Hughes Thomas

Tom Brown at Rugby

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Hughes T.

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Содержание

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PART I

CHAPTER I
THE BROWN FAMILY

"I'm the Poet of White Horse Vale, sir,
With liberal notions under my cap." —

Ballad.

The Browns have become illustrious by the pen of Thackeray and the pencil of Doyle,[1] within the memory of the young gentlemen who are now matriculating[2] at the universities. Notwithstanding the well-merited but late fame which has now fallen upon them, any one at all acquainted with the family must feel that much has yet to be written and said before the British nation will be properly sensible of how much of its greatness it owes to the Browns. For centuries, in their quiet, dogged, homespun way, they have been subduing the earth in most English counties, and leaving their mark in American forests and Australian uplands. Wherever the fleets and armies of England have won renown, there stalwart sons of the Browns have done yeomen's[3] work. With the yew bow and cloth-yard shaft[4] at Cressy and Agincourt[5]– with the brown bill[6] and pike under the brave Lord Willoughby – with culverin and demi-culverin[7] against Spaniards and Dutchmen – with hand-grenade[8] and sabre, and musket and bayonet, under Rodney[9] and St. Vincent, Wolfe and Moore, Nelson and Wellington, they have carried their lives in their hands; getting hard knocks and hard work in plenty, which was, on the whole, what they looked for, and the best thing for them; and little praise or pudding, which indeed they, and most of us, are better without. Talbots[10] and Stanleys, St. Maurs, and such-like folk have led armies and made laws time out of mind; but those noble families would be somewhat astounded – if the accounts ever came to be fairly taken – to find how small their work for England has been by the side of that of the Browns.

These latter, indeed, have until the present generation rarely been sung by poet, or chronicled by sage. They have wanted their "sacer vates,"[11] having been too solid to rise to the top by themselves, and not having been largely gifted with the talent of catching hold of, and holding on tight to, whatever good things happened to be going – the foundation of the fortunes of so many noble families. But the

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[1] **Doyle**: an English artist noted for his humorous and satirical designs.

[2] **Matriculating**: entering.

[3] **Yeomen**: small independent farmers. They have generally constituted the best part of the English army.

[4] **Cloth-yard shaft**: an arrow a yard in length.

[5] **Cressy and Agincourt**: English victories over the French in 1346 and 1415.

[6] **Bill**: a combined spear and battle-axe.

[7] **Culverin and demi-culverin**: ancient forms of cannon.

[8] **Hand-grenade**: a kind of bomb or shell thrown by hand.

[9] **Rodney**, etc.: famous English naval and military commanders.

[10] **Talbots**, etc.: noted family names of the English nobility.

[11] **"Sacer vates"**: inspired bard or poet.

world goes on its way, and the wheel turns, and the wrongs of the Browns, like other wrongs, seem in a fair way to get righted. And this present writer, having for many years of his life been a devout Brown-worshipper, and moreover having the honor of being nearly connected with an eminently respectable branch of the great Brown family, is anxious, so far as in him lies, to help the wheel over, and throw his stone[12] on to the pile.

THE BROWN CHARACTER

However, gentle reader, or simple reader, whichever you may be, lest you should be led to waste your precious time upon these pages, I make so bold as at once to tell you the sort of folk you'll have to meet and put up with, if you and I are to jog on comfortably together. You shall hear at once what sort of folk the Browns are, at least my branch of them; and then if you don't like the sort, why cut the concern at once, and let you and I cry quits before either of us can grumble at the other. In the first place, the Browns are a fighting family. One may question their wisdom, or wit, or beauty, but about their fight there can be no question. Wherever hard knocks of any kind, visible or invisible, are going, there the Brown who is nearest must shove in his carcass. And these carcasses for the most part answer very well to the characteristic propensity; they are a square-headed and snake-necked generation, broad in the shoulder, deep in the chest, and thin in the flank, carrying no lumber. Then for clanship,[13] they are as bad as Highlanders; it is amazing the belief they have in one another. With them there is nothing like the Browns, to the third and fourth generation. "Blood is thicker than water," is one of their pet sayings. They can't be happy unless they are always meeting one another. Never was such people for family gatherings, which, were you a stranger, or sensitive, you might think had better not have been gathered together. For during the whole time of their being together they luxuriate in telling one another their minds on whatever subject turns up; and their minds are wonderfully antagonistic, and all their opinions are downright beliefs. Till you've been among them some time and understand them, you can't think but that they are quarrelling. Not a bit of it; they love and respect one another ten times the more after a good set family arguing bout,[14] and go back, one to his curacy,[15] another to his chambers,[16] and another to his regiment, freshened for work, and more than ever convinced that the Browns are the height of company.

This family training, too, combined with their turn for combativeness, makes them eminently quixotic.[17] They can't let anything alone which they think going wrong. They must speak their mind about it, annoying all easy-going folk; and spend their time and money in having a tinker at it, however hopeless the job. It is an impossibility to a Brown to leave the most disreputable lame dog on the other side of a stile. Most other folk get tired of such work. The old Browns, with red faces, white whiskers, and bald heads, go on believing and fighting to a green old age. They have always a crotchet[18] going, till the old man with a scythe[19] reaps and garners them away for troublesome old boys as they are.

And the most provoking thing is, that no failures knock them up, or make them hold their hands, or think you, or me, or other sane people in the right. Failures slide off them like July rain off a duck's back feathers. Jem and his whole family turn out bad, and cheat them one week, and the

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[12] **Throw his stone**, etc.: help to build their cairn or monument.

[13] **Clanship**: here, the holding together of a class, tribe, or family.

[14] **Bout**: contest.

[15] **Curacy**: parish.

[16] **Chambers**: law offices.

[17] **Quixotic**: romantic or visionary

[18] **Crotchet**: whim, notion, "hobby."

[19] **Old man with a scythe**: Father Time.

next they are doing the same thing for Jack; and when he goes to the treadmill,[20] and his wife and children to the workhouse, they will be on the look-out for Bill to take his place.

TOM BROWN'S BIRTHPLACE

However, it is time for us to get from the general to the particular; so, leaving the great army of Browns, who are scattered over the whole empire on which the sun never sets, and whose general diffusion I take to be the chief cause of that empire's stability, let us at once fix our attention upon the small nest of Browns in which our hero was hatched, and which dwelt in that portion of the Royal County of Berks,[21] which is called the Vale of White Horse.

Most of you have probably travelled down the Great Western Railway as far as Swindon. Those of you who did so with your eyes open have been aware, soon after leaving the Didcot Station, of a fine range of chalk hills running parallel with the railway on the left-hand side as you go down, and distant some two or three miles, more or less, from the line. The highest point in the range is the White Horse Hill, which you come in front of just before you stop at the Shrivenham Station. If you love English scenery and have a few hours to spare, you can't do better, the next time you pass, than stop at the Farringdon road or Shrivenham Station, and make your way to that highest point. And those who care for the vague old stories that haunt country-sides all about England, will not, if they are wise, be content with only a few hours' stay; for, glorious as the view is, the neighborhood is yet more interesting for its relics of by-gone times. I only know two English neighborhoods thoroughly, and in each, within a circle of five miles, there is enough of interest and beauty to last any reasonable man his life. I believe this to be the case almost throughout the country, but each has a special attraction, and none can be richer than the one I am speaking of and going to introduce you to very particularly; for on this subject I must be prosy; so those that don't care for England in detail may skip the chapter.

THE OLD BOY MOURNETH OVER YOUNG ENGLAND

O young England! young England! You who are born into these racing railroad times, when there's a Great Exhibition, or some monster sight every year, and you can get over a couple of thousand miles of ground for three pound ten,[22] in a five weeks' holiday, why don't you know more of your own birthplaces? You're all in the ends of the earth it seems to me, as soon as you get your necks out of the educational collar for midsummer holidays, long vacations, or what not. Going round Ireland, with a return ticket, in a fortnight; dropping your copies of Tennyson on the tops of Swiss mountains; or pulling down the Danube in Oxford racing-boats. And when you get home for a quiet fortnight, you turn the steam off, and lie on your backs in the paternal garden, surrounded by the last batch of books from Mudie's Library, and half bored to death.

Well, well! I know it has its good side. You all patter French more or less, and perhaps German; you have seen men and cities, no doubt, and have your opinions, such as they are, about schools of painting, high art, and all that; have seen the pictures at Dresden[23] and the Louvre,[24] and know the taste of sauer-kraut.[25] All I say is, you don't know your own lanes and woods and fields. Though you may be chock-full of science, not one in twenty of you knows where to find the wood-sorrel,

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[20] **Treadmill**: a wheel on which prisoners were formerly compelled to work.

[21] **Berks**: Berkshire, a county west of London. It is called "Royal" because it is the seat of Windsor Castle. The Vale of the White Horse gets its name from the gigantic image of a horse cut through the turf in the side of a chalk hill. Tradition says it was done over a thousand year ago, to commemorate a great victory over the Danes by Alfred.

[22] **Three pound ten** (shillings): the English shilling is about twenty five cents, and the pound may be called five dollars.

[23] **Dresden**: a city of Germany, noted for its treasures of art.

[24] **The Louvre**: an ancient palace in Paris, containing vast collections of sculptures and paintings.

[25] **Sauer-kraut**: a German dish, prepared from cabbage.

or bee-orchis,[26] which grows in the next wood or on the down[27] three miles off, or what the bog-bean and wood-sage are good for. And as for the country legends, the stories of the old gable-ended farm-houses, the place where the last skirmish was fought in the civil wars,[28] where the parish butts[29] stood, where the last highwayman turned to bay, where the last ghost was laid[30] by the parson, they're gone out of date altogether.

Now, in my time, when we got home by the old coach, which put us down at the cross-roads with our boxes, the first day of the holidays, and had been driven off by the family coachman, singing "Dulce domum"[31] at the top of our voices, there we were, fixtures, till black Monday[32] came round. We had to cut out our own amusements within a walk or a ride of home. And so we got to know all the country folk, and their ways and songs and stories, by heart; and went over the fields and woods and hills again and again, till we made friends of them all. We were Berkshire, or Gloucestershire, or Yorkshire boys: and you're young cosmopolites,[33] belonging to all counties and no countries. No doubt it's all right; I dare say it is. This is the day of large views and glorious humanity, and all that; but I wish backsword play[34] hadn't gone out in the Vale of White Horse, and that that confounded Great Western hadn't carried away Alfred's Hill to make an embankment.

VALES IN GENERAL

But to return to the said Vale of White Horse, the country in which the first scenes of this true and interesting story are laid. As I said, the Great Western now runs right through it, and it is a land of large rich pastures, bounded by ox-fences, and covered with fine hedgerow timber, with here and there a nice little gorse[35] or spinney,[36] where abideth poor Charley,[37] having no other cover[38] to which to betake himself for miles and miles, when pushed out some fine November morning by the Old Berkshire.[39] Those who have been there, and well mounted, only know how he and the staunch little pack who dash after him – heads high and sterns low, with a breast-high scent – can consume the ground at such times. There being little plow-land, and few woods, the Vale is only an average sporting country, except for hunting. The villages are straggling, queer old-fashioned places, the houses being dropped down without the least regularity, in nooks and out-of-the-way corners, by the sides of shadowy lanes and footpaths, each with its patch of garden. They are built chiefly of good gray-stone and thatched;[40] though I see that within the last year or two the red brick cottages are multiplying, for the Vale is beginning to manufacture largely both bricks and tiles. There are lots of waste ground by the side of the roads in every village, amounting often to village greens, where feed the pigs and ganders of the people; and these roads are old-fashioned, homely roads very dirty and badly made, and hardly endurable in winter, but pleasant jog-trot roads, running through the great

[26] **Bee-orchis** (orkis): a wild-flower resembling a bee.

[27] **Down**: a barren hill of chalk or sand.

[28] **Civil wars**: those between Parliament and King Charles I., in the seventeenth century.

[29] **Butts**: targets for archery practice. Before the invention of gunpowder they were set up by law in every parish.

[30] **Laid**: dispelled by religious ceremonies.

[31] **Dulce domum**: sweet home.

[32] **Black Monday**: the end of the holidays.

[33] **Cosmopolites**: citizens of the world at large, familiar with all countries.

[34] **Backsword play**: the game of single-stick, or fencing with cudgels.

[35] **Gorse**: a thick, prickly, evergreen shrub, which grows wild and bears beautiful yellow flowers.

[36] **Spinney**: a small grove filled with undergrowth.

[37] **Charley**: a fox.

[38] **Cover**: a retreat, or hiding-place.

[39] **Old Berkshire**: an association of hunters.

[40] **Thatched**: roofed with straw or reeds.

pasture lands, dotted here and there with little clumps of thorns, where the sleek kine are feeding, with no fence on either side of them, and a gate at the end of each field, which makes you get out of your gig (if you keep one), and gives you a chance of looking about you every quarter of a mile.

One of the moralists whom we sat under in our youth – was it the great Richard Swiveller,[41] or Mr. Stiggins?[42] says, "We are born in a vale, and must take the consequences of being found in such a situation." These consequences, I for one am ready to encounter. I pity people who wern't born in a vale. I don't mean a flat country, but a vale; that is, a flat country bounded by hills. The having your hill *always* in view, if you choose to turn toward him, that's the essence of a vale. There he is forever in the distance, your friend and companion; you never lose him as you do in hilly districts.

THE OLD ROMAN CAMP

And then what a hill is the White Horse Hill! There it stands right above all the rest, nine hundred feet above the sea, and the boldest, bravest shape for a chalk hill that you ever saw. Let us go up to the top of him, and see what is to be found there. Ay, you may well wonder, and think it odd you never heard of this before; but, wonder or not as you please, there are hundreds of such things lying about England, which wiser folk than you know nothing of, and care nothing for. Yes, it's a magnificent Roman camp,[43] and no mistake, with gates, and ditch, and mounds, all as complete as it was twenty years after the strong old rogues left it. Here, right up on the highest point, from which they say you can see eleven counties, they trenched round all the table-land, some twelve or fourteen acres, as was their custom, for they couldn't bear anybody to overlook them, and made their eyrie.[44] The ground falls away rapidly on all sides. Was there ever such turf in the whole world? You sink up to your ankles at every step, and yet the spring of it is delicious. There is always a breeze in the "camp," as it is called and here it lies just as the Romans left it, except that cairn,[45] on the east side, left by her majesty's corps of sappers and miners[46] the other day, when they and the engineer officer had finished their sojourn there, and their surveys for the Ordnance Map[47] of Berkshire. It is altogether a place that you won't forget – a place to open a man's soul and make him prophesy, as he looks down on that great vale spread out as the garden of the Lord before him, and wave on wave of the mysterious downs behind; and to the right and left the chalk hills running away into the distance, along which he can trace for miles the old Roman road, "the Ridgeway" ("the Rudge" as the country folk call it), keeping straight along the highest back of the hills; such a place as Balak[48] brought Balaam to, and told him to prophesy against the people in the valley beneath. And he could not, neither shall you, for they are a people of the Lord who abide there.

BATTLE OF ASHDOWN

And now we leave the camp, and descend toward the west, and are on the Ashdown. We are treading on heroes. It is sacred ground for Englishmen, more sacred than all but one or two fields where their bones lie whitening. For this is the actual place where our Alfred[49] won his great battle,

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[41] **Richard Swiveller**: a jolly character who lives by his wits. See Dickens's "Old Curiosity Shop."

[42] **Mr. Stiggins**: a hypocritical parson. See Dickens's "Pickwick Papers."

[43] **Roman camp**: the Romans, when they conquered England, about 78 A.D., built a stronghold here.

[44] **Eyrie**: the nest of a bird of prey; here, a gathering-place for Roman soldiers.

[45] **Cairn**: a heap of stones set up to mark a spot.

[46] **Sappers and miners**: usually, soldiers employed in working on trenches and fortifications or in undermining those of an enemy; here, engaged in surveying.

[47] **Ordnance Map**: an official or government map.

[48] **Balak**: see Numbers xxii.

[49] **Alfred**: Alfred the Great, King of the West Saxons, 871. He defeated the Danes, who had overrun most of England, at Ashdown,

the battle of Ashdown "Æscendum" in the chroniclers), which broke the Danish power, and made England a Christian land. The Danes held the camp and the slope where we are standing – the whole crown of the hill, in fact. "The heathen had beforehand seized the higher ground," as old Asser[50] says, having wasted everything behind them from London, and being just ready to burst down on the fair vale, Alfred's own birthplace and heritage. And up the heights came the Saxons,[51] as they did at the Alma.[52] "The Christians led up their line from the lower ground. There stood also on that same spot a single thorn-tree, marvellous stumpy (which we ourselves with our very own eyes have seen)." Bless the old chronicler![53] does he think nobody ever saw the "single thorn-tree" but himself? Why, there it stands to this very day, just on the edge of the slope, and I saw it not three weeks since; an old single thorn-tree, "marvellous stumpy." At least, if it isn't the same tree, it ought to have been, for it's just in the place where the battle must have been won or lost – "around which, as I was saying, the two lines of foemen came together in battle with a huge shout. And in this place one of the two kings of the heathen and five of his earls fell down and died, and many thousands of the heathen side in the same place." After which crowning mercy, the pious king, that there might never be wanting a sign and a memorial to the country-side, carved out on the northern side of the chalk hill under the camp, where it is almost precipitous, the great Saxon white horse, which he who will may see from the railway, and which gives its name to the vale over which it has looked these thousand years and more.

Right down below the White Horse is a curious deep and broad gully called "the Manger," into one side of which the hills fall with a series of the most lovely sweeping curves, known as the "Giant's Stairs"; they are not a bit like stairs, but I never saw anything like them anywhere else, with their short green turf, and tender bluebells, and gossamer and thistle-down gleaming in the sun, and the sheep-paths running along their sides like ruled lines.

The other side of the Manger is formed by the Dragon's Hill, a curious little round self-confident fellow, thrown forward from the range, and utterly unlike everything round him. On this hill some deliverer of mankind – St. George[54] the country folk used to tell me – killed a dragon. Whether it were St. George, I cannot say; but surely a dragon was killed there, for you may see the marks yet where his blood ran down, and more by token[55] the place where it ran down is the easiest way up the hill-side.

Passing along the Ridgeway to the west for about a mile, we come to a little clump of young beech and firs, with a growth of thorn and privet[56] underwood. Here you may find nests of the strong down-partridge and pewit, but take care that the keeper[57] isn't down upon you; and in the middle of it is an old cromlech,[58] a huge flat stone raised on seven or eight others, and led up to by a path, with large single stones set up on each side. This is Wayland Smith's cave,[59] a place of classic fame now; but as Sir Walter[60] has touched it, I may as well let it alone, and refer you to Kenilworth for the legend.

