin, and here we are, yer see, both in the same company, and always falling-in alongside of one another. But it won’t last long, mate, and don’t you go for to try and make believe it will. I ain’t so blind as I can’t see that before long you’ll wear a corporal’s stripes. All the fellers says the same, and it’s bound to be true.”

“I must say I hope it will,” Phil replied cheerfully. “It is my aim and object to become an N.C.O. But we needn’t think of parting, Tony. We’ll still be in the same company, and if we don’t stand side by side, we shall be close together in the barrack-room. Besides, you may get the stripes sooner than I.”

“Me, mate? That’s a good un! There ain’t a chance.”

“You never know, Tony; and although it seems far away now, it will come, especially if you always keep out of trouble, as you have done up to this.”

“Yus, it might,” Tony agreed, after a long pause. “Every chap gets a chance, they say, and I’ll see if I can’t win them stripes just to show yer, Phil, that I’ve stuck to me oath. And it won’t be getting into trouble as will lose ’em for me. I used to be a regular wild un, but I’ve given that up months ago; besides, I heerd Sergeant Irving a-saying only a few days ago that the chap as was quiet was bound to get on. ‘What’s the good of larking about as some of these idjuts do?’ he says. ‘Them as drinks is certain to get into trouble, and come before the colonel, and what good does it do ’em? They loses their chance of promotion, and they ruins their health. Besides that, they goes down the quickest when the troops is on active service.’”

“Yes, that is very true, I believe,” Phil answered. “But to return to the stripes. You must win them, Tony, and if only you stick to your work I am sure you will succeed. Then in the course of time you’ll be made sergeant, and later perhaps become sergeant-major. What a fine thing it would be! You would have a good pension to look forward to, and one of these days could end your service while still a young man, but with the comfortable feeling that you were provided for for life.”

“Hum! that’s flying away to the skies, mate,” Tony chuckled, “but there’s plenty of time to see, and – look up! there goes the bugle.”

Both lads fell in with their company, now dressed in all the pride of bearskins and whitened belts and pouches, and having been duly inspected, marched stiffly erect out through the barrack-gate, up Sheet Street, and into the famous old castle.

Many a time did Phil stand motionless by his sentry-box, looking over the terrace-wall at a scene not to be surpassed in any other quarter of Her Majesty's wide dominions – the green fields of Berkshire, with old Father Thames winding hither and thither amongst them, now flowing placidly along between banks of shimmering corn and grass, and anon swirling past with a splash and a gurgle which broke up the reflections of boats and houses brightly mirrored on its surface. Then, sloping his gun, he would march across in front of the terrace gardens and the windows of the royal apartments, and, turning his eyes in the opposite direction, admire the three miles of absolutely straight and undulating road, lined on either side by its double row of grand old oaks and beeches, and ending in a green knoll, surmounted by a pile of masonry, on which is set a large equestrian statue familiarly known as “the Copper Horse”. Away on either side the wide stretches of the park would attract his attention, while far beyond the town, appeared the faint blue and reddish band which marks the position of Windsor Forest.

Many times, too, whilst on sentry-go, did he stand as rigid as his own ramrod, heels close together, and gun at the “present”, as the Queen and the Prince Consort with their children sauntered by. He had even exchanged words with them, for, attracted by his height, and possibly persuaded by the pleading of the infant princes, the Prince had stopped in front of our hero and questioned him as to his age and his parentage. The remarkable manner in which he had been adopted appealed to their curiosity, and before long they had learned Phil's story.

When not for guard, Phil and Tony generally managed to find plenty of occupation in their spare hours. In the winter there were long walks to be taken, and in the summer there was the river, a never-failing source of enjoyment, and in those days far less crowded than in this twentieth century, when excursion trains, bicycles, and tooting steam-launches have done not a little to mar its pleasant peacefulness. Hard by the Brocas boats could be obtained, and here a number of soldiers were to be found every afternoon, idling by the river-side and gazing at the youth of Eton disporting on the water, or themselves seated in boats sculling up and down the stream.

Phil and Tony were occupied in this way one hot summer afternoon, and having sculled up to the Clewer reach, rowed in to the bank, and made fast there for a while.

“It's mighty hot, young un, ain't it?” remarked Tony, wiping the perspiration from his forehead. “Phew! it is hot! Why, if we was bound to row these boats, we'd hate the sight of the river. What do yer say to a snooze?”

“Just the thing, Tony. It's too hot for any kind of exercise, so let's tie up and wait an hour; then we can pull up to the lock and down again. It'll be time for tea then.”

Accordingly the two laid in their paddles, and stretching themselves on the bottom of the boat beneath the shade of an overhanging tree, soon fell asleep, lulled by the gentle ripple of the water. An hour passed, and still they slumbered placidly, the wash of a big boat as it slipped by them failed to rouse them. They heard nothing, and even the hoarse chuckles of a few comrades on the bank above them did not disturb them.

“What say, Jim? Shall we let 'em go?” grinned one.

“Yes, send 'em along, Tom. It'll be a proper joke to watch 'em when they wakes up and looks about 'em,” was the answer. “Now, shake off that rope, and pitch it into the boat. So – oh! Gently, man! Shove 'em off as quiet as if they was babies in a cradle.”