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and compelled them to make a treaty of peace. He is justly considered one of the noblest and wisest of the English sovereigns; and the thousandth anniversary of his birth was celebrated in 1849, at Wantage, Berks.

[50] **Asser**: a contemporary of Alfred; he wrote his life.

[51] **Saxons**: a name given to certain German tribes who conquered Britain, in the fifth century. The name England came from the Angles, a people of the same stock, who settled in the east and north of the island. From these Anglo-Saxons the English have in great part descended.

[52] **Alma**: a river in the Crimea where a desperate battle was fought between the Russians and the allied English and French in 1854.

[53] **Chronicler**: Asser, from whom this is quoted.

[54] **St. George**: the patron saint of England.

[55] **More by token**: as a sign or proof that this is so.

[56] **Privet**: a shrub much used for hedges.

[57] **Keeper**: the gamekeeper, a man kept on great estates to look after the game.

[58] **Cromlech**: a rude tomb built by the first inhabitants of Britain.

[59] **Wayland Smith's Cave**: a "supernatural smith" who shod horses on payment of sixpence.

[60] **Sir Walter**: Sir Walter Scott.

The thick deep wood which you see in the hollow, about a mile off, surrounds Ashdown Park, built by Inigo Jones.[61] Four broad alleys are cut through the wood, from circumference to centre, and each leads to one face of the house. The mystery of the downs hangs about house and wood, as they stand there alone, so unlike all around, with the green slopes, studded with great stones just about this part, stretching away on all sides. It was a wise Lord Craven,[62] I think, who pitched his tent there.

THE "SEVEN BARROWS" FARM

Passing along the Ridgeway to the east, we soon come to cultivated land. The downs, strictly so called, are no more; Lincolnshire farmers have been imported, and the long fresh slopes are sheep-walks[63] no more, but grow famous turnips and barley. One of these improvers lives over there at the "Seven Barrows"[64] farm, another mystery of the great downs. There are the barrows still, solemn and silent, like ships in the calm sea, the sepulchres of some sons of men. But of whom? It is three miles from the White Horse, too far for the slain of Ashdown to be buried there – who shall say what heroes are waiting there? But we must get down into the Vale again, and so away by the Great Western Railway to town, for time and the printer's devil press; and it is a terrible long and slippery descent, and a shocking bad road. At the bottom, however, there is a pleasant public,[65] whereat we must really take a modest quencher, for the down air is provocative of thirst. So we pull up under an old oak which stands before the door.

THE BLOWING STONE

"What is the name of your hill, landlord?"

"Blawing Stwun Hill, sir, to be sure."

[Reader. "*Sturm?*"

Author. "*Stone*, stupid; The Blowing *Stone*."]

"And of your house? I can't make out the sign."

"Blawing Stwun, sir," says the landlord, pouring out his old ale from a Toby Philpot jug,[66] with a melodious crash, into the long-necked glass.

"What queer names!" say we, sighing at the end of our draught, and holding out the glass to be replenished.

"Bean't queer at all, as I can see, sir," says mine host, handing back our glass, "seeing that this here is the Blawing Stwun itself"; putting his hand on a square lump of stone, some three feet and a half high, perforated with two or three queer holes, like petrified antediluvian[67] rat-holes, which lies there close under the oak, under our very nose. We are more than ever puzzled, and drink our second glass of ale, wondering what will come next. "Like to hear un,[68] sir?" says mine host, setting down Toby Philpot on the tray, and resting both hands on the "Stwun." We are ready for anything; and he, without waiting for a reply, applies his mouth to one of the rat-holes. Something must come of it, if he doesn't burst. Good heavens! I hope he has no apoplectic tendencies. Yes, here it comes, sure enough, a grewsome[69] sound between a moan and a roar, and spreads itself away over the valley, and up the

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[61] **Inigo Jones**: a celebrated architect of the 17th century.

[62] **Lord Craven**: the owner of the estate on which the "White Horse" is located.

[63] **Sheep-walks**: sheep pastures, for which the "downs" are much used.

[64] **Barrows**: ancient burial mounds.

[65] **Public**: a public house.

[66] **Toby Philpot jug**: a large brown pitcher, shaped like a jolly old gentleman of the olden time.

[67] **Antediluvian**: before the deluge.

[68] **Un**: it; also him or her.

[69] **Grewsome**: frightful.

hill-side, and into the woods at the back of the house, a ghost-like awful voice. "Um[70] do say, sir," says mine host, rising, purple-faced, while the moan is still coming out of the Stwun, "as they used in old times to warn the country-side, by blawing the Stwun when the enemy was a comin' – and as how folks could make un heered then for seven mile round; leastways, so I've heerd lawyer Smith say, and he knows a smart sight about them old times." We can hardly swallow lawyer Smith's seven miles, but could the blowing of the stone have been a summons, a sort of sending the fiery cross[71] round the neighborhood in the old times? What old times? Who knows? We pay for our beer, and are thankful.

"And what's the name of the village just below, landlord?"

"Kingstone Lisle, sir."

"Fine plantations[72] you've got here."

"Yes, sir, the Squire's[73] 'mazin' fond of trees and such like."

"No wonder. He's got some real beauties to be fond of. Good-day, landlord."

"Good-day, sir, and a pleasant ride to 'e."[74]

FARRINGDON AND PUSEY

And now, my boys, you whom I want to get for readers, have you had enough? Will you give in at once, and say you're convinced, and let me begin my story or will you have some more of it? Remember, I've only been over a little bit of the hill-side yet, what you could ride round easily on your ponies in an hour. I'm only just come down into the vale, by Blowing Stone Hill, and if I once begin about the vale, what's to stop me? You'll have to hear all about Wantage, the birthplace of Alfred, and Farringdon, which held out so long for Charles I. (the vale was near Oxford, and dreadfully malignant;[75] full of Throgmortons, Puseys, and Pyes, and such like, and their brawny retainers). Did you ever read Thomas Ingoldsby's "Legend of Hamilton Tighe"?[76] If you haven't, you ought to have. Well, Farringdon is where he lived, before he went to sea; his real name was Hampden Pye, and the Pyes were the great folk at Farringdon. Then there's Pusey. You've heard of the Pusey horn,[77] which King Canute gave to the Puseys of that day, and which the gallant old squire, lately gone to his rest (whom Berkshire freeholders[78] turned out of last Parliament, to their eternal disgrace, for voting according to his conscience), used to bring out on high days, holidays, and bonfire nights. And the splendid old Cross church at Uffington, the Uffingas town; how the whole country-side teems with Saxon names and memories! And the old moated grange[79] at Compton, nestled close under the hill-side, where twenty Marianas[80] may have lived, with its bright water-lilies in the moat, and its yew walk "the cloister walk," and its peerless terraced gardens. There they all are, and twenty things besides, for those who care about them, and have eyes. And these are the sort of things you may find, I believe, every one of you, in any common English country neighborhood.

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[70] **Um**: they.

[71] **Fiery cross**: a cross, the ends of which had been fired and then extinguished in blood. It was sent round by the chiefs of clans in time of war, to summon their followers.

[72] **Plantations**: groves of trees set out in regular order.

[73] **Squire**: a country gentleman.

[74] **'E**: thee or you.

[75] **Malignant**: The Parliamentary or Puritan party during the civil wars of Charles I. called those who adhered to the king "malignants."

[76] **Tighe**: this legend relates a conspiracy by which young Tighe was led into the thick of a fight and killed.

[77] **Pusey horn**: the Pusey family hold their estate not by a title deed, but by a horn, given, it is said, to William Pecote (perhaps an ancestor of the Puseys) by Canute, a Danish king of England in the eleventh century. The horn bears the following inscription: "I, King Canute, give William Pecote this horn to hold by thy land."

[78] **Freeholders**: landowners.

[79] **Moated grange**: a farm or estate surrounded by a broad deep ditch for defence in old times.

[80] **Marianas**: Mariana, a beautiful woman, one of the most lovable of Shakespeare's characters. See "Measure for Measure."

Will you look for them under your own noses, or will you not? Well, well, I've done what I can to make you, and if you will go gadding over half Europe now every holiday, I can't help it. I was born and bred a west-countryman,[81] thank God! a Wessex man, a citizen of the noblest Saxon kingdom of Wessex, a regular "Angular Saxon,"[82] the very soul of me "adscriptus glebæ."[83] There's nothing like the old country-side for me, and no music like the twang of the real old Saxon tongue, as one gets it fresh from the veritable chaw[84] in the White Horse Vale; and I say with "Gaarge Ridler," the old west-country yeoman,

"Throo aall the waarld owld Gaarge would bwoast,
Commend me to merry owld England mwoast;
While vools[85] gwoes prating vur and nigh,
We stwops at whum,[86] my dog and I."[87]

SQUIRE BROWN AND HIS HOUSEHOLD

Here at any rate lived and stopped at home Squire Brown, J. P.[88] for the county of Berks, in a village near the foot of the White Horse range. And here he dealt out justice and mercy in a rough way, and brought up sons and daughters, and hunted the fox, and grumbled at the badness of the roads and the times. And his wife dealt out stockings, and calico[89] shirts, and smock frocks,[90] and comforting drinks to the old folks with the "rheumatiz," and good counsel to all; and kept the coal and clothes clubs going, for Yule-tide,[91] when the bands of mummers[92] came round dressed out in ribbons and colored paper caps, and stamped round the Squire's kitchen, repeating in true sing-song vernacular[93] the legend of St. George and his fight, and the ten-pound doctor,[94] who plays his part at healing the Saint – a relic, I believe, of the old middle-age mysteries.[95] It was the first dramatic representation which greeted the eyes of little Tom, who was brought down into the kitchen by his nurse to witness it, at the mature age of three years. Tom was the eldest child of his parents, and from his earliest babyhood exhibited the family characteristics in great strength. He was a hearty, strong boy from the first, given to fighting with and escaping from his nurse, and fraternizing with all the village boys, with whom he made expeditions all round the neighborhood. And here in the quiet, old-fashioned country village, under the shadow of the everlasting hills, Tom Brown was reared, and never left it till he went first to school when nearly eight years of age, for in those days change of air twice a year was not thought absolutely necessary for the health of all her majesty's lieges.[96]

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[81] **West-countryman**: a west of England man.

[82] **Angular Saxon**: a play on the words *Anglo-Saxon*.

[83] **Adscriptus glebæ**: attached to the soil.

[84] **Chaw**: "chaw bacon," a nickname for an English peasant.

[85] **Vools**: fools.

[86] **Whum**: home.

[87] For this old song see Hughes's "Scouring of the White Horse."

[88] **J. P.**: justice of the peace.

[89] **Calico**: white cotton cloth called calico in England, to distinguish it from print.

[90] **Smock frocks**: coarse white frocks worn by farm laborers.

[91] **Yule-tide**: Christmas. Clubs are formed by the poor several months in advance, to furnish coal, clothes, and poultry for Christmas time, – each member contributing a few pence weekly.

[92] **Mummers**: maskers, merrymakers in fantastic costumes.

[93] **Vernacular**: one's native tongue.

[94] **Ten-pound doctor**: a quack doctor.

[95] **Mysteries**: rude dramatic plays of a religious character, once very popular.

[96] **Lieges**: loyal subjects.

THE OLD BOY ABUSETH MOVING ON

I have been credibly informed, and am inclined to believe, that the various Boards of Directors of Railway Companies, those gigantic jobbers[97] and bribers, while quarrelling about everything else, agreed together some ten years back to buy up the learned profession of medicine, body and soul. To this end they set apart several millions of money, which they continually distribute judiciously among the doctors, stipulating only this one thing, that they shall prescribe change of air to every patient who can pay, or borrow money to pay, a railway fare, and see their prescription carried out. If it be not for this, why is it that none of us can be well at home for a year together? It wasn't so twenty years ago, – not a bit of it. The Browns didn't go out of the county once in five years. A visit to Reading or Abingdon twice a year, at Assizes or Quarter Sessions[98] which the Squire made on his horse, with a pair of saddle-bags containing his wardrobe – a stay of a day or two at some country neighbor's – or an expedition to a county ball or the yeomanry review —[99] made up the sum of the Brown locomotion in most years. A stray Brown from some distant county dropped in every now and then; or from Oxford, on grave nag, an old don[100] contemporary of the Squire; and were looked upon by the Brown household and the villagers with the same sort of feeling with which we now regard a man who has crossed the Rocky Mountains, or launched a boat on the great lake in Central Africa. The White Horse Vale, remember, was traversed by no great road; nothing but country parish roads, and these very bad. Only one coach ran there, and this one only from Wantage to London, so that the western part of the vale was without regular means of moving on, and certainly didn't seem to want them. There was the canal, by the way, which supplied the country-side with coal, and up and down which continually went the long barges with the big black men lounging by the side of the horses along the towing-path, and the women in bright-colored handkerchiefs standing in the sterns steering. Standing, I say, but you could never see whether they were standing or sitting, all but their heads and shoulders being out of sight in the cozy little cabins which occupied some eight feet of the stern and which Tom Brown pictured to himself as the most desirable of residences. His nurse told him that those good-natured-looking women were in the constant habit of enticing children into the barges and taking them up to London and selling them, which Tom wouldn't believe, and which made him resolve as soon as possible to accept the oft-proffered invitation of these sirens[101] to "young master," to come in and have a ride. But as yet the nurse was too much for Tom.

THE OLD BOY APPROVETH MOVING ON

Yet why should I, after all, abuse the gadabout propensities of my countrymen? We are a vagabond nation now, that's certain, for better, for worse. I am a vagabond; I have been away from home no less than five distinct times in the last year. The Queen sets us the example – we are moving on from top to bottom. Little dirty Jack, who abides in Clement's Inn[102] gateway, and blacks my boots for a penny, takes his month's hop-picking[103] every year as a matter of course. Why shouldn't he? I am delighted at it. I love vagabonds, only I prefer poor to rich ones; – couriers[104] and ladies' maids,

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[97] **Jobbers**: speculators or members of corrupt political rings.

[98] **Assizes or Quarter Sessions**: sessions of courts of justice.

[99] **Yeomanry review**: a review of the county militia.

[100] **Don**: a nickname for a university professor.

[101] **Sirens**: sea-nymphs who enticed sailors into their power by their singing, and then devoured them.

[102] **Clement's Inn**: formerly a college and residence for law students in London. It is now given up to law offices.

[103] **Hop-picking**: all the vagabonds of London go to Kent and Surrey in the autumn to pick hops for the farmers, regarding the work as a kind of vacation frolic.

[104] **Courier**: a person hired by wealthy travellers to go in advance and engage rooms at hotels, etc.

imperials[105] and travelling carriages are an abomination unto me – I cannot away with them. But for dirty Jack, and every good fellow who, in the words of the capital French song, moves about,

"Comme le limaçon,
Portant tout son bagage,
Ses meubles, sa maison,"[106]

on his own back, why, good luck to them, and many a merry road-side adventure, and steaming supper in the chimney-corners of road-side inns, Swiss châlets,[107] Hottentot kraals,[108] or wherever else they like to go. So having succeeded in contradicting myself in my first chapter (which gives me great hopes that you will all go on, and think me a good fellow, notwithstanding my crotchets), I shall here shut up for the present, and consider my ways; having resolved to "sar' it out,"[109] as we say in the Vale, "holus bolus,"[110] just as it comes, and then you'll probably get the truth out of me.

[105] **Imperial**: the best seat on a French diligence or stage-coach.

[106] **Comme le limaçon**, etc.: like the snail, carrying all his baggage, his furniture, and his house.

[107] **Chalet** (shal-ay'): a Swiss herdsman's hut.

[108] **Kraal**: a Hottentot hut or village.

[109] **"Sar' it out"**: deal it out.

[110] **"Holus bolus"**: all at once.

CHAPTER II
THE "VEAST."

"And the King commandeth and forbiddeth, that from henceforth neither fairs nor markets be kept in church-yards, for the honor of the church." —*Statutes*: 13 Edw. I. Stat. II. Chap. VI.

As that venerable and learned poet[111] (whose voluminous works we all think it the correct thing to admire and talk about, but don't read often) most truly says, "The child is father to the man;" *a fortiori*,[112] therefore he must be father to the boy." So, as we are going at any rate to see Tom Brown through his boyhood, supposing we never get any farther (which, if you show a proper sense of the value of this history, there is no knowing but what we may), let us have a look at the life and environments[113] of the child, in the quiet country village to which we were introduced in the last chapter.

TOM BROWN'S NURSE

Tom, as has been already said, was a robust and combative urchin, and at the age of four began to struggle against the yoke and authority of his nurse. That functionary[114] was a good-hearted, tearful, scatter-brain[115] girl, lately taken by Tom's mother, Madam Brown, as she was called, from the village school to be trained as nursery-maid. Madam Brown was a rare trainer of servants, and spent herself freely in the profession; for profession it was, and gave her more trouble by half than many people take to earn a good income. Her servants were known and sought after for miles round. Almost all the girls who attained a certain place in the village school were taken by her, one or two at a time, as house-maids, laundry-maids, nursery-maids, or kitchen-maids, and, after a year or two's drilling, were started in life amongst the neighboring families, with good principles and wardrobes. One of the results of this system was the perpetual despair of Mrs. Brown's cook and own maid, who no sooner had a notable[116] girl made to their hands, than missus was sure to find a good place for her and send her off, taking in fresh importations from the school. Another was, that the house was always full of young girls with clean, shining faces; who broke plates and scorched linen, but made an atmosphere of cheerful homely life about the place, good for every one who came within its influence. Mrs. Brown loved young people, and in fact human creatures in general, above plates and linen. They were more like a lot of elder children than servants, and felt to her more as a mother or aunt than as a mistress.

Tom's nurse was one who took in her instruction very slowly, – she seemed to have two left hands and no head; and so Mrs. Brown kept her on longer than usual that she might expend her awkwardness and forgetfulness upon those who would not judge and punish her too strictly for them.

Charity Lamb was her name. It had been the immemorial habit of the village to christen children either by Bible names, or by those of the cardinal[117] and other virtues; so that one was forever hearing in the village street, or on the green, shrill sounds of "Prudence! Prudence! thee cum' out o' the gutter"; or "Mercy! drat[118] the girl, what bist[119] thee a doin' wi' little Faith?" and there were Ruths,

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[111] **Learned poet**: Wordsworth; the quotation, which follows, is from "My heart leaps up."

[112] **A fortiori**: for a stronger reason.

[113] **Environments**: surroundings.

[114] **Functionary**: one charged with the performance of a duty.

[115] **Scatter-brain**: thoughtless.

[116] **Nŏtable**: industrious, smart.

[117] **Cardinal**: chief.

[118] **Drat**: plague take.

Rachels, Keziahs, in every corner. The same with the boys; they were Benjamins, Jacobs, Noahs, Enochs. I suppose the custom has come down from puritan[120] times – there it is, at any rate, very strong still in the Vale.

TOM BROWN'S FIRST REBELLION

Well, from early morn till dewy eve, when she had it out of him in the cold tub before putting him to bed, Charity and Tom were pitted against one another. Physical power was as yet on the side of Charity, but she hadn't a chance with him wherever head-work was wanted. This war of independence began every morning before breakfast, when Charity escorted her charge to a neighboring farm-house which supplied the Browns, and where by his mother's wish, Master Tom went to drink whey,[121] before breakfast. Tom had no sort of objection to whey, but he had a decided liking for curds, which were forbidden as unwholesome, and there was seldom a morning that he did not manage to secure a handful of hard curds, in defiance of Charity and the farmer's wife. The latter good soul was a gaunt angular woman, who, with an old black bonnet on the top of her head, the strings dangling about her shoulders, and her gown tucked through her pocket holes, went clattering about the dairy, cheese-room, and yard, in high pattens.[122] Charity was some sort of niece of the old lady's, and was consequently free of the farm-house and garden, into which she could not resist going for the purposes of gossip and flirtation with the heir-apparent,[123] who was a dawdling fellow, never out at work as he ought to have been. The moment Charity had found her cousin, or any other occupation, Tom would slip away; and in a minute shrill cries would be heard from the dairy: "Charity, Charity, thee lazy huzzy, where bist?" and Tom would break cover,[124] hands and mouth full of curds, and take refuge on the shaky surface of the great muck reservoir in the middle of the yard, disturbing the repose of the great pigs. Here he was in safety, as no grown person could follow without getting over his knees; and the luckless Charity, while her aunt scolded her from the dairy-door, for being "allus hankering about arter our Willum, instead of minding Master Tom," would descend from threats to coaxing, to lure Tom out of the muck, which was rising over his shoes and would soon tell a tale on his stockings for which she would be sure to catch it from missus's maid.

TOM BROWN'S ABETTORS – NOAH

Tom had two abettors in the shape of a couple of old boys, Noah and Benjamin by name, who defended him from Charity, and expended much time upon his education. They were both of them retired servants of former generations of the Browns. Noah Crooke was a keen, dry old man of almost ninety, but still able to totter about. He talked to Tom quite as if he were one of his own family, and indeed had long completely identified the Browns with himself. In some remote age he had been the attendant of a Miss Brown, and had conveyed her about the country on a pillion.[125] He had a little round picture of the identical gray horse caparisoned with the identical pillion, before which he used to do a sort of fetish[126] worship and abuse turnpike roads and carriages. He wore an

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[119] **Bist**: art.

[120] **Puritan**: the Puritans were those who were dissatisfied with the English Church and wished to *purify* it, as they said, from certain ceremonies. They quite generally gave their children Bible names.

[121] **Whey**: in making cheese the milk separates, the thick part forming curd, and the watery portion whey.

[122] **Pattens**: wooden-soled shoes.

[123] **Heir-apparent**: the legal heir.

[124] **Break cover**: come out from his hiding-place.

[125] **Pillion**: a seat, for a woman, attached to the hinder part of a saddle.

[126] **Fetish**: an idol.

old full-bottomed wig,[127] the gift of some dandy old Brown whom he had valeted[128] in the middle of last century, which habiliment Master Tom looked upon with considerable respect, not to say fear; and indeed his whole feeling toward Noah was strongly tainted with awe; and when the old gentleman was gathered to his fathers, Tom's lamentation over him was not unaccompanied by a certain joy at having seen the last of the wig: "Poor old Noah, dead and gone," said he, "Tom Brown so sorry! Put him in the coffin, wig and all!"

TOM BROWN'S ABETTORS – BENJY

But old Benjy was young master's real delight and refuge. He was a youth by the side of Noah, scarce seventy years old. A cheery, humorous, kind-hearted old man, full of sixty years of Vale gossip, and of all sorts of helpful ways for young and old, but above all for children. It was he who bent the first pin with which Tom extricated his first stickleback[129] out of "Pebbly Brook," the little stream which ran through the village. The first stickleback was a splendid fellow, with fabulous red and blue gills. Tom kept him in a small basin till the day of his death, and became a fisherman from that day. Within a month from the taking of the first stickleback, Benjy had carried off our hero to the canal, in defiance of Charity; and between them, after a whole afternoon's pop-joying,[130] they had caught three or four coarse fish and a perch, averaging perhaps two and a half ounces each, which Tom bore home in rapture to his mother as a precious gift, and which she received like a true mother with equal rapture, instructing the cook nevertheless, in a private interview, not to prepare the same for the squire's dinner. Charity had appealed against old Benjy in the meantime, representing the dangers of the canal banks; but Mrs. Brown, seeing the boy's inaptitude for female guidance, had decided in Benjy's favor, and from thenceforth the old man was Tom's dry nurse. And as they sat by the canal watching their little green and white float,[131] Benjy would instruct him in the doings of deceased Browns. How his grandfather, in the early days of the great war, when there was much distress and crime in the Vale, and the magistrates had been threatened by the mob, had ridden in with a big stick in his hand, and held the Petty Sessions[132] by himself. How his great uncle, the rector, had encountered and laid the last ghost, who had frightened the old women, male and female, of the parish, out of their senses, and who turned out to be the blacksmith's apprentice, disguised in drink and a white sheet. It was Benjy too who saddled Tom's first pony, and instructed him in the mysteries of horsemanship, teaching him to throw his weight back and keep his hand low; and who stood chuckling outside the door of the girls' school when Tom rode his little Shetland into the cottage and round the table, where the old dame and her pupils were seated at their work.

Benjy himself was come of a family distinguished in the Vale for their prowess in all athletic games. Some half-dozen of his brothers and kinsmen had gone to the wars, of whom only one had survived to come home, with a small pension, and three bullets in different parts of his body; he had shared Benjy's cottage till his death, and had left him his old dragoon's[133] sword and pistol, which hung over the mantle-piece, flanked by a pair of heavy single-sticks, with which Benjy himself had won renown long ago as an old gamester,[134] against the picked men of Wiltshire, and Somersetshire,[135]

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[127] **Full-bottomed wig**: this was a large wig worn by all men of fashion in the last century.

[128] **Valeted**: served; (from *valet*, a gentleman's private servant).

[129] **Stickleback**: a small fish.

[130] **Pop-joying**: nibbling by fish.

[131] **Float**: a cork or bit of wood attached to a fish-line.

[132] **Petty sessions**: a criminal court held by a justice of the peace.

[133] **Dragoons**: soldiers who serve on foot or on horseback, as occasion requires.

[134] **Old gamester**: a person skilled in the game of single-stick or back sword.

[135] **Wiltshire and Somersetshire**: counties west of Berkshire.

in many a good bout at the revels and pastimes of the country-side. For he had been a famous back-sword man in his young days, and a good wrestler at elbow and collar.

OUR VEAST

Back-swording and wrestling were the most serious holiday pursuits of the Vale, – those by which men attained fame, – and each village had its champion. I suppose that, on the whole, people were less worked then, than they are now; at any rate, they seemed to have more time and energy for the old pastimes. The great times for back-swording came round once a year, in each village at the feast. The Vale "veasts" were not the common statute feasts[136], but much more ancient business. They are literally, so far as one can ascertain, feasts of the dedication, *i. e.*, they were first established in the church-yard on the day on which the village church was opened for public worship, which was on the wake or festival of the patron saint, and have been held on the same day in every year since that time.

There was no longer any remembrance of why the "veast" had been instituted, but nevertheless it had a pleasant and almost sacred character of its own. For it was then that all the children of the village, wherever they were scattered, tried to get home for a holiday to visit their fathers and mothers and friends, bringing with them their wages or some little gift from up the country for the old folk. Perhaps for a day or two before, but at any rate on "veast-day" and the day after, in our village, you might see strapping, healthy young men and women from all parts of the country going round from house to house in their best clothes, and finishing up with a call on Madam Brown, whom they would consult as to putting out their earnings to the best advantage, or how best to expend the same for the benefit of the old folk. Every household, however poor, managed to raise a "feast-cake" and bottle of ginger or raisin wine, which stood on the cottage table ready for all comers, and not unlikely to make them remember feast-time, – for feast-cake is very solid and full of huge raisins. Moreover feast-time was the day of reconciliation for the parish. If Job Higgins and Noah Freeman hadn't spoken for the last six months, their "old women" would be sure to get it patched up by that day. And though there was a good deal of drinking and low vice in the booths[137] of an evening, it was pretty well confined to those who would have been doing the like "veast or no veast"; and, on the whole, the effect was humanizing and Christian. In fact, the only reason why this is not the case still, is that gentlefolk and farmers have taken to other amusements, and have, as usual, forgotten the poor. They don't attend the feasts themselves, and call them disreputable, whereupon the steadiest of the poor leave them also, and they become what they are called. Class amusements, be they for dukes or plow-boys, always become nuisances and curses to a country. The true charm of cricket[138] and hunting is, that they are still, more or less sociable and universal; there's a place for every man who will come and take his part.

APPROACH OF VEAST-DAY

No one in the village enjoyed the approach of "veast-day" more than Tom, in the year in which he was taken under old Benjy's tutelage.[139] The feast was held in a large green field at the lower end of the village. The road to Farringdon ran along one side of it, and the brook by the side of the road; and above the brook was another large gentle-sloping pasture-land, with a foot-path running down it from the church-yard; and the old church, the originator of all the mirth, towered up with its gray walls and lancet windows[140] overlooking and sanctioning the whole, though its own share therein had been forgotten. At the point where the foot-path crossed the brook and road, and entered on the field

[136] **Statute feasts**: festivals established by law.

[137] **Booths**: temporary sheds, etc., for the sale of refreshments, pedlers' goods, and the like.

[138] **Cricket**: the English national game of ball.

[139] **Tutelage**: guardianship.

[140] **Lancet windows**: high, narrow windows of the earliest Gothic architecture.

where the feast was held, was a long, low, roadside inn, and on the opposite side of the field was a large, white, thatched farm-house, where dwelt an old sporting farmer, a great promoter of the revels.

Past the old church, and down the foot-path, pottered[141] the old man and the child, hand in hand, early on the afternoon of the day before the feast, and wandered all around the ground which was already being occupied by the "cheap Jacks,"[142] with their green-covered carts and marvellous assortment of wares, and the booths of more legitimate[143] small traders with their tempting arrays of fairings[144] and eatables; and penny peep-shows and other shows, containing pink-eyed ladies, and dwarfs, and boa-constrictors, and wily Indians. But the object of most interest to Benjy, and of course to his pupil, also, was the stage of rough planks, some four feet high, which was being put up by the village carpenter for the back-swording and wrestling; and after surveying the whole tenderly, old Benjy led his charge away to the roadside inn, where he ordered a glass of ale and a long pipe for himself, and discussed these unwonted luxuries on the bench outside in the soft autumn evening with mine host, another old servant of the Browns, and speculated with him on the likelihood of a good show of old gamesters to contend for the morrow's prizes, and told tales of the gallant bouts forty years back, to which Tom listened with all his ears and eyes.

MORNING OF THE VEAST

But who shall tell the joy of the next morning, when the church bells were ringing a merry peal and old Benjy appeared in the servants' hall, resplendent in a long blue coat and brass buttons, and a pair of old yellow buckskins[145] and top-boots,[146] which he had cleaned for and inherited from Tom's grandfather; a stout thorn-stick in his hand, and a nosegay of pinks and lavender in his button-hole, and led away Tom in his best clothes, and two new shillings in his breeches pockets? Those two, at any rate, look like enjoying the day's revel.

They quicken their pace when they get into the church-yard, for already they see the field thronged with country folk, the men in clean white smocks or velveteen or fustian[147] coats, with rough plush waistcoats of many colors, and the women in the beautiful scarlet cloak, the usual outdoor dress of West-country women in those days, and which often descended in families from mother to daughter, or in new-fashioned stuff[148] shawls, which, if they would but believe it, don't become them half so well. The air resounds with the pipe and tabor,[149] and the drums and trumpets of the showmen shouting at the doors of their caravans,[150] over which tremendous pictures of the wonders to be seen within hang temptingly; while through all rises the shrill "root-too-too-too" of Mr. Punch, and the unceasing pan-pipe[151] of his satellite.

"Lawk a' massey, Mr. Benjamin," cries a stout motherly woman in a red cloak as they enter the field, "be that you? Well, I never! you do look purely.[152] And how's the squire, and madam, and the family?"

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[141] **Pottered**: walked slowly, sauntered.

[142] **"Cheap Jacks"**: pedlers.

[143] **Legitimate**: lawful.

[144] **Fairings**: ribbons, toys, and other small articles sold for presents.

[145] **Buckskins**: buckskin breeches.

[146] **Top-boots**: high boots.

[147] **Fustian**: coarse cloth.

[148] **Stuff**: woollen.

[149] **Pipe and tabor**: fife and drum.

[150] **Caravans**: show wagons.

[151] **Pan-pipe**: several pipes or fifes fastened together in a row, and blown by an attendant or "satellite," in the Punch and Judy show.

[152] **Purely**: nicely.

Benjy graciously shakes hands with the speaker, who has left our village for some years, but has come over for "veast-day" on a visit to an old gossip – and gently indicates the heir apparent of the Browns.

"Bless his little heart! I must gi' un a kiss. Here, Susannah, Susannah!" cries she, raising herself from the embrace, "come and see Mr. Benjamin and young Master Tom. You minds[153] our Sukey, Mr. Benjamin? she be growed a rare slip of a wench[154] since you seen her, tho' her'll be sixteen come Martinmas[155]. I do aim[156] to take her to see madam to get her a place."

And Sukey comes bouncing away from a knot of old school-fellows, and drops a courtesy to Mr. Benjamin. And elders come up from all parts to salute Benjy, and girls who have been madam's pupils to kiss Master Tom. And they carry him off to load him with fairings; and he returns to Benjy, his hat and coat covered with ribbons, and his pockets crammed with wonderful boxes, which open upon ever new boxes and boxes, and popguns and trumpets, and apples, and gilt gingerbread from the stall of Angel Heavens, sole vender thereof, whose booth groans with kings and queens, and elephants, and prancing steeds, all gleaming with gold. There was more gold on Angel's cakes than there is ginger in those of this degenerate age. Skilled diggers might yet make a fortune in the churchyards of the Vale by carefully washing the dust of the consumers of Angel's gingerbread. Alas! he is with his namesakes, and his receipts have, I fear, died with him.

THE JINGLING MATCH

And then they inspect the penny peep-show, at least Tom does, while old Benjy stands outside and gossips, and walks up the steps, and enters the mysterious doors of the pink-eyed lady and the Irish Giant, who do not by any means come up to their pictures; and the boa will not swallow his rabbit, but there the rabbit is waiting to be swallowed, – and what can you expect for tuppence?[157] We are easily pleased in the Vale. Now there is a rush of the crowd, and a tinkling bell is heard, and shouts of laughter; and Master Tom mounts on Benjy's shoulders, and beholds a jingling match in all its glory. The games are begun, and this is the opening of them. It is a quaint[158] game, immensely amusing to look at; and as I don't know whether it is used in your counties, I had better describe it. A large roped ring is made, into which are introduced a dozen or so of big boys and young men who mean to play; these are carefully blinded and turned loose into the ring, and then a man is introduced not blind-folded, with a bell hung round his neck, and his two hands tied behind him. Of course, every time he moves, the bell must ring, as he has no hand to hold it, and so the dozen blind-folded men have to catch him. This they cannot always manage if he is a lively fellow, but half of them always rush into the arms of the other half, or drive their heads together, or tumble over; and then the crowd laughs vehemently, and invents nicknames for them on the spur of the moment, and they, if they be choleric, tear off the handkerchiefs which blind them, and not unfrequently pitch into one another, each thinking that the other must have run against him on purpose. It is great fun to look at a jingling match certainly, and Tom shouts and jumps on old Benjy's shoulders at the sight, until the old man feels weary, and shifts him to the strong young shoulders of the groom, who has just got down to the fun.

And now, while they are climbing the pole in another part of the field, and muzzling in a flour-tub[159] in another, the old farmer whose house, as has been said, overlooks the field, and who is master

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[153] **Minds**: remember.

[154] **Wench**: a young peasant girl.

[155] **Martinmas**: the feast of St. Martin, Nov. 11.

[156] **Aim**: intend.

[157] **Tuppence**: two pence or four cents; the English penny, being equal to two cents.

[158] **Quaint**: odd, old-fashioned.

[159] **Muzzling in a flour-tub**: running their heads into a tub of flour to fish out prizes.

of the revels, gets up the steps on to the stage, and announces to all whom it may concern that a half-sovereign[160] in money will be forthcoming for the old gamester who breaks most heads; to which the squire and he have added a new hat.

The amount of the prize is sufficient to stimulate the men of the immediate neighborhood, but not enough to bring any very high talent from a distance; so, after a glance or two round, a tall fellow, who is a down shepherd,[161] chucks his hat on to the stage and climbs up the steps, looking rather sheepish. The crowd, of course, first cheer, then chaff[162] as usual, as he picks up his hat and begins handling the sticks to see which will suit him.

THE BACK-SWORDING

"Wooy,[163] Willum Smith, thee canst plaay wi' he[164] arra[165] daay," says his companion to the blacksmith's apprentice, a stout young fellow of nineteen or twenty. Willum's sweetheart is in the "veast" somewhere, and has strictly enjoined him not to get his head broke at back-swording, on pain of her highest displeasure; but as she is not to be seen (the women pretend not to like to see the back-sword play, and keep away from the stage), and as his hat is decidedly getting old, he chucks it on to the stage, and follows himself, hoping that he will only have to break other people's heads, or that after all Rachel won't really mind.