It was a huge joke to those upon the bank, but upon the unconscious occupants of the craft it was wasted. They stirred neither hand nor eyelid, but, locked firmly in the arms of Morpheus, glided down the river, totally unmindful of the shouts which followed them and of the angry “Boat ahead! Where are you coming to? Steer to the left!” which was hurled at them on more than one occasion. Suddenly a louder shout awoke Phil, and, sitting up with a start, he stared around, his eyes wide-open

with astonishment, to find that he and Tony were drifting in midstream past the Brocas, and were already within 50 feet of the bridge.

“Why, we’re adrift!” he exclaimed in a bewildered tone. “Here, Tony, wake up or we shall be on the bridge!”

“Eh, what!” grunted Tony, rubbing his eyes. “Adrift! What’s that row about?”

The shout which had aroused Phil was repeated at that moment and, taken up immediately, assumed a perfect roar, in the intervals of which a loud clattering as of wheels rapidly passing over cobble stones, and the stamp of horses’ hoofs were heard.

“Sounds like a cart or something coming down the street,” said Phil. “Look out, Tony, something’s wrong!”

As Phil spoke the clatter of hoofs and wheels became deafening, and before either could realise what was happening, two maddened horses dashed on to the bridge, dragging a carriage after them in which a gentleman was seated. On the back of one of the beasts was a postilion, and before Phil had time to exclaim, “It’s a royal carriage!” the vehicle had collided with a cart coming in the opposite direction, there was a crash and a sound of breaking woodwork, and next second rider and passenger were shot as if from a catapult over the low rail of the bridge into the water.

“Quick! get your paddle out!” cried Phil, snatching one up and plunging it into the water.

Tony, now fully awake, sprang up and hastily obeyed, but with such vigour that he swung the boat round till it lay across the stream. Next moment, driven by the swirl of the water, it was hurled against a support of the bridge and capsized immediately.

When Phil rose to the surface a few seconds later, and had shaken the water from his eyes, he saw the boat shooting bottom-uppermost through the archway of the bridge, with Tony clinging to it. The stream had already swept him through, and just in front of him, splashing helplessly, was the unfortunate postilion, his eyes glaring round in search of help, and his mouth wide-open as he shouted to the people on the bank.

“All right! I’ll be with you in a moment,” cried Phil, striking out in his direction. A minute later he was by his side, and, grasping him by the shoulder, supported him till the overturned boat floated past them.

Both clutched it, and hung on for their lives.

“There he is, there’s the other!” shouted a crowd of people on the bridge, and, hearing them, Phil hoisted himself as high as possible and searched the water carefully. There was a swirl some fifteen feet away, and two clutching hands suddenly appeared, to be swallowed up an instant later.

Leaving the boat Phil struck out with all his might, to find nothing when he reached the spot; but, plunging beneath the surface, he let the stream sweep him on, and groped with outstretched hands on either side. Something touched his fingers, and, grasping it he pulled it to him; holding tightly with both hands he kicked frantically till his head appeared above the water. Another second and the head of the unconscious passenger was reclining on his shoulder, and a burst of hearty cheering was ringing in his ears. Breathless and exhausted after the struggle, Phil looked round and caught sight of the boat drifting down to him. Treading water for a few minutes he supported the figure in his arms, and at last reached out for and obtained a firm hold of the keel, to which he clung, unable to make another effort, so much was he fatigued.

But help was at hand. A boat had been hastily pushed off from the river-bank, and before long all four had been lifted from the water and carried up the steps on to terra firma. A doctor was hastily summoned, and meanwhile the gentleman and the postilion were removed to a cottage.

As for Phil, five minutes’ rest upon the ground made him feel himself again. Then, shaking the water from him, and bashfully exchanging handshakes with the enthusiastic crowd who surrounded him, and would not be denied, he slipped away with Tony, and, aided by a waterman, righted the capsized boat and proceeded to bail the water out.

“Come along, let’s get out of this, Tony!” he exclaimed fretfully. “I never came across such a bother, and I hate a fuss like this.”

“But you’ll stop and give yer name, Phil? They’re certain to want it, ’specially as the cove has summat to do with the castle.”

“Oh, they can find out later on! Come along and let’s get away,” repeated Phil, in far more terror now than he had been when the boat upset.

“Wait a minute, my men,” suddenly sang out a voice from the bank. “I want to find out who you are.”

Phil reluctantly helped to push the boat alongside, while a gentleman who he knew had some connection with the castle pushed his way to the front of the crowd and, coming down the steps, held his hand out towards him.

“Shake hands, my brave young fellow,” he said earnestly. “I never saw a more gallant deed, and you can have every cause for satisfaction, for you have saved the life of one of our Queen’s most honoured guests. What is your name?”

“Private Western, sir,” answered Phil with flushed cheeks. “Private Phil Western, Number 1760.”

“Then, Western, you can expect to hear from me again. You are a credit to your regiment, and your officers and all your comrades shall know what a fine lad you are. Now, I will not detain you. You had better get off and change your clothes.”

“Three cheers for the sodger boy!” a voice in the crowd shouted; and these were given with a gusto which made Phil’s heart flutter, while Tony stood upright in the boat, looking more pleased and proud than he had ever done before.

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