Then follows the greasy cap, lined with fur, of a half-gipsy, poaching,[166] loafing fellow who travels the Vale not for much good, I fancy:

> "Full twenty times was Peter feared
> For once that Peter was respected,"[167]

in fact. And then three or four other hats, including the glossy castor[168] of Joe Willis, the self-elected and would-be champion of the neighborhood, a well-to-do young butcher of twenty-eight or thereabouts, and a great strapping fellow, with his full allowance of bluster. This is a capital show of gamesters, considering the amount of the prize; so, while they are picking their sticks and drawing their lots, I think I must tell you, as shortly as I can, how the noble old game of back-sword is played; for it has sadly gone out of late, even in the Vale, and maybe you have never seen it.

The weapon is a good stout ash-stick with a large basket-handle,[169] heavier and some what shorter than a common single-stick. The players are called "old gamesters" – why, I can't tell you – and their object is simply to break one another's head: for the moment that blood runs an inch anywhere above the eyebrow, the old gamester to whom it belongs is beaten, and has to stop. A very slight blow with the sticks will fetch blood, so that it is by no means a punishing pastime, if the men don't play on purpose, and savagely, at the bodies and arms of their adversaries. The old gamester going into action only takes off his hat and coat, and arms himself with a stick; he then loops the fingers of his left hand in a handkerchief or strap, which he fastens round his left leg, measuring the length, so that when he draws it tight with his left elbow in the air, that elbow shall just reach as high

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[160] **Half-sovereign**: ten shillings ($2.50).

[161] **Down shepherd**: a shepherd on the downs or chalk hills.

[162] **Chaff**: make fun, ridicule.

[163] **Wooy**: why.

[164] **He**: here, him.

[165] **Arra**: any.

[166] **Poaching**: game-stealing.

[167] Wordsworth's "Peter Bell."

[168] **Castor**: a tall silk hat.

[169] **Basket-handle**: a handle protected by wicker-work.

as his crown. Thus you see, so long as he chooses to keep his left elbow up, regardless of cuts, he has a perfect guard for the left side of his head. Then he advances his right hand above and in front of his head, holding his stick across, so that its point projects an inch or two over his left elbow; and thus his whole head is completely guarded, and he faces his man armed in like manner; and they stand some three feet apart, often nearer, and feint,[170] and strike, and return at one another's head, until one cries "hold," or blood flows. In the first case they are allowed a minute's time, and go on again; in the latter, another pair of gamesters are called on. If good men are playing, the quickness of the return is marvellous; you hear the rattle like that a boy makes drawing his stick along palings, only heavier; and the closeness of the men in action to one another gives it a strange interest, and makes a spell at back-swording a very noble sight.

JOE AND THE GIPSY

They are all suited now with sticks, and Joe Willis and the gipsy man have drawn the first lot. So the rest lean against the rails of the stage, and Joe and the dark man meet in the middle, the boards having been strewed with sawdust; Joe's white shirt and spotless drab breeches and boots contrasting with the gipsy's coarse blue shirt and dirty green velveteen breeches and leather gaiters. Joe is evidently turning up his nose at the other, and half insulted at having to break his head.

The gipsy is a tough, active fellow, but not very skilful with his weapon, so that Joe's weight and strength tell in a minute; he is too heavy metal for him; whack, whack, whack, come his blows, breaking down the gipsy's guard, and threatening to reach his head every moment. There it is at last – "Blood, blood!" shouted the spectators, as a thin stream oozes out slowly from the roots of his hair, and the umpire[171] calls to them to stop. The gipsy scowls at Joe under his brows in no pleasant manner, while Master Joe swaggers about, and makes attitudes, and thinks himself, and shows that he thinks himself, the greatest man in the field.

Then follow several stout sets-to between the other candidates for the new hat, and at last come to the shepherd and Willum Smith. This is the crack set-to of the day. They are both in famous wind, and there is no crying "hold"; the shepherd is an old hand, and up to all the dodges; he tries them one after another, and very nearly gets at Willum's head by coming in near, and playing over his guard at the half-stick, but somehow Willum blunders through, catching the stick on his shoulders, neck, sides, every now and then, anywhere but on his head, and his returns are heavy and straight, and he is the youngest gamester and a favorite in the parish, and his gallant stand brings down shouts and cheers, and the knowing ones think he'll win if he keeps steady, and Tom, on the groom's shoulder, holds his hands together, and can hardly breathe for excitement.

Alas for Willum! his sweetheart, getting tired of female companionship, has been hunting the booths to see where he can have got to, and now catches sight of him on the stage in full combat. She flushes and turns pale; her old aunt catches hold of her saying: "Bless 'ee,[172] child, doan't 'ee go a'nigst[173] it;" but she breaks away and runs toward the stage calling his name. Willum keeps up his guard stoutly, but glances for a moment toward the voice. No guard will do it, Willum, without the eye. The shepherd steps round and strikes, and the point of his stick just grazes Willum's forehead, fetching off the skin, and the blood flows, and the umpire cries "Hold," and poor Willum's chance is up for the day. But he takes it very well, and puts on his old hat and coat, and goes down to be scolded by his sweetheart, and led away out of mischief. Tom hears him say coaxingly as he walks off: —

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[170] **Feint**: to pretend to make a thrust or to give a blow.

[171] **Umpire**: judge or referee.

[172] **'ee**: thee, you.

[173] **A'nigst**: near.

"Now doan't ee, Rachel! I wouldn't ha' done it, only I wanted summut[174] to buy ee a fairing wi', and I be as vlush[175] o' money as a twod[176] o' veathers."[177]

"Thee minds what I tells ee," rejoins Rachel, saucily, "and doan't ee keep blethering[178] about fairings." Tom resolves in his heart to give Willum the remainder of his two shillings after the back-swording.

Joe Willis had all the luck to-day. His next bout ends in an easy victory, while the shepherd has a tough job to break his second head; and when Joe and the shepherd meet, and the whole circle expect and hope to see him get a broken crown, the shepherd slips in the first round, and falls against the rails, hurting himself so that the old farmer will not let him go on, much as he wishes to try; and that imposter, Joe (for he is certainly not the best man) struts and swaggers about the stage the conquering gamester, though he hasn't had five minutes' really trying play.

A NEW "OLD GAMESTER."

Joe takes the new hat in his hand, and puts the money in it, and then, as if a thought strikes him, and he doesn't think his victory quite acknowledged down below, walks to each face of the stage, and looks down, shaking the money, and chaffing, as how he'll stake hat and money and another half sovereign, "agin any gamester as hasn't played already." Cunning Joe! he thus gets rid of Willum and the shepherd who is quite fresh again.

No one seems to like the offer, and the umpire is just coming down, when a queer old hat, something like a doctor of divinity's shovel,[179] is chucked on the stage, and an elderly quiet man steps out, who has been watching the play, saying he should like to cross a stick "wi' the prodigalish young chap."

The crowd cheer and begin to chaff Joe, who turns up his nose and swaggers across to the sticks. "Imp'dent old wos-bird!"[180] says he, "I'll break the bald head on un to the truth."

The old boy is very bald, certainly, and the blood will show fast enough if you touch him, Joe.

JOE OUT OF LUCK

He takes off his long-flapped coat, and stands up in a long-flapped waistcoat, which Sir Roger de Coverley[181] might have worn when it was new, picks out a stick, and is ready for Master Joe, who loses no time, but begins his old game, whack, whack, whack, trying to break down the old man's guard by sheer strength. But it won't do – he catches every blow close by the basket: and though he is rather stiff in his returns, after a minute walks Joe about the stage, and is clearly a staunch old gamester. Joe now comes in, and making the most of his height, tries to get over the old man's guard at half stick, by which he takes a smart blow in the ribs and another on the elbow, and nothing more. And now he loses wind and begins to puff, and the crowd laugh: "Cry, 'hold,' Joe – thee's met thy match!" Instead of taking good advice and getting his wind, Joe loses his temper and strikes at the old man's body.

"Blood, blood!" shout the crowd, "Joe's head's broke!"

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[174] **Summut**: something or somewhat.

[175] **Vlush**: flush.

[176] **Twod**: a toad.

[177] **Veathers**: feathers.

[178] **Blethering**: talking nonsense.

[179] **Shovel**: a broad-brimmed hat turned up at the sides. It was formerly much worn by clergymen of the Church of England.

[180] **Wos-bird**: a bird that steals corn.

[181] **Sir Roger de Coverley**: a typical old country gentleman of delightful simplicity of character. See Addison's "Spectator."

Who'd have thought it? How did it come? That body-blow left Joe's head unguarded for a moment, and with one turn of the wrist the old gentleman has picked a neat bit of skin off the middle of his forehead; and though he won't believe it, and hammers on for three more blows despite of the shouts, is then convinced by the blood trickling into his eyes. Poor Joe is sadly crestfallen, and fumbles in his pocket for the other half-sovereign, but the old gamester won't have it. "Keep thy money, man, and gi's[182] thy hand," says he, and they shake hands; but the old gamester gives the hat to the shepherd, and, soon after, the half-sovereign to Willum, who thereout decorates his sweetheart with ribbons to his heart's content.

"Who can a[183] be! Wur[184] do a cum from?" ask the crowd. And it soon flies about that the west-country champion, who played a tie[185] with Shaw, the life-guardsman[186] at "Vizes"[187] twenty years before, has broken Joe Willis's crown for him.

THE REVELS ARE OVER

How my country fair is spinning out! I see I must skip the wrestling, and the boys jumping in sacks, and rolling wheelbarrows blindfolded; and the donkey-race, and the fight which arose thereout, marring the otherwise peaceful "veast," and the frightened scurrying away of the female feast-goers, and descent of Squire Brown, summoned by the wife of one of the combatants to stop it, which he wouldn't start to do till he had got on his top-boots. Tom is carried away by old Benjy, dog-tired and surfeited with pleasure, as the evening comes on and the dancing begins in the booths; and though Willum and Rachel in her new ribbons, and many another good lad and lass, don't come away just yet, but have a good step out and enjoy it, and get no harm thereby, yet we, being sober folk, will just stroll away up through the church-yard, and by the old yew-tree; and get a quiet dish of tea and bit of talk with our gossips, as the steady ones of our village do, and so to bed.

THE OLD BOY MORALIZETH ON VEASTS

That's a fair, true sketch, as far as it goes, of one of the larger village feasts in the Vale of Berks, when I was a little boy. They are much altered for the worse, I am told. I haven't been at one these twenty years, but I have been at the statute fairs in some west-country towns, where servants are hired, and greater abominations cannot be found. What village feasts have come to, I fear, in many cases, may be read in the pages of "Yeast,[188]" though I never saw one so bad – thank God!

Do you want to know why? It is because, as I said before, gentlefolk and farmers have left off joining or taking any interest in them. They don't either subscribe to the prizes, or go down and enjoy the fun.

Is this a good or a bad sign? I hardly know. Bad, sure enough, if it only arises from the further separation of classes consequent on twenty years of buying cheap and selling dear, and its accompanying overwork; or because our sons and daughters have their hearts in London club-life, or so-called society, instead of in the old English home duties; because farmers' sons are aping fine gentlemen, and farmers' daughters caring more to make bad foreign music than good English cheeses. Good, perhaps, if it be that the time for the old "veast" has gone by, that it is no longer the healthy,

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[182] **Gi's**: give us.

[183] **A**: he.

[184] **Wur**: where.

[185] **Tie**: a contest in which neither side gains the victory.

[186] **Life-guardsman**: one of the Queen's body-guard.

[187] **"Vizes"**: a contraction of Devizes, a town in Wiltshire.

[188] **Yeast**: a novel by Charles Kingsley.

sound expression of English country holiday-making; that, in fact, we as a nation have got beyond it, and are in a transition state, feeling for and soon likely to find some better substitute.

Only I have just got this to say before I quit the text. Don't let reformers of any sort think that they are going really to lay hold of the working boys and young men of England by any educational grapnel[189] whatever, which hasn't some *bona fide*[190] equivalent for the games of the old country "veast" in it; something to put in the place of the back-swording and wrestling and racing; something to try the muscles of men's bodies, and the endurance of their hearts, and to make them rejoice in their strength. In all the new-fangled comprehensive plans which I see, this is all left out; and the consequence is that your great Mechanics' Institutes end in intellectual priggism;[191] and your Christian Young Men Societies in religious Pharisaism.

ADVICE TO YOUNG SWELLS

Well, well, we must bide our time. Life isn't all beer and skittles, – but beer and skittles,[192] or something better of the same sort, must form a good part of every Englishman's education. If I could only drive this into the heads of you rising Parliamentary lords and young swells who "have your ways made for you," as the saying is, – you who frequent palaver houses[193] and West-End clubs,[194] waiting, always ready to strap yourselves on to the back of poor dear old John,[195] as soon as the present used-up lot (your fathers and uncles), who sit there on the great Parliamentary-majorities' pack-saddle, and make believe they are guiding him with their red-tape[196] bridle, tumble, or have to be lifted off.

I don't think much of you yet – I wish I could; though you do go talking and lecturing up and down the country to crowded audiences, and are busy with all sorts of philanthropic intellectualism, and circulating libraries and museums, and Heaven only knows what besides, and try to make us think, through newspaper reports, that you are, even as we, of the working classes. But, bless your hearts, we "aren't so green," though lots of us of all sorts toady[197] you enough certainly, and try to make you think so.

I'll tell you what to do now; instead of all this trumpeting and fuss, which is only the old Parliamentary-majority dodge over again – just you go each of you (you've plenty of time for it, if you'll only give, up t'other line) and quietly make three or four friends, real friends among us. You'll find a little trouble in getting at the right sort, because such birds don't come lightly to your lure, – but found they may be. Take, say, two out of the professions, lawyer, parson, doctor – which you will; one out of trade, and three or four out of the working-classes, tailors, engineers, carpenters, engravers – there's plenty of choice. Let them be men of your own ages, mind, and ask them to your homes; introduce them to your wives and sisters, and get introduced to theirs, give them good dinners, and talk to them about what is really at the bottom of your hearts; and box, and run, and row with them, when you have a chance. Do all this honestly as man to man, and by the time you come to ride old John, you'll be able to do something more than sit on his back, and may feel his mouth with some stronger bridle than a red-tape one.

Ah, if you only would! But you have got too far out of the right rut, I fear. Too much over civilization, and the deceitfulness of riches. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.

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[189] **Grapnel**: a grappling hook.

[190] **Bona fide**: real.

[191] **Priggism**: affectation, conceit.

[192] **Skittles**: the game of ninepins.

[193] **Palaver houses**: talk houses – the Houses of Parliament.

[194] **West-End Clubs**: clubs in the fashionable quarter of London.

[195] **Old John**: John Bull.

[196] **Red-tape**: official routine and formalism.

[197] **Toady**: flatter.

More's the pity. I never came across but two of you who could value a man wholly and solely for what was in him; who thought themselves verily and indeed of the same flesh and blood as John Jones, the attorney's clerk, and Bill Smith, the costermonger,[198] and could act as if they thought so.

FOOTNOTES

[198] **Costermonger**: a fruit and vegetable pedler.

CHAPTER III
SUNDRY WARS AND ALLIANCES

"Poor old Benjy! the "rheumatiz" has much to answer for all through English country-sides,[199] but it never played a scurvier trick than in laying thee by the heels, when thou wast yet in a green old age. The enemy, which had long been carrying on a sort of border warfare, and trying his strength against Benjy's on the battlefield of his hands and legs, now, mustering all his forces, began laying siege to the citadel, and overrunning the whole country. Benjy was seized in the back and loins; and though he made strong and brave fight, it was soon clear enough that all which could be beaten of poor old Benjy would have to give in before long.

It was as much as he could do now, with the help of his big stick and frequent stops, to hobble down to the canal with Master Tom, and bait his hook for him, and sit and watch his angling, telling him quaint old country stories; and when Tom had no sport, and detecting a rat some hundred yards or so off along the bank, would rush off with Toby, the turnspit[200] terrier, his other faithful companion, in bootless pursuit, he might have tumbled in and been drowned twenty times over before Benjy could have got near him.

Cheery and unmindful of himself as Benjy was, this loss of locomotive power bothered him greatly. He had got a new object in his old age, and was just beginning to think himself useful again in the world. He feared much, too, lest Master Tom should fall back again into the hands of Charity and the women. So he tried everything he could think of to get set up. He even went on an expedition to the dwelling of one of those queer mortals, who – say what we will and reason how we will – do cure simple people of diseases of one kind or another without the aid of physic; and so get to themselves the reputation of using charms, and inspire for themselves and their dwellings great respect, not to say fear, amongst a simple folk such as the dwellers in the Vale of White Horse. Where this power, or whatever else it may be, descends upon the shoulders of a man whose ways are not straight, he becomes a nuisance to the neighborhood; a receiver of stolen goods, the avowed enemy of law and order. Sometimes, however, they are of quite a different stamp, men who pretend to know nothing, and are with difficulty persuaded to exercise their occult[201] arts in the simplest cases.

BENJY RESORTS TO A "WISE MAN."

Of this latter sort was old Farmer Ives, as he was called, the "wise man" to whom Benjy resorted (taking Tom with him as usual), in the early spring of the year next after the feast described in the last chapter. Why he was called "farmer" I cannot say, unless it be that he was the owner of a cow, a pig or two, and some poultry, which he maintained on about an acre of land inclosed from the middle of a wild common, on which probably his father had squatted before lords of manors[202] looked as keenly after their rights as they do now. Here he had lived no one knew how long, a solitary man. It was often rumored that he was to be turned out and his cottage pulled down, but somehow it never came to pass; and his pigs and cow went grazing on the common, and his geese hissed at the passing children and at the heels of the horse of my lord's steward, who often rode by with a covetous eye on the inclosure, still unmolested. His dwelling was some miles from our village; so Benjy, who was half ashamed of his errand, and wholly unable to walk there, had to exercise much ingenuity to get the means of transporting himself and Tom thither without exciting suspicion. However, one fine May

[199] **Country-sides**: country districts.

[200] **Turnspit**: a kind of dog, formerly trained to turn a spit for roasting meat.

[201] **Occult**: secret or magical.

[202] **Manor**: the estate of a lord.

morning he managed to borrow the old blind pony of our friend the publican,[203] and Tom persuaded Madam Brown to give him a holiday to spend with old Benjy, and to lend them the squire's light cart, stored with bread and cold meat and a bottle of ale. And so the two in high glee started behind old Dobbin, and jogged along the deep-rutted plashy roads, which had not been mended after their winter's wear, toward the dwelling of the wizard. About noon they passed the gate which opened on to the large common, and old Dobbin toiled slowly up the hill, while Benjy pointed out a little deep dingle on the left, out of which welled a tiny stream. As they crept up the hill the tops of a few birch-trees came in sight, and blue smoke curling up through their delicate light boughs; and then the little white thatched home and inclosed ground of Farmer Ives, lying cradled in the dingle,[204] with the gay gorse common rising behind and on both sides; while in front, after traversing a gentle slope, the eye might travel for miles and miles over the rich Vale. They now left the main road and struck into a green track over the common, marked lightly with wheel and horse-shoe, which led down into the dingle and stopped at the rough gate of Farmer Ives. Here they found the farmer, an iron-gray old man, with a bushy eyebrow and strong aquiline nose busied in one of his vocations. He was a horse and cow doctor, and was tending a sick beast which had been sent up to be cured. Benjy hailed him as an old friend, and he returned the greeting cordially enough, looking, however, hard for a moment both at Benjy and Tom, to see whether there was more in their visit than appeared at first sight. It was a work of some difficulty and danger for Benjy to reach the ground, which, however, he managed to do without mishap; and then he devoted himself to unharnessing Dobbin, and turning him out for a graze ("a run" one could not say of that virtuous steed) on the common. This done, he extricated the cold provisions from the cart, and they entered the farmer's wicket;[205] and he, shutting up the knife with which he was at work, accompanied them toward the cottage. A big old lurcher[206] got up slowly from the doorstone, stretching first one hind leg, and then the other, and taking Tom's caresses and the presence of Toby, who kept, however, at a respectful distance, with equal indifference.

"Us be come to pay ee a visit. I've a been long minded to do't for old sake's sake, only I vinds I dwont get about now as I'd used to't. I be so plaguy bad wi' th' rhumatiz in my back." Benjy paused, in hopes of drawing the farmer at once on the subject of his ailment without further direct application.

"Ah, I see as you bean't quite so lissom[207] as you was," replied the farmer, with a grim smile, as he lifted the latch of his door. "We bean't so young as we was, nother[208] on us, wuss luck."

THE "WISE MAN'S" SURROUNDINGS

The farmer's cottage was very like those of the better class of peasantry in general. A snug chimney-corner with two seats and a small carpet on the hearth, an old flint gun and a pair of spurs over the fire-place, a dresser[209] with shelves, on which some bright pewter plates and crockery-ware were arranged, an old walnut table, a few chairs and settles,[210] some framed samplers[211] and an old print or two, and a book-case with some dozen volumes on the walls, a rack with flitches[212] of bacon and other stores fastened to the ceiling, and you have the best part of the furniture. No sign of occult

[203] **Publican**: an innkeeper.

[204] **Dingle**: a narrow valley.

[205] **Wicket**: gate.

[206] **Lurcher**: a dog that lies in wait for game, more used by poachers or men that steal game than by sportsmen.

[207] **Lissom**: limber.

[208] **Nother**: neither.

[209] **Dresser**: a sideboard or cupboard.

[210] **Settle**: a bench.

[211] **Sampler**: a pattern for needlework.

[212] **Flitch**: a side of bacon.

art is to be seen, unless the bundles of dried herbs hanging to the rack and in the ingle,[213] and the row of labelled vials on one of the shelves betoken it.

Tom played about with some kittens who occupied the hearth, and with a goat who walked demurely in at the open door, while their host and Benjy spread the table for dinner – and was soon engaged in conflict with the cold meat, to which he did much honor. The two old men's talk was of old comrades and their deeds, mute inglorious Miltons[214] of the Vale, and of the doings thirty years back – which didn't interest him much, except when they spoke of the making of the canal; and then, indeed, he began to listen with all his ears, and learned, to his no small wonder, that his dear and wonderful canal had not been there always – was not, in fact, as old as Benjy or Farmer Ives, which caused a strange commotion in his small brain.

After dinner Benjy called attention to a wart which Tom had on the knuckles of his hand, and which the family doctor had been trying his skill on without success, and begged the farmer to charm it away. Farmer Ives looked at it, muttered something or another over it, and cut some notches in a short stick, which he handed to Benjy, giving him instructions for cutting it down on certain days, and cautioning Tom not to meddle with the wart for a fortnight. And then they strolled out and sat on a bench in the sun with their pipes, and the pigs came up and grunted sociably and let Tom scratch them; and the farmer, seeing how he liked animals, stood up and held his arms in the air and gave a call, which brought a flock of pigeons wheeling and dashing through the birch-trees. They settled down in clusters on the farmer's arms and shoulders, making love to him and scrambling over one another's back to get to his face; and then he threw them all off, and they fluttered about close by, and lighted on him again and again when he held up his arms. All the creatures about the place were clean and fearless, quite unlike their relations elsewhere; and Tom begged to be taught how to make all the pigs and cows and poultry in our village tame, at which the farmer only gave one of his grim chuckles.

BENJY'S RHEUMATISM

It wasn't till they were just ready to go, and old Dobbin was harnessed, that Benjy broached the subject of his rheumatism again, detailing his symptoms one by one. Poor old boy! He hoped the farmer could charm it away as easily as he could Tom's wart, and was ready with equal faith to put another notched stick into his other pocket for the cure of his ailments. The physician shook his head, but nevertheless produced a bottle and handed it to Benjy with instructions for use. "Not as t'll do ee much good – leastways I be afeared not," shading his eyes with his hand and looking up at them in the cart; "there's only one thing as I knows on, as'll cure old folks like you and I o' th' rhumatiz."

"Wot be that, then, farmer?" inquired Benjy.

"Church-yard mold," said the old iron-gray man with another chuckle. And so they said their good-byes and went their ways home. Tom's wart was gone in a fortnight, but not so Benjy's rheumatism, which laid him by the heels more and more. And though Tom still spent many an hour with him, as he sat on a bench in the sunshine, or by the chimney-corner when it was cold, he soon had to seek elsewhere for his regular companions.

Tom had been accustomed often to accompany his mother in her visits to the cottages, and had thereby made acquaintances with many of the village boys of his own age. There was Job Rudkin, son of widow Rudkin, the most bustling woman in the parish. How she could ever have had such a stolid[215] boy as Job for a child, must always remain a mystery. The first time Tom went to their cottage with his mother, Job was not indoors, but he entered soon after, and stood with both hands in his pockets staring at Tom. Widow Rudkin, who would have had to cross Madam to get at young

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[213] **Ingle**: chimney-corner.

[214] **"Mute, inglorious Miltons"**: see Gray's "Elegy."

[215] **Stolid**: dull.

Hopeful – a breach of good manners of which she was wholly incapable – began a series of pantomime signs, which only puzzled him, and at last, unable to contain herself longer, burst out with, "Job! Job! where's thy cap?"

"What! beant ee on ma head, mother?" replied Job, slowly extricating one hand from a pocket and feeling for the article in question; which he found on his head sure enough, and left there, to his mother's horror and Tom's great delight.

Then there was poor Jacob Dodson, the half-witted boy, who ambled about cheerfully, undertaking messages and little helpful odds and ends, for every one, which, however, poor Jacob managed always hopelessly to embrangle.[216] Everything came to pieces in his hands, and nothing would stop in his head. They nicknamed him Jacob Doodle-calf.

But above all there was Harry Winburn, the quickest and best boy in the parish. He might be a year older than Tom, but was very little bigger, and he was the Crichton[217] of our village boys. He could wrestle and climb and run better than all the rest, and learned all that the schoolmaster could teach him faster than that worthy at all liked. He was a boy to be proud of, with his curly brown hair, keen gray eye, straight active figure, and little ears and hands and feet – "as fine as a lord's," as Charity remarked to Tom one day, talking as usual great nonsense. Lords' hands and ears and feet are just as ugly as other folks' when they are children, as any one may convince himself if he likes to look. Tight boots and gloves, and doing nothing with them, I allow make a difference by the time they are twenty.

TORYISM OF SQUIRE BROWN

Now that Benjy was laid on the shelf, and his young brothers were still under petticoat government, Tom, in search of companions, began to cultivate the village boys generally more and more. Squire Brown, be it said, was a true blue[218] Tory[219] to the backbone, and believed honestly that the powers which be were ordained of God, and that loyalty and steadfast obedience were man's first duties. Whether it were in consequence or in spite of his political creed, I do not mean to give an opinion, though I have one; but certain it is, that he held therewith divers social principles not generally supposed to be true blue in color. Foremost of these, and the one which the Squire loved to propound above all others, was the belief that a man is to be valued wholly and solely for that which he is in himself, for that which stands up in the four fleshy walls of him, apart from clothes, rank, fortune, and all externals whatsoever. Which belief I take to be a wholesome corrective of all political opinions, and, if held sincerely, to make all opinions equally harmless, whether they be blue, red or green. As a necessary corollary[220] to this belief, Squire Brown held further that it didn't matter a straw whether his son associated with lords' sons or plowmen's sons, provided they were brave and honest. He himself had played foot-ball and gone birds'-nesting with the farmers whom he met at vestry[221] and the laborers who tilled their fields, and so had his father and grandfather, with their progenitors.[222] So he encouraged Tom in his intimacy with the boys of the village, and forwarded it by all means in his power, and gave them the run of a close[223] for a playground, and provided bats and balls and a foot-ball for their sports.

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[216] **Embrangle**: mix up.

[217] **Crichton**: a Scottish gentleman of the sixteenth century, called for his learning and skill "The Admirable Crichton."

[218] **True blue**: genuine.

[219] **Tory**: a member of the conservative party in politics.

[220] **Corollary**: an inference from something before stated.

[221] **Vestry**: parish meeting.

[222] **Progenitors**: forefathers.

[223] **Close**: any inclosed place; here, probably a field.

TOM'S WATCH-TOWER BY THE SCHOOL

Our village was blessed, amongst other things, with a well-endowed school. The building stood by itself, apart from the master's house, on an angle of ground where three roads met; an old gray stone building, with a steep roof and mullioned[224] windows. On one of the opposite angles stood Squire Brown's stables and kennel, with their backs to the road, over which towered a great elm-tree; on the third, stood the village carpenter and wheelwright's large open shop, and his house and the schoolmaster's, with long, low eaves under which the swallows built by scores.

The moment Tom's lessons were over, he would now get him down to this corner by the stables, and watch till the boys came out of school. He prevailed on the groom to cut notches for him in the bark of the elm, so that he could climb into the lower branches, and there he would sit watching the school-door, and speculating on the possibility of turning the elm into a dwelling-place for himself and friends after the manner of the Swiss Family Robinson.[225] But the school hours were long and Tom's patience short; so that he soon began to descend into the street, and go and peep in at the school-door and the wheelwright's shop, and look out for something to while away the time. Now the wheelwright was a choleric[226] man, and one fine afternoon, returning from a short absence, found Tom occupied with one of his pet adzes, the edge of which was fast vanishing under our hero's care. A speedy flight saved Tom from all but one sound cuff on the ears, but he resented this unjustifiable interruption of his first essays at carpentering, and still more the further proceedings of the wheelwright, who cut a switch and hung it over the door of his workshop, threatening to use it upon Tom if he came within twenty yards of his gate. So Tom, to retaliate, commenced a war upon the swallows who dwelt under the wheelwright's eaves, whom he harassed with sticks and stones, and being fleeter of foot than his enemy, escaped all punishment, and kept him in perpetual anger. Moreover, his presence about the school-door began to incense the master, as the boys in that neighborhood neglected their lessons in consequence: and more than once he issued into the porch, rod in hand, just as Tom beat a hasty retreat. And he and the wheelwright, laying their heads together, resolved to acquaint the squire with Tom's afternoon occupations; but, in order to do it with effect, determined to take him captive and lead him away to judgment fresh from his evil doings. This they would have found some difficulty in doing, had Tom continued the war single-handed, or rather single-footed, for he would have taken to the deepest part of Pebbly Brook to escape them; but, like other active powers, he was ruined by his alliances. Poor Jacob Doodle-calf could not go to the school with the other boys, and one fine afternoon, about three o'clock (the school broke up at four) Tom found him ambling about the street, and pressed him into a visit to the school-porch. Jacob, always ready to do what was asked, consented, and the two stole down to the school together. Tom first reconnoitered[227] the wheelwright's shop, and seeing no signs of activity, thought all safe in that quarter, and ordered at once an advance of all his troops upon the school-porch. The door of the school was ajar, and the boys seated on the nearest bench at once recognized and opened a correspondence with the invaders. Tom, waxing bold, kept putting his head into the school and making faces at the master when his back was turned. Poor Jacob, not in the least comprehending the situation, and in high glee at finding himself so near the school, which he had never been allowed to enter, suddenly, in a fit of enthusiasm, pushed by Tom, and ambling three steps into the school, stood there, looking round him and nodding with a self-approving smile. The master who was stooping over a boy's slate, with his back to the door, became aware of something unusual, and turned quickly round. Tom rushed at Jacob, and began dragging him back

[224] **Mullioned**: subdivided by slender, upright bars or columns.

[225] **Swiss Family Robinson**: a story of the adventures of a shipwrecked family on a desert island.

[226] **Choleric**: inclined to anger.

[227] **Reconnoitered**: here, examined in a general way or at a little distance.

by his smock-frock, and the master made at them, scattering forms[228] and boys in his career. Even now they might have escaped, but that in the porch, barring retreat, appeared the crafty wheelwright, who had been watching all their proceedings. So they were seized, the school dismissed, and Tom and Jacob led away to Squire Brown as lawful prizes, the boys following to the gate in groups, and speculating on the result.

DEFEAT, CAPTURE, PEACE

The Squire was very angry at first, but the interview, with Tom's pleading, ended in a compromise. Tom was not to go near the school till three o'clock, and only then if he had done his own lessons well, in which case he was to be the bearer of a note to the master from Squire Brown; and the master agreed in such case to release ten or twelve of the best boys an hour before the time of breaking up, to go off and play in the close. The wheelwright's adzes and swallows were to be forever respected; and that hero and the master withdrew to the servants' hall,[229] to drink the Squire's health, well satisfied with their day's work.

The second act of Tom's life may now be said to have begun. The war of independence had been over for some time; none of the women now, not even his mother's maid, dared offer to help him in dressing or washing. Between ourselves, he had often at first to run to Benjy in an unfinished state of toilet. Charity and the rest of them seemed to take a delight in putting impossible buttons and ties in the middle of his back; but he would have gone without nether[230] integuments[231] altogether, sooner than have had recourse to female valeting. He had a room to himself, and his father gave him sixpence a week pocket-money. All this he had achieved by Benjy's advice and assistance. But now he had conquered another step in life, the step which all real boys so long to make; he had got amongst his equals in age and strength, and could measure himself with other boys; he lived with those whose pursuits and wishes and ways were the same in kind as his own.

PLAY AND WORK

The little governess, who had lately been installed in the house, found her work grow wondrously easy, for Tom slaved at his lessons in order to make sure of his note to the schoolmaster. So there were very few days in the week in which Tom and the village boys were not playing in their close by three o'clock. Prisoner's base,[232] rounders, high-cock-a-lorum, cricket, foot-ball, he was soon initiated into the delights of them all; and though most of the boys were older than himself, he managed to hold his own very well. He was naturally active and strong, and quick of eye and hand, and had the advantage of light shoes and well-fitting dress, so that in a short time he could run and jump and climb with any of them.

RIDING AND WRESTLING

They generally finished their regular games half an hour or so before tea-time, and then began trials of skill and strength in many ways. Some of them would catch the Shetland pony who was turned out in the field, and get two or three together on his back, and the little rogue, enjoying the fun, would gallop off for fifty yards and then turn round, or stop short and shoot them on to the turf, and then gaze quietly on till he felt another load; others played at peg-top or marbles, while a few of

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[228] **Forms**: benches.

[229] **Servants' hall**: the servants' dining-room.

[230] **Nether**: lower.

[231] **Integuments**: garments.

[232] **Prisoner's base**, etc.: boys' games.

the bigger ones stood up for a bout at wrestling. Tom at first only looked on at this pastime, but it had peculiar attractions for him, and he could not long keep out of it. Elbow and collar wrestling, as practised in the western counties, was, next to back-swording, the way to fame for the youth of the Vale; and all the boys knew the rules of it, and were more or less expert. But Job Rudkin and Harry Winburn were the stars, the former stiff and sturdy, with legs like small towers, the latter pliant as india-rubber and quick as lightning. Day after day they stood foot to foot, and offered first one hand and then the other, and grappled, and closed, and swayed, and strained, till a well-aimed crook of the heel or thrust of the loin took effect, and a fair backfall ended the matter. And Tom watched with all his eyes, and first challenged one of the less scientific, and threw him; and so one by one wrestled his way up to the leaders.

Then indeed for months he had a poor time of it; it was not long indeed before he could manage to keep his legs against Job, for that hero was slow of offence, and gained his victories chiefly by allowing others to throw themselves against his immovable legs and loins, but Harry Winburn was undeniably his master; from the first clutch of hands when they stood up, down to the last trip which sent him on his back on the turf, he felt that Harry knew more and could do more than he. Luckily Harry's bright unconsciousness, and Tom's natural good temper, kept them from ever quarrelling; and so Tom worked on and on, and trod more and more nearly on Harry's heels, and at last mastered all the dodges and falls except one. This one was Harry's own particular invention and pet; he scarcely ever used it except when hard pressed, but then out it came, and, as sure as it did, over went poor Tom. He thought about that fall at his meals, in his walks, when he lay awake in bed, in his dreams, – but all to no purpose; until Harry one day in his open way suggested to him how he thought it should be met, and in a week from that time the boys were equal, save only the slight difference of strength in Harry's favor, which some extra ten months of age gave. Tom had often afterward reason to be thankful for that early drilling, and above all for having mastered Harry Winburn's fall.

Besides their home games, on Saturdays the boys would wander all over the neighborhood; sometimes to the downs or up to the camp, where they cut their initials out in the springy turf, and watched the hawks soaring, and the "peert" bird, as Harry Winburn called the gray plover, gorgeous in his wedding feathers; and so home, racing down the Manger with many a roll among the thistles, or through Uffington-wood to watch the fox-cubs playing in the green rides;[233] sometimes to Rosy Brook, to cut long whispering reeds which grew there, to make pan-pipes of; sometimes to Moor Mills, where was a piece of old forest land, with short browsed turf and tufted brambly thickets stretching under the oaks, amongst which rumor declared that a raven,[234] last of his race, still lingered; or to the sand hills, in vain quest of rabbits; and birds'-nesting, in the season, anywhere and everywhere.

EARLIEST PLAYMATES

The few neighbors of the Squire's own rank every now and then would shrug their shoulders as they drove or rode by a party of boys with Tom in the middle, carrying along bulrushes or whispering reeds, or great bundles of cowslip and meadow-sweet, or young starlings or magpies, or other spoil of wood, brook, or meadow, and Lawyer Redtape might mutter to Squire Straightback at the Board, that no good would come of the young Browns, if they were let run wild with all the dirty village boys, whom the best farmers' sons even would not play with. And the Squire might reply with a shake of his head, that *his* sons only mixed with their equals, and never went into the village without a governess or a footman.[235] But, luckily, Squire Brown was full as stiff-backed as his neighbors, and so went on his

[233] **Green rides**: roads cut through woods or pleasure grounds.

[234] **Raven**: a large black bird of the crow family.

[235] **Footman**: a man-servant in livery.

own way; and Tom and his younger brothers, as they grew up, went on playing with the village boys, without the idea of equality or inequality (except in wrestling, running, and climbing) ever entering their heads, as it doesn't till it's put there by over-nice people or fine ladies' maids.

I don't mean to say it would be the case in all villages, but it certainly was so in this one; the village boys were full as manly and honest, and certainly purer than those in a higher rank; and Tom got more harm from his equals in his first fortnight at a private school, where he went when he was nine years old, than he had from his village friends from the day he left Charity's apron-strings.

FIRST SCHOOL

Great was the grief amongst the village school-boys when Tom drove off with the Squire, one August morning, to meet the coach on his way to school. Each of them had given him some little present of the best that he had, and his small private box was full of peg-tops, white marbles (called "alley taws" in the Vale), screws, birds'-eggs, whipcord, Jews-harps, and other miscellaneous boys' wealth. Poor Jacob Doodle-calf, in floods of tears, had pressed upon him, in spluttering earnestness, his lame pet hedgehog (he had always some poor broken-down beast or bird by him); but this Tom had been obliged to refuse by the Squire's order. He had given them all a great tea under the big elm in their playground, for which Madam Brown had supplied the biggest cake ever seen in our village; and Tom was really as sorry to leave them as they to lose him, but his sorrow was not unmixed with the pride and excitement of making a new step in life.

And this feeling carried him through his first parting with his mother better than could have been expected. Their love was as fair and whole as human love can be, perfect self-sacrifice on the one side, meeting a young and true heart on the other. It is not within the scope of my book, however, to speak of family relations, or I should have much to say on the subject of English mothers, – ay, and of English fathers, and sisters, and brothers, too.

OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Neither have I room to speak of our private schools; what I have to say is about public schools,[236] those much-abused and much-belauded[237] institutions peculiar to England. So we must hurry through Master Tom's year at a private school as fast as we can.

It was a fair average specimen, kept by a gentleman, with another gentleman as second master; but it was little enough of the real work they did, – merely coming into school when lessons were prepared and already to be heard. The whole discipline of the school out of lesson hours was in the hands of the two ushers,[238] one of whom was always with the boys in their playground, in the school, at meals, – in fact, at all times and everywhere, till they were fairly in bed at night.

Now, the theory of private schools is (or was) constant supervision out of school; therein differing fundamentally from that of public schools.

It may be right or wrong; but, if right, this supervision surely ought to be the especial work of the head-master, the responsible person. The object of all schools is not to cram Latin and Greek into boys, but to make them good English boys, good future citizens; and by far the most important part of that work must be done, or not done, out of school hours. To leave it, therefore, in the hands of inferior men, is just giving up the highest and hardest part of the work of education. Were I a

[236] **Public schools**: a name given to certain large and richly endowed schools in England which are chiefly patronized by wealthy men. They are wholly unlike the public schools of the United States. Eton, Harrow, Winchester, Rugby, and Westminster are among the best known of this class of schools.

[237] **Belauded**: praised.

[238] **Usher**: an under-teacher.

private schoolmaster, I should say, let who will hear the boys their lessons, but let me live with them when they are at play and rest.

The two ushers in Tom's first school were not gentlemen, were very poorly educated, and were only driving their poor trade of usher to get such living as they could out of it. They were not bad men, but had little heart for their work, and, of course, were bent on making it as easy as possible. One of the methods by which they endeavored to accomplish this was by encouraging tale-bearing, which had become a frightfully common vice in the school in consequence, and had sapped all the foundations of school morality. Another was, by grossly favoring the biggest boys, who alone could have given them much trouble; whereby those young gentlemen became most abominable tyrants, oppressing the little boys in all the small mean ways which prevail in private schools.

TOM'S FIRST LETTER HOME

Poor little Tom was made dreadfully unhappy in his first week, by a catastrophe which happened to his first letter home. With huge labor he had, on the very evening of his arrival, managed to fill two sides of a sheet of letter-paper with the assurances of his love for dear mamma, his happiness at school, and his resolves to do all she would wish. This missive,[239] with the help of the boy who sat at the desk next him, also a new arrival, he managed to fold successfully; but this done they were sadly put to it for means of sealing. Envelopes were then unknown, they had no wax, and dared not disturb the stillness of the evening school-room by getting up and going to ask the usher for some. At length, Tom's friend, being of an ingenious turn of mind, suggested sealing with ink, and the letter was accordingly stuck down with a blob of ink, and duly handed by Tom on his way to bed, to the housekeeper to be posted. It was not till four days afterward that the good dame sent for him, and produced the precious letter and some wax saying, "Oh, Master Brown, I forgot to tell you before, but your letter isn't sealed." Poor Tom took the wax in silence and sealed his letter, with a huge lump rising in his throat during the process, and then ran away to a quiet corner of the playground, and burst into an agony of tears. The idea of his mother waiting day after day for the letter he had promised her at once, and perhaps thinking him forgetful of her, when he had done all in his power to make good his promise, was as bitter a grief as any which he had to undergo for many a long year. His wrath then was proportionately violent when he was aware of two boys, who stopped close by him, and one of whom, a fat gaby[240] of a fellow, pointed at him and called him "Young mammy-sick!" Whereupon Tom arose, and giving vent thus to his grief and shame and rage, smote his derider on the nose, and made it bleed, – which sent that young worthy howling to the usher, who reported Tom for violent and unprovoked assault and battery. Hitting in the face was a felony[241] punishable with flogging, other hitting only a misdemeanor, – a distinction not altogether clear in principle. Tom, however, escaped the penalty by pleading "primum tempus,"[242] and having written a second letter to his mother, inclosing some forget-me-nots, which he picked on their first half-holiday walk, felt quite happy again, and began to enjoy vastly a good deal of his new life.

These half-holiday walks were the great events of the week. The whole fifty boys started after dinner with one of the ushers for Hazeldown, which was distant some mile or so from the school. Hazeldown measured some three miles round, and in the neighborhood were several woods full of all manner of birds and butterflies. The usher walked slowly round the down with such boys as liked to accompany him; the rest scattered in all directions, being only bound to appear again when the usher had completed his round, and accompany him home. They were forbidden, however, to go anywhere

[239] **Missive**: anything to be sent; hence, a letter.

[240] **Gaby**: a dunce.

[241] **Felony**: a serious offence or crime.

[242] **Primum tempus**: first time.

except on the down and into the woods; the village had been especially prohibited, where huge bulls'-eyes[243] and unctuous toffee[244] might be procured in exchange for coin of the realm.

THE AMUSEMENTS

Various were the amusements to which the boys then betook themselves. At the entrance of the down there was a steep hillock, like the barrows of Tom's own downs. This mound was the weekly scene of terrific combats, at a game called by the queer name of "mud-patties." The boys who played divided into sides under different leaders, and one side occupied the mound. Then all parties, having provided themselves with many sods of turf, cut with their bread-and-cheese knives, the side which remained at the bottom proceeded to assault the mound, advancing upon all sides under cover of a heavy fire of turfs, and then struggling for victory with the occupants, which was theirs as soon as they could, even for a moment, clear the summit, when they in turn became the besieged. It was a good, rough, dirty game, and of great use in counteracting the sneaking tendencies of the school. Then others of the boys spread over the downs, looking for the holes of humble bees[245] and mice, which they dug up without mercy, often (I regret to say) killing and skinning the unlucky mice, and (I do not regret to say) getting well stung by the humble bees. Others went after butterflies and birds'-eggs in their seasons; and Tom found on Hazeldown, for the first time, the beautiful little blue butterfly with golden spots on his wings, which he had never seen on his own downs, and dug out his first sand-martin's nest. This latter achievement resulted in a flogging, for the sand-martins build in a high bank close to the village, consequently out of bounds;[246] but one of the bolder spirits of the school, who never could be happy unless he was doing something to which risk attached, easily persuaded Tom to break bounds and visit the martin's bank. From whence, it being only a step to the toffee shop, what could be more simple than to go on there and fill their pockets? or what more certain than that on their return, a distribution of treasure having been made, the usher should shortly detect the forbidden smell of bulls'-eyes, and, a search ensuing, discover the state of the breeches' pockets of Tom and his ally?

THE REPROBATE

This ally of Tom's was indeed a desperate hero in the sight of the boys, and feared as one who dealt in magic, or something approaching thereto. Which reputation came to him in this wise. The boys went to bed at eight, and, of course, consequently lay awake in the dark for an hour or two, telling ghost stories by turns. One night when it came to his turn, and he had dried up their souls by his story, he suddenly declared that he would make a fiery hand appear on the door; and, to the astonishment and terror of the boys in his room, a hand, or something like it, in pale light, did then and there appear. The fame of this exploit having spread to the other rooms, and being discredited there, the young necromancer[247] declared that the same wonder would appear in all the rooms in turn, which it accordingly did; and the whole circumstances having been privately reported to one of the ushers as usual, that functionary, after listening about the doors of the rooms, by a sudden descent caught the performer in his nightshirt, with a box of phosphorus[248] in his guilty hand. Lucifer-matches and all the

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[243] **Bulls'-eyes and toffee**: the former are hard balls of sugar, the latter a kind of candy made of brown sugar and butter.

[244] **Bulls'-eyes and toffee**: the former are hard balls of sugar, the latter a kind of candy made of brown sugar and butter.

[245] **Humble bees**: "bumble-bees."

[246] **Bounds**: the school limits, beyond which boys are not to go without permission.

[247] **Necromancer**: (one who communes with the dead) a conjurer.

[248] **Phosphorus**: the yellowish, inflammable substance used in making common matches – in a pure state it burns on exposure to air. Matches – called "Lucifers" or "light-bringers" – were invented in England about 1829. Previous to that time the only way of striking a light was by flint and steel, the spark being caught on a bit of tinder (half-burnt rag) which was then blown into a blaze.

present facilities for getting acquainted with fire were then unknown: the very name of phosphorus had something diabolic in it to the boy mind; so Tom's ally, at the cost of a sound flogging, earned what many older folks covet much, – the very decided fear of most of his companions.

He was a remarkable boy and by no means a bad one. Tom stuck to him till he left, and got into many scrapes by so doing. But he was the great opponent of the tale-bearing habits of the school; and the open enemy of the ushers; and so worthy of all support.

Tom imbibed a fair amount of Latin and Greek at the school, but somehow on the whole it didn't suit him, or he it, and in the holidays he was constantly working the Squire to send him at once to a public school. Great was his joy, then, when in the middle of his third half-year, in October, 183-, a fever broke out in the village; and the master having himself slightly sickened of it, the whole of the boys were sent off at a week's notice to their respective homes.

The Squire was not quite so pleased as Master Tom to see that young gentleman's brown, merry face appear at home, some two months before the proper time, for the Christmas Holidays; and so, after putting on his thinking-cap, he retired to his study and wrote several letters, the result of which was, that one morning at the breakfast-table, about a fortnight after Tom's return, he addressed his wife with: "My dear, I have arranged that Tom shall go to Rugby[249] at once, for the last six weeks of this half-year, instead of wasting them, riding and loitering about home. It is very kind of the Doctor[250] to allow it. Will you see that his things are all ready by Friday, when I shall take him up to town, and send him down the next day by himself!"

Mrs. Brown was prepared for the announcement, and merely suggested a doubt whether Tom were yet old enough to travel by himself. However, finding both father and son against her on this point, she gave in, like a wise woman, and proceeded to prepare Tom's kit[251] for his launch into a public school.

[249] **Rugby**: a small village in Warwickshire on the river Avon, nearly in the centre of England. It is the seat of Rugby School, – one of the great public schools, – and was founded by Lawrence Sheriff, a native of the neighboring village of Brownsover, in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. The school owes its fame chiefly to Dr. Arnold, who became head master in 1827, and held the position until his death in 1842.

[250] **Doctor**: Dr. Arnold.

[251] **Kit**: here, clothes.

CHAPTER IV
THE STAGE COACH

"Let the steam-pot hiss till it's hot,
Give me the speed of the Tantivy trot."

Coaching song by R. E. E. Warburton, Esq.

"Now, sir, time to get up, if you please. Tally-ho[252] coach for Leicester'll be round in half an hour, and don't wait for nobody." So spake the Boots[253] of the Peacock Inn, Islington,[254] at half-past two o'clock on the morning of a day in the early part of November, 183-, giving Tom at the same time a shake by the shoulder, and then putting down a candle and carrying off his shoes to clean.

TOM ARRIVES IN TOWN

Tom and his father arrived in town from Berkshire the day before, and finding, on inquiry, that the Birmingham coaches which ran from the city did not pass through Rugby, but deposited their passengers at Dunchurch, a village three miles distant on the main road, where said passengers had to wait for the Oxford and Leicester coach in the evening, or to take a post-chaise,[255] had resolved that Tom should travel down by the Tally-ho, which diverged from the main road and passed through Rugby itself. And as the Tally-ho was an early coach, they had driven out to the Peacock to be on the road.

Tom had never been in London, and would have liked to have stopped at the Belle Sauvage,[256] where they had been put down by the Star,[257] just at dusk, that he might have gone roving about those endless, mysterious, gas-lit streets, which, with their glare and hum and moving crowds, excited him so that he couldn't talk even. But as soon as he found that the Peacock arrangement would get him to Rugby by twelve o'clock in the day, whereas otherwise he wouldn't be there till the evening, all other plans melted away; his one absorbing aim being to become a public-school boy as fast as possible, and six hours sooner or later seeming to him of the most alarming importance.

Tom and his father had alighted at the Peacock at about seven in the evening; and having heard with unfeigned joy the paternal order at the bar, of steaks and oyster-sauce for supper in half an hour, and seen his father seated cosily by the bright fire in the coffee-room with the paper in his hand, Tom had run out to see about him, had wondered at all the vehicles passing and repassing, and had fraternized with the boots and hostler, from whom he ascertained that the Tally-ho was a tip-top goer, ten miles an hour including stoppages, and so punctual that all the road set their clocks by her.

SQUIRE BROWN'S PARTING WORDS

Then being summoned to supper, he had regaled himself in one of the bright little boxes[258] of the Peacock coffee-room, on the beefsteak and unlimited oyster-sauce; had at first attended to the

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[252] **Tally-ho**: the cry with which huntsmen urge on their hounds; here, a name given to a fast coach.

[253] **Boots**: a servant in an inn who blacks boots, etc.

[254] **Islington**: a northern suburb of London.

[255] **Post-chaise**: a hired carriage.

[256] **Belle Sauvage**: a famous old inn, formerly in the centre of London.

[257] **Star**: the name of the coach which brought the Squire and Tom to London.

[258] **Boxes**: inclosed places for eating.

excellent advice which his father was bestowing on him and then begun nodding, from the united effects of the fire and the lecture. Till the Squire, observing Tom's state, and remembering that it was nearly nine o'clock, and that the Tally-ho left at three, sent the little fellow off to the chambermaid, with a shake of the hand (Tom having stipulated in the morning before starting, that kissing should now cease between them) and a few parting words.

"And now, Tom, my boy," said the Squire, "remember you are going, at your own earnest request, to be chucked into this great school, like a young bear, with all your troubles before you, – earlier than we should have sent you perhaps. If schools are what they were in my time, you'll see a great many cruel blackguard things done, and hear a deal of foul bad talk. But never fear. You tell the truth, keep a brave and kind heart, and never listen to or say anything you wouldn't have your mother and sister hear, and you'll never feel ashamed to come home, or we to see you."

The allusion to his mother made Tom feel rather choky, and he would have liked to have hugged his father well, if it hadn't been for the recent stipulation.

As it was, he only squeezed his father's hand, and looked bravely up and said: "I'll try, father."

"I know you will, my boy. Is your money all safe?"

"Yes," said Tom, diving into one pocket to make sure.

"And your keys," said the Squire.

"All right," said Tom, diving into the other pocket.

"Well, then, good-night. God bless you! I'll tell Boots to call you, and be up to see you off."

Tom was carried off by the chambermaid in a brown study,[259] from which he was roused in a clean little attic, by that buxom[260] person calling him a little darling, and kissing him as she left the room; which indignity he was too much surprised to resent. And still thinking of his father's last words, and the look with which they were spoken, he knelt down and prayed that, come what might, he might never bring shame or sorrow on the dear folk at home.

THE SQUIRE'S MEDITATIONS

Indeed, the Squire's last words deserved to have their effect, for they had been the result of much anxious thought. All the way up to London he had pondered what he should say to Tom by way of parting advice; something that the boy could keep in his head ready for use. By way of assisting meditation, he had even gone the length of taking out his flint and steel and tinder, and hammering away for a quarter of an hour till he had manufactured a light for a long cheroot,[261] which he silently puffed; to the no small wonder of Coachee, who was an old friend, and an institution on the Bath road; and who always expected a talk on the prospects and doings, agricultural and social, of the whole country when he carried the Squire.

To condense the Squire's meditation, it was somewhat as follows: "I won't tell him to read his Bible, and love and serve God; if he doesn't do that for his mother's sake and teaching, he won't for mine. Shall I go into the sort of temptations he'll meet with? No, I can't do that. Never do for an old fellow to go into such things with a boy. He won't understand me. Do him more harm than good, ten to one. Shall I tell him to mind his work, and say he's sent to school to make himself a good scholar? Well, but he isn't sent to school for that, – at any rate not for that mainly. I don't care a straw for Greek particles, or the digamma;[262] no more does his mother. What is he sent to school for? Well, partly because he wanted so to go. If he'll only turn out a brave, helpful, truth-telling Englishman,

[259] **Brown study**: meditation without any particular object of thought.

[260] **Buxom**: rosy with health, merry.

[261] **Cheroot**: a kind of cigar.

[262] **Digamma**: an ancient letter of the Greek alphabet. Greek particles are prepositions and conjunctions – hence nice or difficult points of Greek grammar.

and a gentleman, and a Christian, that's all I want," thought the Squire; and upon this view of the case he framed the last words of advice to Tom, which were well enough suited to his purpose.

THE TALLY-HO

For they were Tom's first thoughts as he tumbled out of bed at the summons of Boots, and proceeded rapidly to wash and dress himself. At ten minutes to three he was down in the coffee-room in his stockings, carrying his hat-box, coat, and comforter in his hand, and there he found his father nursing a bright fire, and a cup of hot coffee and a hard biscuit[263] on the table.

"Now then, Tom, give us your things here, and drink this; there's nothing like starting warm, old fellow."

Tom addressed himself to the coffee, and prattled away while he worked himself into his shoes and his great-coat, well warmed through, – a Petersham coat with velvet collar, made tight after the abominable fashion of those days. And just as he was swallowing his last mouthful, winding his comforter round his throat, and tucking the ends into the breast of his coat, the horn sounds, Boots looks in and says, "Tally-ho, sir;" and they hear the ring and the rattle of the four fast trotters and the town-made drag[264] as it dashes up to the Peacock.

"Anything for us, Bob?" says the burly guard,[265] dropping down from behind, and slapping himself across the chest.

"Young genl'm'n, Rugby; three parcels, Leicester; hamper[266] o' game, Rugby" answers Ostler.

"Tell young gent to look alive," says guard, opening the hind-boot[267] and shooting in the parcels after examining them by the lamps. "Here, shove the portmanteau[268] up a-top, – I'll fasten him presently. Now then, sir, jump up behind."

"Good-by, father – my love at home." A last shake of the hand. Up goes Tom, the guard catching his hat-box and holding on with one hand, while with the other he claps the horn to his mouth. Toot, toot, toot! the ostlers let go their heads, the four bays plunge at the collar, and away goes the Tally-ho into the darkness, forty-five seconds from the time they pulled up; Ostler, Boots, and the Squire stand looking after them under the Peacock lamp.

"Sharp work!" says the Squire, and goes in again to his bed, the coach being well out of sight and hearing.

Tom stands up on the coach and looks back at his father's figure as long as he can see it, and then the guard, having disposed of his luggage, comes to an anchor, and finishes his buttonings and other preparations for facing the three hours before dawn; no joke for those who minded cold, on a fast coach in November, in the reign of his late majesty.

A NOVEMBER RIDE IN OLD TIMES

I sometimes think that you boys of this generation are a deal tenderer fellows than we used to be. At any rate you are much more comfortable travellers, for I see every one of you with his rug or plaid,[269] and other dodges for preserving the caloric,[270] and most of you going in those fuzzy, dusty,

[263] **Hard biscuit**: cracker.

[264] **Drag**: a four-horse coach.

[265] **Guard**: a person having charge of a mail-coach, a conductor.

[266] **Hamper**: a large, strongly made packing basket.

[267] **Hind-boot**: a place at the end of a coach for luggage.

[268] **Portmanteau**: travelling bag.

[269] **Rug or plaid**: a thick shawl or other wrap.

[270] **Caloric**: here, heat of the body.

padded, first-class carriages.[271] It was another affair altogether, a dark ride on the top of the Tally-ho, I can tell you, in a tight Petersham coat, and your feet dangling six inches from the floor. Then you knew what cold was, and what it was to be without legs, for not a bit of feeling had you in them after the first half hour. But it had its pleasures, – the cold, dark ride. First there was the consciousness of silent endurance, so dear to every Englishman, – of standing out against something, and not giving in. Then there was the music of the rattling harness, and the ring of the horses' feet on the hard road, and the glare of the two bright lamps through the steaming hoar-frost,[272] over the leader's ears, into the darkness; and the cheery toot of the guard's horn, to warn some drowsy pikeman[273] or the ostler at the next change; and the looking forward to daylight – and last, but not least, the delight of returning sensation in your toes.

Then the break of dawn and the sunrise, where can they be ever seen in perfection but from a coach roof? You want motion and change and music to see them in their glory; not the music of singing men and singing women, but good silent music, which sets itself in your own head, the accompaniment of work and getting over the ground.

The Tally-ho is past St. Albans,[274] and Tom is enjoying the ride, though half frozen. The guard, who is alone with him on the back of the coach, is silent, but has muffled Tom's feet up in straw, and put the end of an oat-sack over his knees. The darkness has driven him inward, and he has gone over his little past life, and thought of all his doings and promises, and of his mother and sister, and his father's last words; and has made fifty good resolutions, and means to bear himself like a brave Brown as he is, though a young one. Then he has been forward into the mysterious boy-future, speculating as to what sort of a place Rugby is, and what they do there, and calling up all the stories of public schools which he has heard from big boys in the holidays. He is chock full of hope and life, notwithstanding the cold, and kicks his heels against the backboard, and would like to sing, only he doesn't know how his friend the silent guard might take it.

"PULLING UP."

And now the dawn breaks at the end of the fourth stage,[275] and the coach pulls up at a little road-side inn with huge stables behind. There is a bright fire gleaming through the red curtains of the bar-window, and the door is open. The coachman catches his whip into a double thong, and throws it to the ostler; the steam of the horses rises straight up into the air. He has put them along over the last two miles, and is two minutes before his time. He rolls down from the box and into the inn. The guard rolls off behind. "Now, sir," says he to Tom, "you just jump down, and I'll give you a drop of something to keep the cold out."

Tom finds a difficulty in jumping, or, indeed, in finding the top of the wheel with his feet, which may be in the next world, for all he feels; so the guard picks him off the coach-top, and sets him on his legs, and they stump off into the bar, and join the coachman and the other outside passengers.

Here a fresh-looking barmaid serves them each with a glass of early purl[276] as they stand before the fire, coachman and guard exchanging business remarks. The purl warms Tom up and makes him cough.

"Rare tackle[277] that, sir, of a cold morning," says the coachman, smiling. "Time's up." They are out again and up; coachee the last, gathering the reins into his hands and talking to Jem, the ostler,

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[271] **First-class carriages**: in England the railway cars (called "carriages") are divided into first, second, and third class.

[272] **Hoar-frost**: frozen dew.

[273] **Pikeman**: the man who takes toll on a turnpike.

[274] **St. Albans**: about twenty miles north of London.

[275] **Stage**: division of a journey.

[276] **Purl**: a hot drink made of beer and other ingredients.

[277] **Tackle**: stuff.

about the mare's shoulder, and then swinging himself up on to the box, – the horses dashing off in a canter before he falls into his seat. Toot-toot-tootle-too goes the horn, and away they are again, five-and-thirty miles on their road (nearly half way to Rugby, thinks Tom), and the prospect of breakfast at the end of the stage.

MORNING SIGHTS AND DOINGS

And now they begin to see, and the early life of the country-side comes out: a market cart or two, men in smock-frocks going to their work, pipe in mouth, a whiff of which is no bad smell this bright morning. The sun gets up, and the mist shines like silver gauze. They pass the hounds jogging along to a distant meet,[278] at the heels of the huntsman's hack,[279] whose face is about the color of the tails of his old pink,[280] as he exchanges greetings with the coachman and guard. Now they pull up at a lodge,[281] and take on board a well-muffled-up sportsman, with his gun-case and carpet-bag. An early up-coach meets them and the coachmen gather up their horses, and pass one another with the accustomed lift of the elbow, each team doing eleven miles an hour, with a mile to spare behind, if necessary. And here comes breakfast.

"Twenty minutes here, gentlemen," says the coachman, as they pull up at half-past seven at the inn-door.

BREAKFAST

Have we not endured nobly this morning, and is not this a worthy reward for much endurance? There is the low dark wainscoted[282] room hung with sporting prints; the hat-stand (with a whip or two standing up in it belonging to bagmen,[283] who are still snug in bed) by the door; the blazing fire, with the quaint old glass over the mantel-piece, in which is stuck a large card with the lists of the meets for the week of the county hounds. The table covered with the whitest of cloths and of china, and bearing a pigeon pie, ham, round of cold boiled beef cut from a mammoth ox, and the great loaf of household bread on a wooden trencher.[284] And here comes in the stout head waiter, puffing under a tray of hot viands; kidneys and a steak, transparent rashers[285] and poached eggs, buttered toast and muffins, coffee and tea all smoking hot. The table can never hold it all; the cold meats are removed to the sideboard; they were only put on for show and to give us an appetite. And now fall on, gentlemen all. It is a well-known sporting house, and the breakfasts are famous. Two or three men in pink, on their way to the meet, drop in, and are very jovial and sharp-set, as indeed we all are.

"Tea or coffee, sir?" says head waiter, coming round to Tom.

"Coffee, please," says Tom with his mouth full of muffin and kidneys; coffee is a treat to him, tea is not.

Our coachman, I perceive, who breakfasts with us, is a cold-beef man. He also eschews hot potations, and addicts himself to a tankard of ale, which is brought him by the barmaid. Sportsman looks on approvingly, and orders a ditto for himself.

Tom has eaten kidney and pigeon pie, and imbibed coffee, till his little skin is as tight as a drum; and then has the further pleasure of paying head waiter out of his own purse, in a dignified

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[278] **Meet**: a gathering of huntsmen for a hunt.

[279] **Hack**: here, nag or horse kept for rough riding.

[280] **Old pink**: a red hunting-coat.

[281] **Lodge**: a gentleman's house.

[282] **Wainscoted**: lined with boards or panels.

[283] **Bagmen**: commercial travellers.

[284] **Trencher**: a large wooden plate.

[285] **Rashers**: thin slices of bacon.

manner, and walks out before the inn-door to see the horses put to. This is done leisurely and in a highly finished manner by the ostlers, as if they enjoyed the not being hurried. Coachman comes out with his way-bill,[286] and puffing a fat cigar which the sportsman has given him. Guard emerges from the tap,[287] where he prefers breakfasting, licking round a tough-looking doubtful cheroot, which you might tie round your finger, and three whiffs of which would knock any one else out of time.

The pinks[288] stand about the inn-door lighting cigars and waiting to see us start, while their hacks are led up and down the market-place on which the inn looks. They all know our sportsman, and we feel a reflected credit when we see him chatting and laughing with them.

"Now, sir, please," says the coachman; all the rest of the passengers are up; the guard is locking up the hind-boot.

"A good run to you," says the sportsman to the pinks, and is by the coachman's side in no time.

"Let 'em go, Dick!" The ostlers fly back, drawing off the cloths from their glossy loins, and away we go through the market-place and down the High Street,[289] looking in at the first-floor[290] windows, and seeing several worthy burgesses[291] shaving thereat; while all the shop-boys who are cleaning the windows, and the house-maids who are doing the steps, stop and looked pleased as we rattle past, as if we were a part of their legitimate morning's amusement. We clear the town, and are well out between the hedgerows again as the town clock strikes eight.

GUARD DISCOURSES ON RUGBY

The sun shines almost warmly, and breakfast has oiled all springs and loosened all tongues. Tom is encouraged by a remark or two of the guard's between the puffs of his oily cheroot, and besides is getting tired of not talking. He is too full of his destination to talk about anything else; and so asks the guard if he knows Rugby.

"Goes through it every day of my life. Twenty minutes before twelve down – ten o'clock up."

"What sort of a place is it, please?" says Tom.

Guard looks at him with a comical expression. "Werry out-o'-the-way place, sir, no paving to streets, nor no lighting. 'Mazin' big horse and cattle fair in autumn – lasts a week – just over now. Takes town a week to get clean after it. Fairish hunting country. But slow place, sir, slow place; off the main road, you see – only three coaches a day, 'an one on 'em a two-oss van,[292] more like a hearse nor[293] a coach – Regulator[294]– comes from Oxford. Young genl'm'n at school calls her Pig and Whistle, and goes up to college by her (six miles an hour) when they goes to enter. Belong to school, sir?"

"Yes," says Tom, not unwilling for a moment that the guard should think him an old boy; but then having some qualms as to the truth of the assertion, and seeing that if he were to assume the character of an old boy he couldn't go on asking the questions he wanted, added – "that is to say, I'm on my way there. I'm a new boy."

The guard looked as if he knew this quite as well as Tom.

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[286] **Way-bill**: a list of passengers in a public vehicle.

[287] **Tap**: bar-room.

[288] **Pinks**: huntsmen.

[289] **High Street**: the main street.

[290] **First-floor**: the floor above the ground-floor, – the second story.

[291] **Burgess**: a citizen or voter in a town.

[292] **Van**: a large light-covered wagon.

[293] **Nor**: than.

[294] **Regulator**: the name of the rival coach.

"You're werry late, sir," says the guard; "only six weeks to-day to the end of the half."[295] Tom assented. "We takes up fine loads this day six weeks, and Monday and Tuesday arter.[296] Hopes we shall have the pleasure of carrying you back."

Tom said he hoped they would; but he thought within himself that his fate would probably be the Pig and Whistle.[297]

PEA-SHOOTERS

"It pays uncommon cert'nly," continues the guard.

"Werry free with their cash is the young genl'm'n. But, Lor' bless you, we gets into such rows all 'long the road, what wi' their pea-shooters,[298] and long whips and hollering, and upsetting every one as comes by; I'd a sight sooner carry one or two on 'em, sir, as I may be a carryin' of you now, than a coach-load."

"What do they do with the pea-shooters?" inquires Tom.

"Do wi' 'em! why, peppers every one's faces as we comes near, 'cept the young gals, and breaks windows wi' them, too, some on 'em shoots so hard. Now 'twas just here last June, as we was a driving up the first-day boys,[299] they was mendin' a quarter-mile of road, and there was a lot of Irish chaps, reg'lar roughs, a breaking stones. As we comes up, 'Now boys,' says young gent on the box (smart young fellow, and desper't reckless), 'here's fun! let the Pats have it about the ears.' 'God's sake, sir,' says Bob (that's my mate the coachman), 'don't go for to shoot at 'em, they'll knock us off the coach.' 'Coachee,' says young my lord, 'you ain't afraid; hoora, boys! let 'em have it.' 'Hoora!' sings out the others, and fill their mouths chuck full of peas to last the whole line. Bob, seeing as 'twas to come, knocks his hat over his eyes, hollers to his 'osses, and shakes 'em up, and away we goes up to the line on 'em, twenty miles an hour. The Pats begin to hoora, too, thinking it was a runaway, and first lot on 'em stands grinnin' and wavin' their old hats as we comes abreast on 'em; and then you'd ha' laughed to see how took aback and choking savage they looked, when they gets the peas a stinging all over 'em. But bless you, the laugh weren't all of our side, sir, by a long way. We was going so fast, and they was so took aback, that they didn't take what was up till we was half-way up the line. Then 'twas 'Look out all,' surely. They howls all down the line fit to frighten you, some on 'em runs arter us and tries to clamber up behind, only we hits 'em over the fingers and pulls their hands off; one as had had it very sharp act'ly[300] runs right at the leaders, as though he'd ketch 'em by the heads, only luck'ly for him he misses his tip[301] and comes over a heap o' stones first. The rest picks up stones, and gives it us right away till we gets out of shot, the young gents holding out werry manful with the pea-shooters and such stones as lodged on us, and a pretty many there was, too. Then Bob picks hisself up again, and looks at young gent on box werry solemn. Bob'd had a rum un[302] in the ribs, which'd like to ha' knocked him off the box, or made him drop the reins. Young gent on box picks hisself up, and so does we all, and looks round to count damage. Box's head[303] cut open and his hat gone; 'nother young gent's hat gone; mine knocked in at the side, and not one on us as wasn't black and blue somewheres or another, most on 'em all over. Two pounds ten to pay for damage to paint, which

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[295] **Half**: the half year.

[296] **Arter**: after.

[297] **Pig and Whistle**: as Oxford lies on the direct road between Rugby and White Horse Vale, Tom would naturally return by this coach.

[298] **Pea-shooters**: tin tubes used by boys for blowing peas at a mark.

[299] **First-day boys**: probably those that went up at the beginning of the term.

[300] **Act'ly**: actually.

[301] **Tip**: here, mark.

[302] **Rum un**: here, a hard blow.

[303] **Box's head**: that is, the head of the "young gent" sitting on the seat ("box") with the driver.

they subscribed for there and then, and give Bob and me a extra half-sovereign each; but I wouldn't go down that line again not for twenty half-sovereigns." And the guard shook his head slowly, and got up and blew a clear brisk toot-toot.

"What fun!" said Tom, who could scarcely contain his pride at this exploit of his future schoolfellows. He longed already for the end of the half that he might join them.

"'Tain't such good fun, though, sir, for the folks as meets the coach, nor for we who has to go back with it next day. Them Irishers last summer had all got stones ready for us, and was all but letting drive, and we'd got two reverend gents aboard, too. We pulled up at the beginning of the line, and pacified them, and we're never going to carry no more pea-shooters, unless they promises not to fire where there is a line of Irish chaps a stone-breaking." The guard stopped and pulled away at his cheroot, regarding Tom benignantly the while.

"Oh, don't stop! tell us something more about the pea-shooting."

AN OLD YEOMAN

"Well, there'd like to have been a pretty piece of work over it at Bicester, a while back. We was six mile from the town, when we meets an old square-headed gray-haired yeoman chap, a jogging along quite quiet. He looks up at the coach, and just then a pea hits him on the nose, and some catches his cob[304] behind and makes him dance up on his hind legs. I see'd the old boy's face flush and look plaguy awkward, and I thought we was in for somethin' ugly.

"He turns his cob's head, and rides quietly after us, just out of shot. How that ere cob did step! we never shook him off not a dozen yards in the six miles. At first the young gents was werry lively on him: but afore we got in, seeing how steady the old chap come on, they was quite quiet, and laid their heads together what they should do. Some was for fighting, some for axing his pardon. He rides into the town close after us, comes up when we stops, and says the two as shot at him must come before a magistrate; and a great crowd comes round, and we couldn't get the 'osses to. But the young uns they all stand by one another, and says all or none must go, and as how they'd fight it out, and have to be carried. Just as 'twas gettin' serious, and the old boy and the mob was going to pull 'em off the coach, one little fellow jumps up and says: 'Here – I'll stay – I'm only going three miles further. My father's name's Davis, he's known about here, and I'll go before the magistrate with this gentleman.' 'What! be thee parson Davis's son?' says the old boy. 'Yes,' says the young un. 'Well, I be mortal sorry to meet thee in such company, but for thy father's sake and thine (for thee bi'st[305] a brave young chap) I'll say no more about it.' Didn't the boys cheer him, and the mob cheered the young chap – and then one of the biggest gets down, and begs his pardon werry gentlemanly for all the rest, saying as they all had been plaguy vexed from the first, but didn't like to ax his pardon till then, 'cause they felt they hadn't ought to shirk the consequences of their joke. And then they all got down, and shook hands with the old boy, and asked him to all parts of the country, to their homes, and we drives off twenty minutes behind time with cheering and hollering as if we was county members.[306] But, Lor' bless you, sir," says the guard smacking his hand down on his knee and looking full into Tom's face, "ten minutes arter they was all as bad as ever."

BLOW-HARD AND HIS YARNS

Tom showed such undisguised and open-mouthed interest in his narrations, that the old guard rubbed up his memory, and launched out into a graphic history of all the performances of the boys on

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[304] **Cob**: a short, stout horse.

[305] **Bi'st**: "beest," art.

[306] **County members**: members of Parliament.

the road for the last twenty years. Off the road he couldn't go; the exploit must have been connected with horses or vehicles to hang in the old fellow's head. Tom tried him off his own ground once or twice, but found he knew nothing beyond, and so let him have his head, and the rest of the road bowled easily away; for old Blow-hard (as the boys called him) was a dry old file,[307] with much kindness and humor, and a capital spinner of a yarn when he had broken the neck of his day's work, and got plenty of ale under his belt.

What struck Tom's youthful imagination most, was the desperate and lawless character of most of the stories. Was the guard hoaxing him? He couldn't help hoping that they were true. It's very odd how almost all English boys love danger; you can get ten to join a game, or climb a tree, or swim a stream, when there's a chance of breaking their limbs or getting drowned, for one who'll stay on level ground, or in his depth, or play quoits or bowls.[308]

THE RUNNERS

The guard had just finished an account of a desperate fight which had happened at one of the fairs between the drovers and the farmers with their whips, and the boys with cricket-bats and wickets,[309] which arose out of a playful but objectionable practice of the boys going round to the public houses and taking the linch-pins out of the wheels of the gigs, and was moralizing upon the way in which the Doctor, "a terrible stern man he'd heard tell," had come down upon several of the performers, "sending three on 'em off next morning, each in a po-chay[310] with a parish constable," when they turned a corner and neared the milestone, the third from Rugby. By the stone two boys stood, their jackets buttoned tight, waiting for the coach.

"Look here, sir," says the guard, after giving a sharp toot-toot, "there's two on 'em, out and out runners they be. They comes out about twice or three times a week, and spurts a mile alongside of us."

And as they came up, sure enough, away went two boys along the footpath, keeping up with the horses; the first a light, clean-made fellow going on springs, the other, stout and round shouldered, laboring in his pace, but going as dogged as a bull-terrier.

Old Blow-hard looked on admiringly. "See how beautiful that there un holds hisself together, and goes from his hips, sir," said he; "he's a 'mazin' fine runner. Now many coachmen as drives a first-rate team'd put it on and try and pass 'em. But Bob, sir, bless you, he's tender-hearted; he'd sooner pull in a bit if he see'd 'em a gettin' beat. I do b'lieve, too, as that there un'd sooner break his heart than let us go by him afore next milestone."

At the second milestone the boys pulled up short, and waved their hats to the guard, who had his watch out and shouted "4.56," thereby indicating that the mile had been done in four seconds under the five minutes. They passed several more parties of boys, all of them objects of the deepest interest to Tom, and came in sight of the town at ten minutes before twelve. Tom fetched a long breath, and thought he had never spent a pleasanter day. Before he went to bed he had quite settled that it must be the greatest day he should ever spend, and didn't alter his opinion for many a long year, – if he has yet.

FOOTNOTES

[307] **File**: a shrewd person.

[308] **Quoits or bowls**: quoits are iron rings pitched at short stakes set in the ground. Bowls are tenpins.

[309] **Wickets**: stakes which are driven into the ground as a mark for the ball in playing cricket.

[310] **Po-chay**: a post-chaise; a hired chaise.

CHAPTER V.
RUGBY AND FOOT-BALL

" – Foot and eye opposed
In dubious strife." —*Scott.*

ARRIVAL AT RUGBY

"And so here's Rugby, sir, at last, and you'll be in plenty of time for dinner at the School-house, as I tell'd you," said the old guard, pulling his horn out of its case, and tootle-tooing away; while the coachman shook up his horses, and carried them along the side of the school-close, round Dead-man's corner, past the school-gates, and down the High Street to the Spread Eagle; the wheelers in a spanking trot, and leaders cantering, in a style which would not have disgraced "Cherry Bob," "ramping, stamping, tearing, swearing Billy Harwood," or any other of the old coaching heroes.

Tom's heart beat quick as he passed the great schoolfield or close, with its noble elms, in which several games at foot-ball were going on, and tried to take in at once the long line of gray buildings, beginning with the chapel, and ending with the School-house, the residence of the head-master, where the great flag was lazily waving from the highest round tower. And he began already to be proud of being a Rugby boy, as he passed the school-gates with the oriel window[311] above, and saw the boys standing there, looking as if the town belonged to them, and nodding in a familiar manner to the coachman, as if any one of them would be quite equal to getting on the box and working the team down the street as well as he.

TOM FINDS A PATRON

One of the young heroes, however, ran out from the rest, and scrambled up behind; where, having righted himself, and nodded to the guard, with "How do, Jem?" he turned short round to Tom, and, after looking him over for a minute, began:

"I say, you fellow, is your name Brown?"

"Yes," said Tom, in considerable astonishment; glad, however, to have lighted on some one already who seemed to know him.

"Ah, I thought so; you know my old aunt, Miss East; she lives somewhere down your way in Berkshire. She wrote to me that you were coming to-day, and asked me to give you a lift."[312]

Tom was somewhat inclined to resent the patronizing air of his new friend, a boy of just about his own height and age, but gifted with the most transcendent coolness and assurance, which Tom felt to be aggravating and hard to bear, but couldn't for the life of him help admiring and envying, – especially when young my lord begins hectoring two or three long, loafing fellows, half porter, half stableman, with a strong touch of the blackguard, and in the end arranges with one of them, nicknamed Cooey, to carry Tom's luggage up to the School-house for sixpence.

"And heark'ee, Cooey, it must be up in ten minutes, or no more jobs from me. Come along, Brown." And away swaggers the young potentate, with his hands in his pockets, and Tom at his side.

"All right, sir," says Cooey, touching his hat, with a leer and a wink at his companions.

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[311] **Oriel window**: a bay-window. The great window over the arch is a striking feature of the Rugby gateway.

[312] **Lift**: assistance of any kind.

"Hullo, though!" says East, pulling up, and taking another look at Tom, "this'll never do. Haven't you got a hat? We never wear caps here. Only the louts wear caps. Bless you, if you were to go into the quadrangle[313] with that thing on, I – don't know what'd happen." The very idea was quite beyond young Master East, and he looked unutterable things.

Tom thought his cap a very knowing affair, but confessed that he had a hat in his hat-box; which was accordingly at once extracted from the hind-boot, and Tom equipped in his go-to-meeting roof, as his new friend called it. But this didn't quite suit his fastidious taste in another minute, being too shiny; so, as they walk up the town, they dive into Nixon's, the hatter's, and Tom is arrayed, to his utter astonishment, and without paying for it, in a regulation cat-skin[314] at seven and sixpence; Nixon undertaking to send the best hat up to the matron's room, School-house, in half an hour.

"You can send in a note for a tile[315] on Monday, and make it all right, you know," said the Mentor.[316] "We're allowed two seven-and-sixers a half, besides what we bring from home."

Tom by this time began to be conscious of his new social position and dignities, and to luxuriate in the realized ambition of being a public-school boy at last, with a vested right of spoiling two seven-and-sixers in half a year.[317]

"You see," said his friend, as they strolled up toward the school-gates, in explanation of his conduct, "a great deal depends on how a fellow cuts up at first. If he's got nothing odd about him, and answers straightforward, and holds his head up, he gets on. Now you'll do very well as to rig, all but that cap. You see I'm doing the handsome thing by you, because my father knows yours; besides, I want to please the old lady. She gave me half-a-sov.[318] this half, and perhaps'll double it next, if I keep in her good books."[319]

There's nothing for candor like a lower-school boy, and East was a genuine specimen, – frank, hearty and good-natured, well satisfied with himself and his position, and chock full of life and spirits, and all the Rugby prejudices and traditions which he had been able to get together in the long course of one-half year during which he had been at the School-house.

And Tom, notwithstanding his bumptiousness,[320] felt friends with him at once, and began sucking in all his ways and prejudices, as fast as he could understand them.

INTRODUCTION TO THE MATRON

East was great in the character of cicerone;[321] he carried Tom through the great gates, where were only two or three boys. These satisfied themselves with the stock questions – "You fellow, what's your name? Where do you come from? How old are you? Where do you board? and, What form[322] are you in?" – and so they passed on through the quadrangle and a small court-yard, upon which looked down a lot of little windows (belonging, as his guide informed him, to some of the School-house studies),[323] into the matron's room, where East introduced Tom to that dignitary; made him give up the key of his trunk, that the matron might unpack his linen, and told the story of the hat

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[313] **Quadrangle**: a square piece of ground inclosed by buildings. English schools and colleges are quite generally built round a quadrangle or "quod" as it is commonly called.

[314] **Regulation cat-skin**: the hat prescribed by custom or school law.

[315] **Tile**: a tall silk hat.

[316] **Mentor**: a wise counsellor. See Homer's Odyssey.

[317] **Two seven-and-sixers**, etc.: *i. e.*, two hats, for each half year, costing seven shillings and sixpence ($1.80) each.

[318] **Half-a-sov.**: half a sovereign ($2.50).

[319] **Keep in her good books**: keep on good terms with her.

[320] **Bumptiousness**: domineering manner.

[321] **Cicerone**: guide.

[322] **Form**: here, class.

[323] **Studies**: small private rooms occupied by the Rugby boys (two in a room) for study. They are distinct from the bed-rooms.

and of his own presence of mind; upon the relation whereof the matron laughingly scolded him, for the coolest new boy in the house; and East, indignant at the accusation of newness, marched Tom off into the quadrangle, and began showing him the schools, and examining him as to his literary attainments; the result of which was a prophecy that they would be in the same form, and could do their lessons together.

EAST'S STUDY

"And now come in and see my study; we shall have just time before dinner; and afterward, before calling-over,[324] we'll do the close."

Tom followed his guide through the School-house hall, which opens into the quadrangle. It is a great room, thirty feet long and eighteen high, or thereabouts, with two great tables running the whole length, and two large fire-places at the side, with blazing fires in them, at one of which some dozen boys were standing and lounging, some of whom shouted to East to stop; but he shot through with his convoy,[325] and landed him in the long dark passages, with a large fire at the end of each, upon which the studies opened. Into one of these, in the bottom passage, East bolted with our hero, slamming and bolting the door behind them, in case of pursuit from the hall, and Tom was for the first time in a Rugby boy's citadel.

He hadn't been prepared for separate studies, and was not a little astonished and delighted with the palace in question.

It wasn't very large certainly, being about six feet long by four broad. It couldn't be called light, as there were bars and a grating to the window; which little precautions were necessary in the studies on the ground-floor looking out into the close, to prevent the exit of small boys after locking up, and the entrance of contraband articles. But it was uncommonly comfortable to look at, Tom thought. The space under the window at the further end was occupied by a square table covered with a reasonably clean and whole red and blue check table-cloth; a hard-seated sofa covered with red stuff occupied one side, running up to the end and making a seat for one, or by sitting close, for two at the table; and a good stout wooden chair afforded a seat to another boy, so that three could sit and work together. The walls were wainscoted half-way up, the wainscot being covered with green baize, the remainder with a bright-patterned paper, on which hung three or four prints, of dog's heads, Grimaldi[326] winning the Aylesbury steeple-chase,[327] Amy Robsart,[328] the reigning Waverley beauty of the day, and Tom Crib[329] in a posture of defence, which did no credit to the science[330] of that hero, if truly represented. Over the door was a row of hat-pegs, and on each side book-cases with cupboards at the bottom; shelves and cupboards being filled indiscriminately with school-books, a cup or two, a mouse-trap, and candlesticks, leather straps, a fustian bag, and some curious-looking articles which puzzled Tom not a little, until his friend explained that they were climbing irons, and showed their use. A cricket-bat and small fishing-rod stood up in one corner.

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[324] **Calling-over**: roll-call.

[325] **Convoy**: literally, a merchant-vessel protected by a ship-of-war; here, a person under the care of another.

[326] **Grimaldi**: the name of a race-horse.

[327] **Steeple-chase**: a race between horsemen across country to see which can first reach a certain distant object, as a church steeple.

[328] **Amy Robsart**: the heroine of Scott's Waverley novel, "Kenilworth."

[329] **Tom Crib**: a noted pugilist.

[330] **Science**: boxing or pugilistic science.

"OUR OWN" AND THE USE THEREOF

This was the residence of East and another boy in the same form, and had more interest for Tom than Windsor Castle,[331] or any other residence in the British Isles. For was he not about to become the joint owner of a similar home, the first place he could call his own? One's own, – what a charm there is in the words! How long it takes boy and man to find out their worth! how fast most of us hold on to them! faster and more jealously, the nearer we are to that general home, into which we can take nothing, but must go naked as we came into the world. When shall we learn that he who multiplieth possessions multiplieth troubles, and that the one single use of things which we call our own is that they may be his who hath need of them?

"And shall I have a study like this, too?" said Tom.

"Yes, of course, you'll be chummed with some fellow on Monday, and you can sit here till then."

"What nice places!"

"They're well enough," answered East, patronizingly, "only uncommon cold at nights sometimes. Gower – that's my chum – and I make a fire with paper on the floor after supper generally, only that makes it so smoky."

"But there's a big fire out in the passage," said Tom.

"Precious little we get out of that though," said East; "Jones the præpostor[332] has the study at the fire end, and he has rigged up an iron rod and green baize curtains across the passage, which he draws at night, and sits there with his door open, so he gets all the fire, and hears if we come out of our studies after eight, or make a noise. However, he's taken to sitting in the fifth-form room lately, so we do get a bit of fire now sometimes; only keep a sharp look-out that he don't catch you behind his curtain when he comes down, – that's all."

TOM'S FIRST RUGBY DINNER

A quarter past one now struck, and the bell began tolling for dinner, so they went into the hall and took their places, Tom at the very bottom of the second table, next to the præpostor (who sat at the end to keep order there), and East a few paces higher. And now Tom for the first time saw his future school-fellows in a body. In they came, some hot and ruddy from foot-ball or long walks, some pale and chilly from hard reading[333] in their studies, some from loitering over the fire at the pastry-cook's, dainty mortals, bringing with them pickles and sauce-bottles to help them with their dinners. And a great big-bearded man, whom Tom took for a master, began calling over the names, while the great joints were being rapidly carved on the third table in the corner by the old verger[334] and the housekeeper. Tom's turn came last, and meanwhile he was all eyes, looking first with awe at the great man who sat close to him, and was helped first, and who read a hard-looking book all the time he was eating: and when he got up and walked off to the fire, at the small boys round him, some of whom were reading, and the rest talking in whispers to one another, or stealing one another's bread, or shooting pellets,[335] or digging their forks through the table-cloth. However, notwithstanding his curiosity, he managed to make a capital dinner by the time the big man called "Stand up!" and said grace.

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[331] **Windsor Castle**: the principal residence of the English monarchs. It is on the Thames, about twenty miles west of London.

[332] **Præpostors**: the members of the sixth form, the highest class in the school. They were charged with the duty of looking after the other boys.

[333] **Reading**: studying.

[334] **Verger**: here, the porter.

[335] **Pellets**: wads of paper.

As soon as dinner was over, and Tom had been questioned by such neighbors as were curious as to his birth, parentage, education, and other like matters, East, who evidently enjoyed his new dignity of patron and Mentor, proposed having a look at the close,[336] which Tom, athirst for knowledge, gladly assented to, and they went out through the quadrangle and passed the fives' court,[337] into the great play-ground.

"That's the chapel you see," said East, "and there just behind it is the place for fights; you see it's most out of the way of the masters, who all live on the other side and don't come by here after the first lesson or callings-over. That's when the fights come off. And all this part where we are is the little side-ground, right up to the trees, and on the other side of the trees is the big side-ground, where the great matches are played. And there's the island[338] in the farthest corner; you'll know that well enough next half, when there's island fagging.[339] I say, it's horrid cold! let's have a run across;" and away went East, Tom close behind him. East was evidently putting his best foot foremost, and Tom, who was mighty proud of his running, and not a little anxious to show his friend that although a new boy he was no milk-sop, laid himself down to the work in his very best style. Right across the close they went, each doing all he knew, and there wasn't a yard between them, when they pulled up at the island-moat.

"I say," said East, as soon as he got his wind, looking with much increased respect at Tom, "you aren't a bad scud, not by no means. Well, I'm warm as toast now."

WHITE TROUSERS IN NOVEMBER

"But why do you wear white trousers in November?" said Tom. He had been struck by this peculiarity in the costume of almost all the School-house boys.

"Why, bless us, don't you know? – No, I forgot. Why, to-day's the School-house match. Our house plays the whole of the School at foot-ball.[340] And we all wear white trousers to show 'em we don't care for hacks.[341] You're in luck to come to-day. You just will see a match; and Brooke's going to let me play in quarters. That's more than he'll do for any other lower-school boy, except James, and he is fourteen."

"Who is Brooke?"

"Why, that big fellow who called over at dinner, to be sure. He's cock of the school, and head of the School-house side, and the best kick and charger in Rugby."

"Oh, but do show me where they play. And tell me about it. I love foot-ball so, and have played all my life. Won't Brooke let me play?"

"Not he," said East, with some indignation; "why, you don't know the rules, – you'll be a month learning them. And then it's no joke playing-up, in a match, I can tell you. Quite another thing from your private school games. Why, there's been two collar-bones broken this half, and a dozen fellows lamed. And last year a fellow had his leg broken."

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[336] **Close**: this close or play-ground contains something over thirteen acres.

[337] **Fives' court**: the space set apart for playing fives, a game resembling tennis.

[338] **Island**: the island no longer exists.

[339] **Fagging**: the power given the sixth form, by authority and the custom of the school, to require the boys of the lower forms or classes to do errands, and act as servants generally. The system still has its defenders who regard it as a means of discipline.

[340] **Foot-ball**: foot-ball is the great game at Rugby. It first became popular in America under the Rugby rules, which, though modified, are still the basis of the game as now played.

[341] **Hacks**: kicks on the shins.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.